

Tajikistan-India Relations, 1991-2015

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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2017



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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “Tajikistan-India Relations, 1991-2015” submitted by me for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

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Map 1: Political Map of Central Asia



Source: <http://astanatimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Central-Asia-Map.jpg>

Map 2: Physical Map of Tajikistan



Source: <http://www.map-library.com/maps/maps-of-asia/maps-of-tajikistan/detailed-physical-map-of-tajikistan.jpg>

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Despite the temptation to take complete credit for this work there are some people whose contribution I cannot help but acknowledge. Their presence and support has been invaluable in the successful completion of this dissertation. I thank them below, but for those who I might have missed out -unwittingly - please do excuse the lapse.

I start with my Supervisor, Prof. K. Warikoo, without whose guidance - till the very end- this dissertation would not have been possible.

My parents, for being my source of strength.

My brother, Arun and sister, Kavita for being just an arm's length away, always.

My Senior Mr. Amar Shukla and Mr. Manas, my friends, Sunil and Himmat, for being so encouraging and helpful every time. Not to forget Nilakshi who kept up with my erratic schedule.

And my all other friends for helping me selflessly and being there for me at the best of times and the worst of times.

Thank you all

Place: New Delhi

Narendra Sharma

Date: 25 July 2016

ABBREVIATIONS

ASSR:	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republic
IRP:	Islamist Republic Party
DPT:	Democratic Party of Tajikistan
IRP:	Islamic Revival Party
CP:	Communist Party
CST:	Collective Security Treaty
CSTO:	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CIS:	Commonwealth of Independent States
EEC:	Eurasian Economic Community
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
IMF:	International Monetary Fund
IMU:	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE:	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OIC:	Organization of Islamic Conference
OPEC:	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Companies
SCO:	Shanghai Cooperation organization
UTO:	United Tajik Opposition
WTO:	World Trade Organization
MEA:	Ministry of External Affairs
UN:	United Nations

Preface

Tajikistan and India are two close neighbors who have shared historical, cultural and civilizational links through history. In modern times, these ties are driven by convergence of geo-political concerns and interests. The increasing threats of separatism, cross-border terrorism and religious extremism have led to greater security and strategic cooperation between the two countries. Taliban takeover of Afghanistan changed the threat perceptions and frequent diplomatic visits between the two countries resulted in closer defense cooperation. But the lack of direct overland connectivity has proved a major hindrance, especially in economic and trade relations. Both sides are committed to exploring alternative routes to increase economic activities. Indian entry to SCO and challenges like rising radicalization, state-sponsored terrorism and foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan have given impetus to cooperation in the realms of security, defense, trade and diplomacy.

Tajikistan-India bilateral diplomatic ties were established in 1992. Today, both sides have completed 25 years of these ever growing diplomatic relations. Tajik President's state visits in 1995, 2001 and 2006 led to the establishment of development partnership and mutual understanding on security and stability of the region. Each visit shaped bilateral ties in some new dimensions. Indian Prime Minister's visit in 2003 laid down the framework for mutual geo-strategic cooperation in the region while Tajik President's visit in 2012 elevated bilateral partnership to the level of long-term strategic partnership. Capitalizing on this mutual trust, confidence and goodwill, Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi's visit to Tajikistan in 2015 built deeper development partnerships between the two countries. . During Tajik president's visit in 2016, India regarded Tajikistan as a major mainstay against the forces of terrorism and extremism and Tajikistan recognizes Indian participation imperative for the security, stability and development of the entire region.

Visible results of these diplomatic visits are the establishment of Joint Working Group on Terrorism, Defense and India-Tajikistan Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation along with several business forums, which were instrumental in taking bilateral ties forward in the fields of security, defense and trade spheres.

Military hospital at Farkhor, upgradation of Ayni airbase and Varzob-1 hydropower plant, fruit processing plant and IT Centre of Excellence in Dushanbe and other several humanitarian aid and development grants with training and scholarship to Tajik students and defense personnel under ITEC and ICCR are some features of this development partnership. Although, bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India in diplomatic, economic, defense and security spheres have progressed well but not to its full potential. Tajikistan is the nearest Central Asian republic to India but due to lack of direct land connectivity, ties of two countries especially in the spheres of trade and economic cooperation are still lagging behind. In this context, it is vital for both countries to seek alternative routes like North-South Transport Corridor and also at the same time seek access to Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement and UN convention on landlocked countries to seek transit of goods between two countries.

Diplomatic efforts have yielded results in enhancing India's geo-political profile in Central Asia and Tajikistan and defense and security cooperation is an important part of this. With new challenges like rising radicalization, drug trafficking and deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and developments like Indian entry to SCO, it necessitates closer partnership in defense and security arenas. This period also becomes important with rising dominance of China in the region and its support to Pakistan. India needs to engage with Russia to reach a consensus for getting a foreign airbase at Ayni that could be a significant step. This study shows how both countries recognize the centrality of each other in forging a long-term strategy to combat cross border terrorism, Islamic radicalization, separatism and securing their national and economic interests.

This work has been divided into chapters in such a manner as to give a clear understanding of bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India in the spheres of diplomatic, trade, security and defense. The introduction is a brief study of the development of bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India from 1991 to 2015 with a brief historical background of civilizational, cultural and trade ties between the two countries.

The second chapter, as the title suggests, deals with developments and stages in the bilateral diplomatic history of the two countries and it also discusses in detail the progress

made by diplomatic visits between the two countries. It examines the impact of these diplomatic visits on closer cooperation in defense, security and trade.

Although, lack of direct land connectivity has been the major hurdle in developing economic and trade ties to its full potential, but still these ties have progressed well over the period of time. Chapter three deals with this aspect of bilateral relations. This chapter while examining the progress made in economic and trade ties between the two countries, also sheds light on the new and potential areas of cooperation and alternative routes of connectivity and Indian role in developing the human resources of Tajikistan.

Fourth chapter deals with the factors responsible for closer defense and security cooperation between the two countries and areas of cooperation in defense. This chapter also focuses on the need of deeper cooperation in these areas in the wake of rising threats of cross-border terrorism, extremism and separatism.

The conclusion is a summary of diplomatic, economic and trade, security and defense aspects of the Tajikistan-India relations, which have already been touched upon in the previous chapters. Besides, it looks at the findings of research with some possible opinions and suggestions.

A bibliography has been included at the end to assist those interested in further study of the bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India especially in the diplomatic, trade, security and defense cooperation.

Strong emphasis on close historical, cultural, and civilizational and trade ties between the two neighbors needs to be matched by significant improvement in economic and trade relations. Proactive diplomacy is the instrument to address the issues of connectivity, ensuring stability, security and peace in the region along with economic prosperity via human resource development, shared knowledge and innovation. Both countries need to build a long-term strategy and secure their national interests by curbing the menace of separatism, cross-border terrorism and religious extremism. There are both opportunities and challenges before the two countries, but sustained and close cooperation in diplomatic, trade, defense and security arenas will certainly move the relations between the two countries to new heights.

Chapter: 1

Introduction

Tajikistan and India relations are shaped by shared history, culture and civilizational links, and in modern times, these ties are driven by convergence of geo-political concerns and interests. Against the rising threats of separatism, cross-border terrorism and religious extremism, both countries seek greater security and strategic cooperation. Taliban takeover of Afghanistan changed the threat perceptions and frequent diplomatic visits between the two countries resulted in closer defense cooperation. But the lack of direct overland connectivity has proved a major hindrance, especially in economic and trade relations. Both sides are committed to exploring alternative routes to increase economic activities. Indian entry to SCO and challenges like rising radicalization, state-sponsored terrorism and foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan have given impetus to cooperation in the realms of security, defense, trade and diplomacy.

In the past, Tajikistan and India have enjoyed shared cultural, civilizational and trade relations. Linguistically and culturally, we belong to the same family. Further, the similarity between the culture and traditions of Central Asian and Indian people under Avestan and Vedic period only points to our shared historical and cultural relations. Tajik President's own chronicle, "*Tajikistan in the mirror of history-from Aryan to Samanids*" recalls the old relationship between the people of two countries and points to common Aryan ancestry. Some of the examples of these cultural relations are the adoption of the game of chess and popularity of Indian literary heritage 'Panchtamtra' in the Central Asian region. It is interesting to note that these civilizational links date back to even pre-historic times. Recent research and archaeological excavations clearly show the similar agricultural practices, town planning and regular contact between Indus Valley and Central Asian people. These civilizational links between lands of Amu Darya and Ganga got further strengthened when Bactria, Sogd and Parthia came under a common state along

with Gandhara and North-Western India during the period of Achaemenid, Indo-Greek and Kushan empires. Kushan Empire marked the highest level of Cultural exchanges that resulted in the infusion of Indian culture, traditions and Buddhism to the Central Asian region. It was during this time of history that the Great Silk Road served as a medium of exchange of goods, services and ideas rendering peace and prosperity to the people of the region. To sum up, Professor K. Warikoo (2016) states that, "Geographical proximity, ethnolinguistic affinity and shared history have formed the basis of a special relationship between India and Tajikistan".

This bilateral engagement between the people continued during Turkish and Persian empires that strengthened ties further. There were continuous exchanges of leaders, people, poets, Sufi saints and intellectuals between seats of learning like Samarkand, Bukhara and Delhi. Tajik and Indian poets and scholars made equal contributions to the advancement of Indo-Persian literature in the Indian sub-continent. The popularity of Rabindranath Tagore's poetry in Tajikistan and Bedil's poetry in India and the Indian Prime Minister presenting a miniature painting of Abdul Qadir Bedil to Tajik President points towards shared spiritual and cultural heritage. Mughals who came from this region made Indian their new home but given their emotional and psychological connections with their homeland, they continued their engagements with the region in one or the other form. According to Richard Foltz, this two hundred years of continuous engagement with the Central Asian region and especially influence of Tajik nobility (who belonged to the same Indo-Aryan Branch of Aryans of which one part settled in North and North-West India) in Mughal courts led to the development of India's cosmopolitan culture. It would be naive to assume that this engagement was just one way, but traveling of Buddhism, traditional knowledge of medicine and herbs and India traders, poets and monks to this region only points that our shared past experienced mutual influence.

Now, with India and Central Asia coming under the Russian and British empires respectively and later on rivalry and mutual suspicion between the two empires widened the distance between two regions of shared close cultural and historical relations. As Professor K. Warikoo (2016) points out that, "This Russian policy of

strategic diversion was countered by the British by adopting a sustained forward policy in the region”. By the treaty of 1907, both Tsarist Russia and British decided that Wakhan Corridor, a narrow strip of Afghan territory, would be separating Russian Central Asian territories and British Indian possessions and rendering a serious long-term blow to the connectivity between the two regions. Thus it is clear that this ‘Great Game’ rivalry between two empires put a stoppage to the centuries old civilizational links between the two regions.

Tajik people and poets like Mirzo Tursun-Zoda supported Indian freedom movement. Indian independence resulted in the forming of two separate states namely India and Pakistan proved catastrophic to the age-old connections with the Central Asian region as direct land connectivity to the wider South Asian region was lost. And again during the Soviet era, there was commonality of interests and close cooperation in science, politics, economics and culture. Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic enjoyed close trade and cultural relations with India. These relations were regulated through Moscow and the extent and intensity of these relations were still limited. However, with the signing of Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in 1971, cultural exchanges between India and Central Asian republics increased considerably. During this period of time, Hindi films enjoyed much popularity in Central Asia. During Cold War era, India despite being the founding member of Non-alignment movement, remained a close ally of Soviet Union and for that matter Central Asian republics. Friendly Indo-Soviet ties were instrumental in forging deeper Indian contacts with Central Asia in comparison to other southern neighbors and this very good mutual understanding along with age old brotherly bonding and commonality of interest and views in modern times provided India an added advantage to establish political relations with newly emerged Central Asian republics after the disintegration of Soviet Union.

Soviet disintegration resulted in the emergence of five Central Asian Republics namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the 1990s. India was one of the first countries to recognize their Independence and started to establish diplomatic relations with newly emerged republics by segregating its overall Soviet-era ties by Republic wise. The sudden break up of Soviet Union

brought socio-economic miseries to these republics and these miseries coupled with the transitional pain resulted in widespread poverty, unemployment and political instability in many countries. These countries started to interact with regional and global powers to overcome this situation. During this time, India was in shock due to break up of its dependable ally and political and economic instability at home further delayed Indian outreach to the region. However India was quick to realize this delay and now it has a strategic partnership with three of the five Central Asian republics and trade is also picking up, though slowly. Indian measures like 'Connect Central Asia' policy, and also holding an India-Central Asia Dialogue at Track II annually in one of the republics have contributed to the closer ties. Though India and Central Asian countries enjoy friendly relationship, the economic and trade engagement between the two sides has been much below its potential. The countries of Central Asia are rich in hydrocarbons, mineral and other natural resources and are close to India geographically. Geographically, the strategic location of these countries also makes them a bridge between different regions of Asia and between Europe and Asia. Although the significance of the region in India's economic and energy security is clear, lack of direct surface connectivity has been affecting the economic engagement. However, the recent progress in North-South Transport Corridor will certainly improve the connectivity between the two regions.

Geographically, Tajikistan is nearest to India and given its geo-strategic position, it is important not only to India but also regional and global actors as well. Further, Tajikistan is rich in mineral and natural resources and it has a fast-growing consumer market and India is important to it due to its status as an emerging economic and political power in the world. Mutual interests of both sides rest primarily on economic and trade cooperation, regional security and stability and maintaining of strategic order. As far as this modern relationship between two countries is concerned, it is simply not based on close civilizational, cultural and trade ties but both sides find several commonalities. In the present time, the similarity of worldviews, common threat concerns like cross-border terrorism, religious extremism and separatism, high level of mutual confidence and trust, their commitment to build modern secular, pluralist and democratic polity, securing stability and peace in Afghanistan, promoting social-ethno-linguistic and cultural

harmony, adherence to non-interference and peaceful co-existence and promoting overall trade, cultural and technological cooperation are imparting new colors to the dynamic partnership between two countries. Tajikistan provides a special place to India in its foreign policy due to its close geographical proximity and age-old close historical, cultural and trade ties and mutual concerns related to regional security and stability. Referring to these bilateral relations between two countries, Tajik President stressed: "the Republic of Tajikistan within the framework of its bilateral and multilateral relations with India is looking at it as a factor for peace and stability in the region". And again in 1996, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan pointed out the similarity of views regarding regional and international issues by stating that, "In the political field, the positions of the Republic of India on a number of regional and international issues are identical with or similar to the positions of the Republics of Tajikistan".

The disintegration of USSR followed by Tajik civil war disrupted Tajikistan-India relations for some time. But it also gave an opportunity to engage with new sovereign Tajik state. Attempts by outside powers to secure geo-political and economic interests (New Great Game) coupled by rising threats of cross-border terrorism; extremism and volatile Afghanistan situation have turned Tajikistan a high priority in India's foreign policy, which led to high-level diplomatic exchanges between the two countries.

Formal diplomatic ties were established between the two countries on 28 August, 1992. Since then, Indo-Tajik cooperation has covered a broad spectrum of fields from diplomatic, economic, cultural, defense and security to education, human resource development, science and technology, academic and humanitarian arenas. Diplomatic visits by leaders from both sides have helped in strengthening bilateral ties in these spheres and thus taking bilateral cooperation to new heights. Tajik President has visited India several times so far. It was during the first state visit of Tajik President in 1995 when a mutual understanding was reached on Afghanistan for security and stability of the region. However, the Taliban took over Afghanistan and escalation of cross-border terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir started a new phase in the bilateral cooperation between two countries. Here it is also

important to note that Pakistani sponsored extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan had a direct spillover effect on Tajikistan and thus worsened its internal security scenario. Now worried about their respective internal security and stability, both countries cooperated well in supporting Northern Alliance led by Tajik leadership of Ahmad Shah Masood against the Taliban. Against these developments, landmark visits by Tajik President in 1999 and 2001 and Indian Prime Minister in 2003 concretized the ties in geo-political and security realms in the wake of rising threats of state sponsored terrorism and religious extremism and Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee described this joint Tajik-Indian action as a "stabilizing factor" for the region. It was due to these diplomatic efforts that India was able to garner Tajik support for Indian claim of permanent membership at United Nations Security Council and entry to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). At the same time Tajikistan found a reliable partner in its pursuit of regional security and stability and economic development of the country.

Although each visit brought both countries closer but due to political instability at home which resulted in political indecisiveness in foreign affairs and lack of political and bureaucratic will to implement the already signed mutual agreements failed to raise India's geo-political and strategic profile in the Central Asian region. However, developments like Kargil war and persistent volatile security situation in the neighborhood provided a new urgency to the bilateral cooperation especially in the fields of security and defense. The visit of Indian Defense Minister in 2002 points to this urgency and growing defense cooperation between two countries. The military hospital at Farkhor and Ayni air base for infant Tajik air force are physical signs of this new cooperation.

Indian President Pratibha Patil's visit enhanced goodwill, trust and mutual confidence between the two countries. During the state visit of Tajik President in 2012, both sides decided to elevate their bilateral relations to the level of a long-term strategic partnership. Indian Prime Minister's visit in 2015 provided further impetus to these relations. On his last stoppage to Tajikistan, Narendra Modi remarked: "This is the last stop on my visit to the five Central Asian countries. But, we sometimes save the special one for the last". He pointed out to closest linguistic, civilizational

and historical links with Tajikistan. Tajik President's visit to India in 2016 reinforced the commitment of both countries to take bilateral ties to a new level by improving overall bilateral security cooperation, capacity building, and information exchanges and via active coordination at regional and multilateral platforms. India regarded Tajikistan's role as a 'mainstay' against forces of extremism, religious radicalization, and terrorism.

These diplomatic visits also resulted in the strengthening of cooperation between two countries in areas like human resource development by providing increased number of scholarships and training to Tajik students via ITEC in areas ranging from English language, banking, and finance, IT to industrial development and management and defense training and identifying new areas of cooperation like tourism, agriculture and space. Tajikistan attracts the largest share of humanitarian and development assistance in the form of aids and material support and it has significantly build the IT capacity of Tajikistan while at the same time enhancing Indian strategic outreach in the region.

Diplomatic ties shaped by regular visits of leaders, bureaucrats and other cultural and academic missions resulted in the signing of several mutual agreements and MOUs including those of economic and trade nature and helped in strengthening defense, security and strategic cooperation, but the lack of direct overland connectivity hindered trade cooperation. Though economic and trade ties between Tajikistan and India go back to Silk Road days, in present times it's a low-key affair due to structural and connectivity hurdles. There is a vast potential of trade between resource rich Tajikistan and technology-rich India. Private sector cooperation is an important aspect of trade relations that can increase the competitive nature of Tajikistan's manufacturing units thus leading to Tajikistan's export diversification and economic independence in the wake of dominating cheap Chinese goods. In return India can avail the benefit of the vast potential of hydro power in Tajikistan for its energy security. The areas of cooperation between two countries are like pharmaceuticals, education, health, energy, tele-communication, and infrastructure. Structural changes in the trade relations between two countries are the need of the hour. The reasons for this low level of trade between the two countries are f direct

overland connectivity due to political differences between India and Pakistan, expensive and unreliable Mumbai- Bandar Abbas- Dushanbe route, macroeconomic instability in Central Asia inadequate banking facilities, strict visa regimes, language barriers and absence of direct and daily air connectivity are some of them. Indian access to Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement can tap the vast potentiality of trade between India and Central Asia. And, further establishment of India-Pakistan- Afghanistan-Central Asia Transport Corridor will reduce the cost of transportation significantly (Warikoo: 2016; 7, 8). Political relations need to be improved between India and Pakistan and political stability in Afghanistan is the need of the hour. However, Indian hopes lie mainly on the North-South Transport Corridor and recent progress in this project is a positive sign. According to the respective embassy websites, both countries have a Joint Inter- governmental commission led by the ministry of economy and trade that reviews the existing level of cooperation in several fields. Apart from this, several major agreements and bilateral treaties like Agreement for Bilateral Investment Protection, Air Services Agreement and Agreement on Long-term Cooperation in Trade, Economic and Industry and institutional arrangements like setting up of an Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation and business forums and even after their several rounds of meetings have strengthened bilateral trade while at the same time identifying the new areas of cooperation. A number of civilian projects like the reconstruction of the Varzob-1 hydro power plant, Fruit Processing Plant and IT Centre in Dushanbe have strengthened the existing relations between two countries. Indian Prime Minister's visit to Tajikistan in 2015, where he addressed an agricultural workshop, points to the vast potential of cooperation in farming techniques, equipment and space technology.

One of the vibrant dimensions of these ever growing bilateral ties is the increasing cooperation in security and defense related fields between the two countries. Mutual interests concerning peace, security and stability of Central Asia in the wake of volatile Afghan situation coupled with rising threats of religious extremism and cross-border terrorism brought two countries closer in defense and strategic partnership. These developments increased the diplomatic efforts between two countries for closer defense ties. In this context, Indian Prime Minister's visit in

2003 laid down the framework for mutual geo-strategic cooperation in the region while Tajik President's visit in 2012 elevated bilateral partnership to the level of long-term strategic partnership. Today, joint military exercises, defense personnel training, Ayni airbase, military hospital, defense material supplies and Joint Working Group on Terrorism are the hallmark of this partnership. Although, Indian entry to SCO provided it some influence but entry to other regional organizations like "Dushanbe Four" is still needed to push these ties forward. It is clear that Pakistan has a role in spreading religious extremism and cross-border terrorism that is harming both Tajikistan and India. Pakistan is using this platform to secure a position in the Central Asian region and is denying India's entry to this organization which is a Tajik Initiative to counter narco trade and promoting economic cooperation and sharing electricity. Indian entry into this organization can add greater significance to it. The establishment of Joint Working Group on terrorism, Defense and sharing of intelligence and expanding cooperation between heads of relevant organizations are positive signs of our growing security and defense cooperation with the country. During Indian Prime Minister's visit to the country in 2015, both sides expressed satisfaction with growing defense ties and at the same time reaffirmed their commitment for closer cooperation in this field. During Tajik president's visit in 2016, India regarded Tajikistan as a major mainstay against the forces of terrorism and extremism and Tajikistan recognizes Indian participation imperative for the security, stability and development of the entire region.

Tajikistan and India are faced with a wide range of common questions connected with most important challenges such as terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. However, these security challenges to regional peace and stability are not the only reasons of Indian outreach in this region, given fast developing Pakistan-China axis in the region, Indian need to maintain its strategic influence in the region. Stephen Blank in this regard opines that, "Two key Indian objectives are to deny Pakistan and China, her key rivals and threats, opportunities to increase their strategic capability by gaining predominant influence in Central Asia or by threatening India's assets there. Enhancing Indian influence in the region equates to a strategy of strategic denial". Both Russia and Central Asian states have welcomed Indian role in this region and Central Asian states especially Tajikistan and

Uzbekistan recognize India as an important factor in the regional peace and stability in Afghanistan and Central Asian region. Further, India's accession to SCO provides it a legitimate platform to enhance its political and strategic profile in the region. However, India's increasing closeness to the USA may result in the formation of Russia-China-Pakistan axis and may harm its economic and strategic aspirations in the region. Russian cooperation is vital for India's presence in this region and for this India needs to sort out the apprehensions of the long-standing ally in this regard.

With new challenges like rising radicalisation, drug trafficking and deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and developments like Indian entry to SCO, both countries need to move towards closer partnership in defense, security and trade arenas. This period also becomes important with rising dominance of China in the region and its support to Pakistan. Direct connectivity to Tajikistan is still a major hindrance. It is vital for both countries to seek alternative routes like North-South Transport Corridor and also at the same time seek access to Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement and UN Convention on landlocked countries to seek transit of goods between two countries. India needs to engage with Russia to reach a consensus for getting a foreign airbase at Ayini that could be a significant step. All these developments points towards the fact that both countries recognize the centrality of each other in forging a long-term strategy to combat cross border terrorism, Islamic radicalisation, separatism and securing their national and economic interests.

Review of Literature

The literature review has been divided in three thematic structures:

Diplomatic Relations

India's close proximity with Central Asia and given its close civilizational, cultural and economic ties made this region an area of high priority in the country's foreign policy. This section covers various dimensions which resulted in strengthening the overall relations between two countries. Gulshan (2015) points out that Tajikistan and India have enjoyed close cooperation in the fields of trade and culture. She further states that under new Tajikistan statehood, relations between two countries started on the new path of development and diplomatic relations were established between the two by signing an agreement on 28 August 1992. She has also argued that delay in establishing bilateral relations was due to Indian inability to wake up from the sudden shock of Soviet disintegration followed by bloody Tajik civil war. Singh (2003) talks about a new phase in the relations between two countries after the Taliban took over Afghanistan and escalation of cross border terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Here it can also be pointed out that Pakistan, which sponsored extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan had direct spill over effect on Tajikistan. The first State visit of Tajikistan president took place in December 1995 in which mutual understanding was reached on the situation in Afghanistan and setting up of an Indo-Tajik Joint commission for economic, scientific and technical cooperation. Although each visit brought both countries closer but as he points out that there was little progress in implementing these agreements and in raising India's geo-political and strategic profile. Olimov (2016) argues that the working visit of President Rahmonov on 22 January 1999 was extraordinary and path breaking. It concretised Tajikistan-India relations in the realm of security. Bilateral relations further strengthened with the state visit of President Rahmonov in May, 2001. Tajikistan fully supported the Indian claim of permanent membership at United Nations Security Council and Indian Prime minister Vajpayee described joint Tajik-Indian action as a "stabilizing factor" for the region. Singh (2003) points out that "Indo-Tajik cooperation acquired a new urgency in the light of developments taking place in and around Afghanistan". It was in this backdrop that visits of Indian defence minister in 2002 and Prime Minister Vajpayee in 2003 took place. Olimov (2016) observes that Vajpayee's visit was instrumental in further strengthening and expanding

India-Tajikistan bilateral cooperation in the framework of common geo-strategic interests. Two important agreements including Joint Working Group on terrorism and extradition treaty were signed during this visit.

He has rightly observed that the significance of enhanced cooperation with Tajikistan lies in the fact that it is not only a neighbor of Afghanistan but a stable, secular and strong Tajikistan is central to peace and stability in both Central and South Asia. Gulshan (2015) points out the new areas of cooperation between two countries like human resource development by providing scholarships and training to Tajik students via ITEC in areas ranging from English language, banking, finance , IT to industrial development and management and defence training. In the same way many Indian students are studying at Tajik State Medical University. Indian President Pratibha Patil's visit enhanced goodwill, trust and mutual confidence between the two countries. State visit of President Rahmonov took place in 2012. According to Joint Statement issued during this visit, both sides decided to elevate their bilateral relations to the level of a long term strategic partnership. Indian Prime Minister's visit in 2015 provided further impetus to these relations. But these ties need to be sustained and further strengthened and in this regard, Singh (2003) points out that "The ancient tradition of the Great Silk Route which united these people who lived in peace and prosperity during the Kushan Age known for its spirit of religious tolerance, cultural pluralism rather than the competitive spirit of the New Great Game, should serve as a guide for the leadership of our people in the present time".

Economic and Trade Relations

Diplomatic ties shaped by regular visits of leaders, bureaucrats and other cultural and academic missions resulted in signing of several mutual agreements and MOU's including those of economic and trade nature. Gulshan (2015) observes that trading and economic interests of India and Tajikistan are deeply rooted in historical ties. She further stresses that India, today being the centre of world's IT infrastructure, agriculture and industry, Indian experience in these areas can be of vital importance for Tajikistan. Importance of India as a trading partner has been clearly stated by the trade representative of Tajikistan, Mahmadi Tuuraev in his interview, "India was, is and will be one of the very important countries in the region, not only for Tajikistan but also for all Asia and the whole world in the arena of trade and business. India is one of the fastest growing countries. Its economy is huge and

there is great potential which could not remain unseen by other countries including Tajikistan". Although there has been satisfactory progress in diplomatic, security and defence cooperation but due to many obstacles, trade and economic ties have suffered. Warikoo (2016) points out that although India's trade with Central Asia goes back to the Silk Route days, but today Central Asian Republics form a very low portion of Indian trade. He further counts the annual trade turnover between two countries for the year 2014-15 as only 58 million Dollars. He rightly points out the reasons for this low level of trade between the two countries, lack of direct overland connectivity due to political differences between India and Pakistan, expensive and unreliable Mumbai- Bandar Abbas- Dushanbe route, macroeconomic instability in Central Asia, inadequate banking facilities, strict visa regimes, language barriers and absence of direct and daily air connectivity are some of them. Suggesting measures to overcome connectivity problem, he observes that Indian access to Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement can tap the vast potentiality of trade between India and Central Asia. Further, Warikoo and Umarov (2015) point out that establishment of India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia Transport Corridor will reduce the cost of transportation by 5 to 15 times. Political relations need to be improved between India and Pakistan and political stability in Afghanistan is the need of hour. In this direction, Gulshan (2015) counts the areas of cooperation between two countries like pharmaceuticals, education, health, energy, tele-communication and infrastructure. Given poor quality of Chinese goods and services that are also harming traditional manufacturing units of Tajikistan and with Uzbekistan blocking its trade, Tajikistan desperately needs an alternative route for its export diversification and investment. Indian private sector experience in the areas like mountain tourism, infrastructure, power stations, enhancing competitive capacity of manufacturing units of Tajikistan can significantly strengthen the economic independence of Tajikistan and at the same time provide much needed energy security to India. Structural changes in the trade relations between two countries are the need of hour. Warikoo (2015) also highlights the economic and strategic importance of this region for India and how it has escaped Indian attention so long. According to the respective embassy websites both countries have a Joint inter- governmental commission led by the ministry of economy and trade that reviews existing level of cooperation in several fields. A number of civilian projects like reconstruction of Varzob-1 hydro power plant and IT centre in Dushanbe have strengthened the existing relations between two countries. Indian Prime

Minister's visit to Tajikistan in 2015, where he addressed an agricultural workshop, points to the vast potential of cooperation in farming techniques, equipment and space technology.

Defence, Security and strategic cooperation

Gulshan (2015) says that Tajikistan and India are faced with a wide range of common questions connected with most important challenges such as terrorism, religious extremism and drug trafficking. She also points out that stability in Afghanistan is central to both Central Asia and South Asia. Here again, Warikoo (2004) clearly highlights the role of Afghanistan factor in Tajikistan crisis and its spill over effects in the form of cross-border terrorism and separatism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. He also points out that "Rapid politicization of Islam and a militant Islamic fundamentalist movement in Tajikistan was directly linked to the developments in the Afghanistan". These mutual concerns and interests brought two countries closer in defence, security and strategic cooperation. Challenges are not limited to these areas Dutta (2015) talks about Afghanistan being the largest opium producer and Tajikistan acting as a Transit Hub (Northern Route) and money being used by terrorists to finance their military activities, which poses a serious threat to regional security and stability. Given the porous border, corruption and poor border management in Gorno-Badakhshan, trafficking in drugs and arms poses serious threat to regional peace and stability. Gulshan (2015) highlights the fact that Kabul take over by Taliban moved the two countries for closer defence and security cooperation. The visits by Tajik President and Indian Prime Minister focused on common geo-strategic and security interests in the region. And this led to deeper strategic and defence cooperation between two countries. It is clear that Pakistan has a role in spreading religious extremism and cross border terrorism that is harming both Tajikistan and India. Sharma (2016) highlights how Pakistan is using this platform to secure a position in Central Asian region and is denying India's entry to this organization that is a Tajik Initiative to counter narco trade and promoting economic cooperation and sharing electricity. Indian entry into "Dushanbe Four" can add greater significance to this organization. Gulshan (2015) points out that defence cooperation covers a wide spectrum of bilateral interests which include exchange of information, material support and joint exercises and defence personnel's training and human resource development via IT and English language trainings. Military hospital at

Ayini air base and assistance to Tajikistan to raise and build an effective Air Force are also noteworthy. Again establishment of Joint Working Group on terrorism, sharing of intelligence and expanding cooperation between heads of relevant organizations are much needed developments. New challenges like emergence of radical Islamist groups like ISIS, state sponsored terrorism and withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan necessitates India to raise further its political and strategic cooperation with Tajikistan.

Definition, Scope and Rationale of the study

The proposed study concerns itself with the bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India in diplomatic, economic, defence and security spheres since the inception of Tajikistan as an independent Sovereign state in 1991, up to Indian Prime Minister's landmark visit to Tajikistan in 2015. However, the turning point between the relations came when Taliban took over Afghanistan that moved the two countries closer due to mutual concerns about its spill over effects which affected both countries. Thus study will examine the factors and mutual interests which are driving both countries closer in these areas. Indian Prime Minister's visit in 2003 was also a turning point that laid the framework for mutual geo-strategic cooperation in the region. Establishment of Joint Working Group on Terrorism points to the concern that the security and stability of Central Asia has been central to both Tajikistan and India. But lack of direct overland connectivity is obstructing the Indian outreach to Tajikistan. So exploring alternative routes and India's role in developing human resource of Tajikistan is assumes importance. The proposed study also concerns itself with the new potential areas of cooperation like agriculture, space, hydro power development and tourism. Rationale of the study is the convergence of mutual interests in trade, security and strategic fields and increasing importance of the Central Asian region which necessitates closer cooperation between the two countries. On the one hand, there is untapped potential of trade and economic cooperation between resource rich Tajikistan and technical capability of India. On the other hand, rising threats of cross-border terrorism, religious extremism and volatile Afghan situation which impacts both countries, moves the two countries to seek much closer strategic and defence cooperation. Tajikistan is a landlocked country, with Uzbekistan blocking its goods, Pakistan denying Indian access to its markets and import of cheap and low quality Chinese goods and services have adverse impact on its local industry. So Tajikistan presently needs an alternative route to market its goods and services as well as receive technical support to enhance the competitive nature of its manufacturing units. Here,

Indian cooperation becomes obvious which in return may fulfill to secure its energy security by tapping the vast hydel resources of Tajikistan. With new challenges like rising radicalisation, drug trafficking and deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and developments like Indian entry to SCO, it would be interesting to note as to how both countries move towards closer partnership in defence, security and trade arenas. This period also becomes important with rising dominance of China in the region and its support to Pakistan. Direct connectivity to Tajikistan is still a major hindrance. It is vital for both countries to seek alternative routes like North-South Transport Corridor and also at the same time seek access to Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement and UN convention on landlocked countries to seek transit of goods between two countries. India needs to engage with Russia to reach a consensus for getting a foreign airbase at Ayini that could be a significant step. It would be interesting to study how both countries recognize the centrality of each other in forging a long-term strategy to combat cross border terrorism, Islamic radicalisation, separatism and securing their national and economic interests.

Research Questions

1. What are the major factors that are bringing the two countries closer in defence, security and strategic cooperation?
2. What are the main reasons for slow progress in trade and economic ties between two countries?
3. What are the major challenges for private sector cooperation between the two countries?
4. What are the new and potential areas of cooperation in the changing geo-political and economic scenario?
5. What is the Indian role in developing human resources of Tajikistan? Is there slow progress in implementing the mutual agreements or projects from both sides?

Hypothesis

In spite of the convergence of geo-political and strategic interests between Tajikistan and India, there is little progress in bilateral relations, particularly in trade and economic spheres.

Research Methods

The methodology involves both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources will include documents and reports published and released by the Governments of Tajikistan and India on bilateral relations between the two countries and declarations and joint statements made in various official meetings including the think tanks, press releases, reports of delegations etc. Secondary sources will include books, articles published in the journals and other web based resources. The study aims to be analytical and descript

Chapter: 2

Diplomatic Ties

Tajikistan-India relations owe a lot to their close civilizational, cultural and economic ties. With close proximity to each other, both countries have made Central and South Asian region an area of high priority in their respective foreign policy.

Tajikistan emerged as an independent sovereign country after the sudden break up of Soviet Union along with four other Central Asian countries namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Establishment of these sovereign independent countries on the world map brought significant shift in the power politics. These states struggled to maintain an independent foreign policy due to chaos and instability created by the sudden break-up of Soviet-style institutions coupled with transitional issues and difficulties. The main pillars that shape the foreign policy of a country are geography, economic development, political traditions domestic and international factors, military strength and national character (Bandhopadyay, 1980). Although in the peculiar case of Tajikistan and for that matter any Central Asian country's national interest and a foreign hand to bring them out of economic and security difficulties shaped their respective foreign policy. And they leaned towards Russia which dominated their foreign policy for some time to come. Russia still remained the major player in the region, providing financial and security aid and strength to these new sovereign states.

Soon after the breakup of Soviet Union, now Tajikistan being the new sovereign independent republic became a part and parcel of the international system and adopted a foreign policy that is based on the foundation of mutual respect and equal rights and advocates international peace and security. It is clearly reflected in the Preamble of Tajik constitution, a part of which reads:

“We, the people of Tajikistan, as an integral part of the world community, Conscious of its duty and its responsibility to the past, present and future Generations, understanding the need for sovereignty and development of their State, while recognizing the inviolable freedom and human rights, respecting the Equality and friendship of all nations and peoples, challenges the establishment of a just society” (Preamble of Constitution of Tajikistan).

As a nation interacts with outside world, national interest is something that determines foreign affairs. As Palmer & Perkins rightly put it like, “There is no real friend but only friend is national interest”. Tajikistan, a mountainous landlocked country borders with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in north and west, China in East and Afghanistan in the south. It occupies geo-strategic position in Central Asia and hence comes under the geo-political definition of the Heartland theory of Mackinder¹. Tajikistan’s geo-strategic location is a door to Central Asia and the same factor might be responsible for the modern version of ‘great game’ being played here. At this point of time foreign policy is something that must be looked at for the more comprehensive view of its relations with other countries including India.

The Foreign policy of Tajikistan can be divided into the three major phases according to the major changes in its formulation due to domestic and international factors (Pal, 2008: 55 to 58). The first phase includes civil war during which it strived hard to maintain its unity and at the same time securing international aid and cooperation to maintain national security and cope up with economic and social hardships due to lack of resources and breakdown of the Soviet system of institutions. Here, Russia was the immediate external help especially in the area of national security but Russian economic and security help was limited as at that time it was also going through turmoil.

The second phase starts after the Civil War. During this period ties and strong relations with Russia continued but at the same time Tajikistan started it wider cooperation with other regional and global big powers and now a balanced foreign policy was the main goal of Tajik foreign policy. (Jonson, 2006:84).

The third phase in Tajikistan foreign policy starts after period 9/11 developments and it opened new opportunities in the economic and political arena and to interact with other countries and seek close cooperation with them. These attacks led the USA to engage with Central Asian countries along with Afghanistan. This development also reduced the tensions with its two neighbors namely Afghanistan and Uzbekistan and improved the security scenario here.

The emergence of five independent Central Asian republics on the world map after Soviet disintegration changed the geo-politics dynamics of Asia and for that matter whole of the world.

¹ Heartland theory by the father of geopolitics Mackinder states that whoever controls Central Asia wields enormous power.

As (Roy, 2001) contends: "CARs lie at the crossroads of Russia, the Middle East, South Asia and East Asia. Any geopolitical changes in the region inevitably extended their impact on several states in the neighborhood". The year 1991 can be regarded as a historic year in world history. With Soviet disintegration, Central Asian republics became sovereign and independent republics. But this development came with economic and transitional miseries. Central Asian republics responded by moving on a market oriented path that for some time furthered this transitional misery and signing mutual agreements with other countries. Some common changes like introducing direct presidential election and attempts at reviving their ethnolinguistic national identity with religious revivalism and opening up to outside world were there in almost all the republics.

Different countries reacted to these developments according to their own geo-political, strategic and economic interests with India being no exception. India enjoyed very good friendly relations and cooperation with these republics in the past under overall Indo-Soviet cooperation. Now after the Soviet disintegration, India just segregated its ties republic wise (MEA, 1991). Independent Tajikistan was eagerly establishing its relations with major regional and global powers as well as the international organization and financial institutions. But with Civil War turmoil and regional instability engulfing it, Tajikistan coincidentally found the convergence of mutual concerns and strategic interest with India. Ministry of External Affairs, India in this regard contends that:

“Feeling vulnerable from its southern neighbors on account of fundamentalism, terrorism, drug-trafficking as well as criminal links, it finds, in India, a natural partner in its quest to develop a secular, pluralistic and democratic polity”.

Today, India –Tajikistan relations are shaped by the commonality of interests and concerns on wide ranges of issues like terrorism, regional stability and security and cooperation in defense and economic sphere. Today both countries are furthering their relationship by various diplomatic visits, official delegation and cultural exchanges. India sees Tajikistan’s geo-strategic location and its abundant natural resources especially hydro-power and mineral resources while Tajikistan sees an engagement benefit with a major economic and political player of the time. It's not that only our close historical and cultural ties in the ancient period and mutual interests or concerns in modern times are the major force that is driving our relationship but common perception about building a modern democratic pluralist and secular society is also one of the factors in this ever-growing mutual confidence in bilateral ties.

Diplomatic relations between two countries date back to Tajikistan gaining independence with Soviet disintegration. India was the one of the first countries to recognize the Tajik independence and was eager to establish diplomatic ties with newly emerged Central Asian countries. Soon after the Soviet breakup, India was the only non-communist country with diplomatic outpost in Central Asia and its friendly relations with former Soviet Union provided an advantageous position to it to engage with newly emerged countries. India's consulate in Tashkent that was opened in 1987 with jurisdiction over Kazak, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics provided an added impetus in comparison to other regional rivals keen to engage with these countries (Mullen and Prasad, 2014). Diplomatic relations between two countries were started by signing an agreement on 28 August 1992 (Gulshan, 2015:198). But as (Gulshan, 2015) argues that considerable delay in establishing relations was due to Indian inability to recover from the sudden shock of Soviet disintegration and it got further delayed due to Tajik civil war. At the time when rest of the world was heading to Central Asia to establish ties with newly emerged Central Asian countries, India did it by sending Junior Minister of Commerce and External Affairs (Singh, 2003:198). The visits of Uzbek President Karimov and Kazakh President Nazarbaev during this period started a new chapter in Indo-Central Asian cooperation but major Indian diplomatic visit was still missing here. As again while acknowledging the understandable delay on Indian side in establishing its relations with Central Asian countries due to sudden Soviet disintegration with whom Indian enjoyed close relations, (Singh, 2003) clearly states that India came out of this shock with then Indian Prime Minister P.V Narshima Rao paying official visit to Central Asian countries namely Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. But Tajikistan was still missing in the list due to civil war conditions there. What can be inferred from all these arguments is that attributing Indian delay in establishing diplomatic ties with Central Asian countries in general and Tajikistan in particular to factors like Soviet disintegration and Tajik civil war would be insufficient here. Disturbing economic(economic distress and balance of payment problem in early nineties followed by economic reforms and opening up of Indian economic structure) and political conditions(coalition Governments) that resulted in lack of political decisiveness and willingness at home equally contributed to Indian delay in reaching out to newly emerged geo-strategic region. During the period 1991-92, several visits concluded between India and Central Asian republics namely Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan but Civil War disturbances in Tajikistan were still keeping Indo- Tajik cooperation at a bay. During this period of time, a decision was taken to open an embassy at Dushanbe but, it couldn't be materialized due to unrest there (MEA, 1992).

Tajik civil war coupled with volatile Afghan situation and rising threat of Al-Qaeda played an important role in the Indo-Tajik relations. On the one hand, these developments slowed the pace of Indian engagement with Tajikistan in comparison with other Central Asian countries and on the other hand these developments in and around both countries provided much-needed impetus to the much deeper bilateral engagements especially in defense and security sectors.

Tajik civil war was a multi-faceted struggle in its character involving domestic and external players as well as ethnic and regional local elites competing for power after Soviet disintegration and also a conflict between state and religion and a movement to oppose socio-political reforms. There are several geographical, political and socio-economic and ethnic dimensions of this conflict as well. Tajikistan is a mountainous country with 93 percentages of its covered under high mountains, glaciers and arid plateaus. This has made travel and communication between different regions of the country difficult and thus creating regional divisions proving obstacles in its economic and social integration (Olimov, 2016:45, 46). These regional divisions coupled with social and economic chaos and distress due to Soviet disintegration gave birth to several political factions and regional, ethnic and religious movements. Again this regional divide along with Afghanistan crisis, as Afghanistan was the main route for radical ideas, weapons and drugs and radical Islam, served as a motivation for opposition groups for gaining access to power corridors.

How these developments brought Indo-Tajik cooperation to a new height is a point to be worth described here. In this regard, (Warikoo, 2004) highlights the Afghan factor in Tajikistan crisis where Afghan Mujahideen supporting Islamic extremists in Tajikistan with arms and narco trade and thus destroying socio-political stability there and its spillover effects in the form of cross-border terrorism and separatism in the Indian state of Jammu-Kashmir. He further contends that “Rapid politicization of Islam and a militant Islamic fundamentalist movement in Tajikistan was directly linked to the developments in Afghanistan”. Further, Pakistan establishment and its ISI supported Jihadi operatives in Afghanistan in order to get its puppet government there and it increased its outreach to Central Asian republics and Afghanistan to stop Indian influence there especially via using religious pretexts and supporting religious extremism groups there and thus jeopardizing the stability and security scenario of Central Asian republics particularly that of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Thus mutual concerns and interests brought the two countries closer especially for cooperation for regional security and stability and joint measures against narcotics trade and radical Islam. India, concerned about the continuous Pakistani support to terrorist groups, tried to isolate and resist Pakistan’s influence in the Central Asian republics and

Afghanistan by engaging more with these countries via means of humanitarian and development assistance as well as security, defense and diplomatic cooperation (Toshmuhammadov, 2004). India was in contact with neighboring countries and offered its participation to find a solution to Tajik crisis (MEA, 1992). It is well understood that any disturbance in Afghanistan and Tajikistan (both share a porous and loosely monitored border where arms, drugs and radical ideas flow unhindered) would affect the volatile situation in Kashmir. Russia invited India to be a partner in Tajik peace process as India and Russia both shared the fear of the rise of religious radicalization and that stability in Afghanistan and Tajikistan is in the interests of both countries and South and Central Asia at large. The situation at Tajikistan was discussed by then Russian Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev and Sharad Pawar in September 1992 and again by Narshimha Rao and Yeltsin in January 1993 and June 1994. Russia liked the idea of UN-sponsored talk on Tajikistan along with Pakistan and Iran but Indian reluctance was due to its domestic conditions at home. Also Tajikistan regarded all participating countries except Russia as 'mere observers' (Singh, 1995:198). The year 1993 marked the high-level visits between India and Central Asia in general and Tajikistan in particular. Several resident missions were opened in the capitals of Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Also Kazakhstan ambassador became the first resident ambassador from a Central Asian republic (MEA, 1993). With the then Indian Prime Minister, Narshima Rao visiting Uzbekistan, India again reaffirmed its commitment to developing bilateral relations with Central Asian republics to new heights by means of cooperation in political, economic and trade, science and technology fields and through the development of human resources, cultural and academic exchanges. During this visit, opening up of Cultural Centre at Tashkent brought ancient Indian and Central Asian civilizational links alive and of those Tajikistan was an inevitable part. This visit of Indian Prime Minister was reciprocated by Uzbek president, Islam Karimov in 1994. He was also awarded an honorary degree by Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Indo-Kazakh cooperation and strengthening of India's bilateral relations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was another highlight of that year (MEA, 1993).

Indo-Tajik cooperation rose to a new level in 1993 with Tajik Prime Minister paying an official visit to India. This visit was significant in the backdrop of India's fast developing contacts with other Central Asian countries and also developments taking place in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. As Afghanistan crisis was playing its crucial part in both Tajik civil war and the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, mutual concern for regional security and stability was one of the highlights of this visit.

The then Tajik Prime Minister, A.A. Abdullajanov on his first state visit to India declared:

“Tajikistan gives priority and importance to its relations with India and believes that this is incumbent on us due to our geographical closeness, deep historical commonalities and closeness of culture and tradition”². Opening up of the resident Indian mission in Dushanbe was expected to increase bilateral relations between the two closely associated countries. But stability and security in Afghanistan and Tajikistan were still a concern for both countries. India expressed its concern on developments taking place on Afghan –Tajik border that resulted in heavy loss of human life and material destruction. India appealed to both sides to exercise maximum restraint and for a possible cooperation between states to meet the growing challenge of trans-border activities that pose danger to the integrity and security of a nation. India also objected to external interference and troops in Tajikistan (MEA, 1993). While talking to his Tajik counterpart, Indian Prime Minister called this visit of Tajik Prime Minister as opening up of a new era of cooperation between two countries. India announced 5 million US dollar credit to Tajikistan to promote economic and commercial cooperation and also offered tonnes of medicines to help Tajikistan to come out of its difficulties. A total of six agreements were signed between two countries namely agreement on declaration on principles and directions of cooperation, Protocol on cooperation, agreement on economic and technical cooperation, cooperation in the sphere of culture, arts, education, science, mass media and sports, agreement on trade and economic cooperation, agreement on cooperation between the Commercial Bank for Foreign Economic Activity of the Republic of the Tajikistan and the State Bank of India (MEA, 1993). By signing these agreements, Tajik Prime Minister took the first major step in further developing the ancient bond of friendship into economic and strategic cooperation for regional peace and stability in modern times (Singh, 2003:199). Thus these agreements related to different fields provided a new impetus to the bilateral relations between two countries. Indian Assistance during the difficult phase of Tajikistan history tells a great story about Indian traditions of cooperation and help and also that India is not there just for seeking its geo-political interests but has common civilizational and historical affinity with Central Asian people. In their separate meeting, both leaders expressed concern at developments like cross-border terrorism, fundamentalism and religious radicalization taking place in Central Asia and Afghanistan and as well as the internal situation in Tajikistan itself. As India too is the victim of state sponsored terrorism,

² Puri (1997), Madan Mohan, Central Asian Geopolitics: The Indian View, Central Asian Survey, 16:2, 237-268.

India assured Tajikistan of all help against all kinds of terrorism and extremism. Both leaders also committed to revive and strengthen the historical and cultural ties between the two countries (MEA, 1993).

This period in the history of modern Tajikistan was marked by some important and defining events that shaped India- Tajikistan relations in some new dimensions. Firstly, the fall of Mohammad Najibullah led pro-communist regime in Afghanistan and establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan only emboldened the morale of Tajik Islamic extremists who were now eyeing cross-border material and cadre support. Secondly, killing of 25 Russian border troops by opposition group at Afghan-Tajik border in July 1993 brought in focus the volatile security situation in this region. Although, this attack only led to increased Russian military presence for Tajikistan's security and a more aggressive Russian support to Rakhmonov regime but prospects of establishment of peace and stability in the region still looked dim. Thirdly, Rakhmonov was now trying to defeat the opposition and for this, he called for a referendum to amend the constitution and followed by presidential and parliamentary election to stabilize and legitimize his regime. Despite the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe(OSCE) criticism of Presidential election of 1994 and Parliamentary election of 1995, Rakhmonov now with wider Russian support was able to act more confidently and he banned many opposition parties. But, this new 'existing constitutional framework' was short lived and the situation started worsening again during 1995 (Jonson, 2006).

India by condemning the violence at Afghan-Tajik border to congratulating Rakhmonov on his landslide victory in 1994 Presidential election, did send a clear message for regional security and stability especially in Tajikistan and Afghanistan and lent its support to end cross-border and state sponsored terrorism (MEA, 1993).

Bilateral consultations were held between foreign ministries of the two countries on the visit of Deputy Minister and Foreign Minister of Tajikistan to India in April 1994. While appreciating the fact that India was the first country outside CIS which hosted the official visit of the head of new Government of Tajikistan in February 1993, Tajik Ministers also appreciated Indian humanitarian and development assistance to Tajikistan. Two sides also discussed how bilateral relations can be further strengthened especially in economic and trade sectors. Tajikistan reiterated its support to India's position on Kashmir and also

expressed that this dispute should be resolved in accordance with Shimla Agreement and it also regarded cross-border terrorism as a destabilizing factor for the region (MEA, 1994). An important visit from Indian side during this period of time was the visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri Salman Khurshid in June 1994 who was accompanied by senior government officials and business persons. Tajik government appreciated the political significance of India for the Central Asian region and wished for closer Indo-Tajik cooperation. A five million US dollars credit line that was earlier extended to Tajikistan was signed during this visit and both sides also expressed strong opposition to international terrorism (MEA, 1994). All these high profile visits along with functioning Indian resident mission in Dushanbe and honorary Tajik consul in New Delhi provided further impetus to the bilateral ties.

The impetus and pragmatism in bilateral ties generated by these visits and signing of several agreements were again put to stop by worsening security situation in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. By autumn 1995, Inter-Tajik talks under United Nations auspices yielded no results and opposition groups were militarily advancing rapidly. The Taliban victory in Afghanistan was also posing a serious danger to already worsened security situation due to civil war in Tajikistan. Russia was too now worried over the Taliban success and wanted an immediate solution to Tajikistan civil war. So it pressurized both Rakhmonov and opposition sides for a political compromise (Jonson, 2006).

It was in the backdrop of these developments that first State visit of Head of Tajikistan, Emomali Rakhmonov to India took place from 11 to 16 December 1995. Now as Mujahideen were creating problems at Afghan-Tajik border and rise of Taliban threatened peace and stability in the entire region including Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, this visit once again strengthened mutual understanding regarding regional peace, security and stability between the two countries (Singh, 2003:200). A total of six agreements related to developing friendly ties, further strengthening cooperation in areas like setting up of Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for economics, scientific and technological cooperation, cooperation at international platforms, protection of bilateral investments, cooperation in health care, telecom and cultural exchanges programs and one Memorandum of Understanding related to environmental protection were signed during this visit (MEA, 1995).

The essence of mutual understanding reached between two countries can easily be found in the *Declaration of the further development of friendly relations between the Republic of India and the Republic of Tajikistan* signed during this visit that in parts, reads:

1. “Both sides agree that long-term and stable relations of friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries meet the fundamental interests of the two countries and the two peoples... They are convinced that it is necessary for multi-ethnic, pluralist states to cooperate actively to preserve their state structures from the threats of terrorism and religious or ethnic extremism and separatism.
2. The Republic of India fully supports the democratic transformations in the Republic of Tajikistan and the efforts of the leadership of Tajikistan for achieving a durable peace, security and national reconciliation in the Republic of Tajikistan.
5. The two sides reaffirmed their commitment to the UN Charter and drew attention to the necessity of reform of the world body ... In the restructuring of the UN ... the Republic of Tajikistan supports the candidature of India to permanent membership of the UN Security Council.
15. The Republic of Tajikistan welcomed India's efforts to promote stability, understanding and cooperation in South Asia and calls upon all states in the region to honor their commitments under existing bilateral agreements (Simla Agreement) and not to resort to cross-border terrorism and hostile propaganda”³.

These agreements and declarations indicated support to each other’s mutual concerns and played an important role in furthering bilateral relations. While India supported Tajikistan’s efforts to make a deal with United Tajik Opposition, Tajikistan supported Indian policies in South Asia and especially Afghanistan. These very bilateral agreements also showed the eagerness of both countries to develop cooperation in a wide range of areas and Joint Commission headed by foreign affairs Minister was entrusted with the responsibility of identifying the new areas and forms of cooperation. While stressing upon the principles of peaceful co-existence both leaders expressed their readiness and cooperation to combat the growth of cross-border terrorism and increasing extremism in the region (MEA, 1995). Thus both sides were against the external interference in Afghanistan and any kind of support to extremist forces in the region. India was of the view that continuance violence and new

³ Communiqué dated 12 December, 1995, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi.

series of assault on the Kabul shows Pakistan direct interference in the country and even government of Afghanistan accepts the Pakistani role in its internal disturbances. India maintained in the wake of worsening situation the Afghanistan that forces that are attacking Kabul are raised, trained and financed by Pakistan army and its intelligence agencies. India also maintained that for peace and stability in Afghanistan, external interference has to end and conciliation should be followed (MEA, 1995).

Restoration of peace in Afghanistan, which is a bridge between Central Asia and South Asia, was considered very crucial for economic integration of the Central Asian republics with India and the region. Tajikistan which shares Indian concerns like cross-border terrorism and extremism now wanted active role of regional players like Iran, China and India to resolve the Afghan question which had spillover effect in Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and was also abetting Tajik civil war besides the suppression of Tajik and other minorities by the resurgent Pashtun-dominated Taliban. The danger of rising tide of extremism was realized by both Central Asian republics along with India. Both Emomali Rakhmonov, President of Tajikistan and Islam Karimov, President of Uzbekistan believed that fundamentalism is main reason for some of the problems faced by Central Asian republics in the post-Soviet era (Puri, 1997: 18). Invitation to then Indian foreign minister, Salman Khurshid by Uzbekistan to attend a seminar on *Security and Cooperation in Central Asia* to discuss the proposal for peace and security in Central Asia, was clear indication for more active role of India as a regional player for assisting Central Asian republics in achieving peace and security for all round development (MEA, 1995). But the signing of mere agreements didn't yield the expected results. As (Singh, 2003:200) contends:

“Little progress, however, was made in implementing these agreements. The modest success attained was confined to setting up in Tajikistan a joint venture for the manufacture of pharmaceuticals by utilizing the credit offered by India and training of Tajik diplomats and specialists in the field of banking, computer and management. Little attention was paid to the need to raise India's political profile in the region apart from cultural and scientific exchanges”.

Although there are some valid reasons for this low level of engagements, lack of political and bureaucratic will in implementing these projects and agreements and connectivity, communication and administrative hurdles are some of them. The period from 1996 to 1999 witnessed some turbulent developments both in Central and South Asia. These

developments ranging from fall of Kabul to Taliban, earthquake in Northern Afghanistan, signing of general peace accord that ended five years long bloody Tajik civil war, Indian general election of May 1996 resulting in hung parliament and last but not the least the Kargil war between India and Pakistan, brought in some setbacks as well as opportunities that shaped bilateral cooperation in some or other new dimensions.

In 1996, India and Central Asian republics completed five years of dynamic and unique relations. Both Central and South Asian region are facing some new common concerns and challenges and also serves competing grounds for geo-political and economic interests of regional and international players (MEA, 1996).

Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in September 1996 brought a new phase in India and Central Asia especially Indo-Tajik bilateral relations. With the rise of Taliban, India feared rise in cross-border terrorism and extremism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir while at the same time Tajikistan feared an extended and intense Civil War with cross-border arms and cadre support to Tajik political opposition groups by Afghanistan-based Pakistani supported extremist groups. It was also evident to both Tajikistan and India that Pakistan's continuous support to extremism and terrorism in Afghanistan was further complicating and deteriorating the situation in Tajikistan and Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Alarmed by the worsening security scenario in the wake of extremist Taliban threat, Central Asian republics with regional and global players met on various platforms. Meeting of Central Asian countries along with Russia in Almaty on 4 October, 1996 resulted in issuing the joint statement calling for end of war and non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign Afghanistan and in defense of its territorial integrity. It also pointed out that: "Destroying the stability on the borders of Afghanistan and CIS countries will be regarded as threat to their own countries and will get an adequate response"⁴. With Central Asian countries and other regional countries again meeting at *Regional Conference on Afghanistan* in Tehran in October, 1996 and *UN Conference on Afghanistan* in November, 1996, Indian response to this situation was always according to its commitment to independence, unity, stability and peace in Afghanistan, extending humanitarian assistance to it in the period of crisis and in defense of its territorial integrity and for non-interference in its internal affairs by outside actors especially Pakistan and also for a non-

⁴ Ministry of external affairs, India

military solution of the problem. India was also in contact with regional countries especially Central Asian republics, Iran and Russia who had considerable influence in Afghanistan affairs and also supported the efforts of United Nations, however, India didn't accept the UN mechanism of 6+2 format to bring peace in Afghanistan due to its flawed nature (MEA, 1999).

Indian position on Taliban was clear from the very start as India viewed it as a destabilizing factor for the entire region and supported legitimate government of Afghanistan at every stage. And now Pakistan being in support of extremism and due to Taliban take over of Kabul, maintaining a communication channel with the legitimate government of Afghanistan became an immediate necessity. With this purpose and to contain Taliban, India approached Tajikistan with a plan to assist Ahmad Shah Masood of Northern Alliance. As Tajikistan accepted this offer immediately, India now became a more active strategic player in this region and all these developments brought some qualitative changes in the relations between two countries (Olimov, 2016:16).

Indian general election in May 1996 resulted in fractured mandate followed by domestic turmoil in Indian politics, but when posed with the serious security threat to the region, India woke up immediately and previous slow pace of cooperation with Central Asian states came to an end. The new Afghan situation provided new impetus to the bilateral relations between India and Central Asian republics particularly Tajikistan. As this Afghan turmoil was having a bearing on Tajik conflict at home and Tajik nationalities in Afghanistan, India maintained that solution to Tajik problem has to be via reconciliation and peaceful dialogues and negotiations (MEA, 1996). During this period of time, positive news was emerging from Tajikistan as opposition parties and the regime finally reached an agreement. With the rise of extremist Taliban and escalation of cross-border terrorism and extremism coupled with related violent crime and increased drug trafficking by Taliban regime, stability and security of CIS countries came under danger. Due to this, Russia along with Iran and other Central Asian countries and United Nations wanted an immediate political compromise to end Tajik problem. For this matter, an agreement was reached between Tajik President Rakhmonov and United Tajik Opposition leader, Said Abdullah Nuri, on 23 December, 1996 for the creation of Commission of National Reconciliation (CNR) to suggest constitutional reforms and changes in government structure and General Peace Accord was signed in June 1997 (Jonson, 2006:45-46). With the signing of the Peace Accord, a further

stimulus was expected between the bilateral relations between India and Tajikistan. Although, at this point of time, domestic turbulence in the Indian politics continued with general elections of 1996 and again 1998 resulting in hung assembly and thus jeopardizing the country's decisiveness in the international affairs. With the isolation of India following nuclear tests in Pokhran during the tenure of then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpai and looming threat of war with Pakistan adversely impacted India relations with Central Asian republics and for that matter with Tajikistan. International criticism and economic and aid sanctions that followed the aftermath of nuclear tests, India was forced to keep a low profile in international affairs for some time. Russia and some Central Asian country just showed diplomatic protests and were not in favor of international sanctions on India. Gujral Doctrine also played an important part in India's foreign engagements during this period of time, as it resulted in focusing on friendly relations with neighboring countries instead of seeking strategic depth outside of the region. This restricted Indian engagements to outside world and particularly Central Asia. Although India faced international isolation and a brief lull in its relations with many countries and some economic and trade miseries due to sanctions, but establishing itself as a nuclear power helped it to raise its strategic and political presence in both Central and South Asia. It was necessary to meet some crucial security challenges in 1990's. It was in the backdrop of all these developments that working visit of Tajik president to India happened in January 1999. At this point of time, both Tajikistan and India were concerned about the security of their respective countries in the wake of cross-border and state sponsored terrorism and extremism and this dimension of mutual concern about regional security was common ground for bilateral engagements between two countries. As (Olimov, 2016: 22) aptly puts it, "The working visit of President Rakhmonov on 22 January 1999 was extraordinary and path breaking. It concretized Tajikistan-India relations in the realm of security". During this time, foreign office consultations were held with Joint Secretary visiting Tajikistan in February, 1999 and Tajik foreign secretary visiting India in April 1999 and these consultations helped a lot in framing proper strategies for regional security which has been the mutual concern of the both countries and again held in 2000. India also extended humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan (MEA, 1999).

India's long-held apprehensions about regional security due to state sponsored terrorism resulted in the grim reality in May 1999 when many local and foreign militants along with

Pakistani soldiers infiltrated into the Indian side and a full blown war took place between India and Pakistan in Kargil. Central Asian republics, however, asked both sides to maintain restraint and solve the issue via mutual negotiations and in accordance with Shimla and Lahore agreements. They feared that escalation of violence between India and Pakistan along with ongoing crisis in Afghanistan could have serious ramifications to CIS countries (Valen, 1999).

With the end of Kargil war with Indian victory and general parliamentary elections of 1999 resulting in the formation of a stable government of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre with Atal Bihari Vajpai as Prime Minister, improved the prospects of an enhanced cooperation between Indian and Tajikistan. As the rise of nationalist Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) party for which India's security and prestige were core of its ideological spirit, to power in 1998 brought significant changes in Indian foreign policy from nonalignment to realism thus making Indian strategic interests of worth pursuing in regions like Central Asia (Blank, 2010, 8). Russian and USA support for an active Indian role in this region partially to counter increasing Chinese influence and religious extremism furthers the pursuit of Indian strategic and security aspirations in this region. At the same time, Peace Accord of 1997 brought some stability in Tajikistan but developments in neighboring Afghanistan still concerned both India and Tajikistan. India continued its active support to Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. To treat its injured soldiers, India also started a military hospital at Farkhor on Tajikistan- Afghanistan border that was later used by Indian Air Force. At this point of time, Russian President Putin's India visit is of utmost importance as both sides agreed for a joint struggle against global terrorism especially spread by Taliban and Al-Qaeda regimes and in this joint effort, the cooperation of Tajikistan was regarded as crucial. (Singh, 2003: 201).

Around these developments, a timely and significant state visit of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov took place in May 2001. The highlight of the visit was the document named Joint Declaration of Principles of Mutual Relation reflecting the semblance of concerns and approaches to major international and regional happenings, which, in parts, reads:

1. "The Sides re-affirm their adherence to the strengthening of friendly relations based on the principles of the United Nations Charter, respect for the independence and sovereignty,

territorial integrity and non-intervention in the internal affairs of each other, and also on the basis of generally accepted principles and norms of international law.

2. The Sides consider that support and further development of long-term and stable relations of good-neighborliness, friendship and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries are compatible with the fundamental interests of both countries and the peoples and promote the preservation and strengthening of peace and stability in the region.
3. The Sides note the importance of political consultations on bilateral, regional and international issues and stress the necessity of their further intensification at different levels and in the spirit of the provisions of the protocol on cooperation between the Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, signed on 15 February 1993.
7. The Republic of India reiterates its supports to the efforts of the Republic of Tajikistan and its Government for strengthening its independence and sovereignty, preserving peace and stability and solving social and economic problems”⁵.

A total of five agreements related to assistance in criminal matters, Prevention of Drug Trafficking, an agreement for direct air services between Dushanbe and New Delhi, cooperation in the field of industry and an MOU in technical cooperation were signed during this visit. Tajikistan supported Indian claim of permanent membership to United Nation's Security Council. While describing the Joint Tajik-Indian action a ‘stabilizing factor’ for the region, Indian prime minister regarded this state visit of Tajik President as a new chapter in ‘close and dynamic’ and friendly bilateral relations between the two countries (Singh, 2003:202). Both sides also held discussions on regional and international issues of mutual concern and reiterated their commitment in opposition to International terrorism. India extended drought relief of worth five million US dollars to Tajikistan. This year (2001) also saw Indian Minister for state, Omar Abdullah visiting Tajikistan and India provided anti- tuberculosis medicines to Tajikistan. Later in the year, the first meeting of Indo-Tajikistan Joint Commission was held and new areas of cooperation like industry, tourism, civil aviation and training of business delegations were identified. End of the year was also marked by the visit of Tajik Defense Minister who along with the Indian side reviewed regional security scenario (MEA, 2001).

The 9/11 twin tower bombings and subsequent refusal by Taliban to hand over Al-Qaeda to American authorities led to USA raids in Afghanistan. These raids helped United Front

⁵ Ministry of External Affairs, India.

forces to regain most of the areas in the Afghanistan. Meanwhile, India and Tajikistan participated in all talks on Afghanistan issue and India continued its humanitarian aids to Afghanistan (MEA, 2002). All these developments in and around Afghanistan and their spillover effects in the form of drug trafficking, separatism and cross-border terrorism and extremism equally concerned both India and Tajikistan. These developments developed new urgency for closer cooperation between India and Tajikistan not only in security related areas but in defense fields too. Visit of the then Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes to Tajikistan in April 2002 and also the subsequent visit of Afghan Foreign Minister Gen. Mohd. Fahim to India clearly indicate rising Indian strategic and political profile in the region and indo-Tajik cooperation is an important determinant in that (Singh, 2003:203). As a renowned scholar (Olimov, 2016:22) while stating that confining Taliban to just Afghanistan is not a long term respite but defeating it is. He further rightly contends that:

“The net result is that cross-border terrorism continue to bleed India while stability in Tajikistan and Central Asia, in general, remains under the constant threat of armed religious extremism and terrorism.”

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Tajikistan in November 2003 provided new impetus for closer bilateral cooperation especially in defense, security and economic spheres. This visit resulted in the signing of several important agreements related to combating terrorism, expanding cooperation in defense and other strategic areas. Establishment of Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and signing of extradition treaty were another highlights of this visit. This visit along with establishment of Tajik Diplomatic Mission in New Delhi in October, 2003, opening up of a cultural Centre in Dushanbe by India and beginning of air services between two countries were some of milestones in further strengthening people to people contacts and bilateral cooperation especially in the framework of common geo- political and strategic interests (MEA, 2003). *Joint Declaration on Friendship and Cooperation between Republic of India and Republic of Tajikistan* signed during this visit in between reads:

“The sides shall develop bilateral cooperation based on the universally recognized principles and norms of international law; respect for the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of both states; non-interference in each other's internal affairs and commitment to democratic values.

The sides affirmed that strengthened cooperation between the two countries is a positive factor for the maintenance of peace and stability. They also reaffirmed the importance of settling issues through peaceful dialogue.

The Republic of India reiterates its support to the Republic of Tajikistan and its Government in its efforts at strengthening democracy and in promoting economic development.

The Republic of Tajikistan re-affirms its support to the efforts of the Republic of India, and its Government to promote and strengthen international peace and security, including mutual understanding and cooperation in South Asia”⁶.

Agreement between two countries on the exemption of visa requirement for holders of diplomatic passports facilitated the entry of citizens and thus further strengthening the friendly relations between two countries. While reiterating its commitment for India’s permanent membership to United Nations Security Council, both sides agreed for “steady progress in defense exchanges and the intent to intensify relations in this area”. External Affairs Minister Shri Yashwant Sinha in his address to Tajik National address also counted the ancient and new dynamics of relations between two countries (MEA, 2003). Thus these visits followed by Joint Secretary level talks in August 2003 stimulated the fresh breath in the bilateral ties between two countries. As Gulshan (2015) asserts:

“For India, the significance of enhanced cooperation with Tajikistan lies on the fact that it is not only a neighbor of Afghanistan, but a stable, secular and strong Tajikistan is central to peace and stability in both Central and South Asia”.

3rd India-Central Asia Regional Conference was organized in Tashkent in November 2003. It was significant as concerns over resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan and regional security situations concerning both India and Central Asian republics along with economic cooperation and potential areas of cooperation especially in defense, IT, Human Resource development and trade between India and Central Asia were discussed by young and eminent scholars from Central Asian republics as well as from India (Diwedi, 2003).

Indian general elections of 2004 resulted in United Progressive Alliance (UPA) forming government at Centre. During this time, ties continued growing with Central Asian republics and Indian presence, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan increased

⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, India.

substantially and cooperation with Tajikistan continued satisfactorily although with no significant diplomatic visit between two countries. India paid a heavy price in form of human and material causality in its efforts of assisting Afghanistan in form of humanitarian, financial and project assistance and imparting training in various fields. This period of time was marked by India's good growth rate resulting in making it an emerging economic giant and thus raising its role and status in International Affairs. Along with these statuses, Indian foreign policy was adapting to fast changing global geo-political and power equations. Although instability at its north door still continued to worry it but significant visits namely Afghan president, Hamid Karzai' visit in February 2005 and Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh's visit to Afghanistan in August 2005 further enhanced the Indian bilateral cooperation in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole. India while maintaining its position for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan announced 550 million US dollar for projects in different fields like infrastructure and human resource development. At the same time, India's engagement continued with Tajikistan as an Indian delegation led by the secretary and joint secretary visited Tajikistan in May 2004. It resulted in Waiving off 8.37 million US dollars grant extended to Tajikistan along with opening up of Fruit Processing Plant and gifting 10 buses to Dushanbe city. With the prospectus of rising defense cooperation between two countries, Tajik defense minister visited India in January 2005. Bilateral protocol for visa-free travel for diplomatic passports holders that was signed in 2003 during Indian prime minister came into force in July 2005. A protocol regarding common actions was also signed during the First meeting of India-Tajikistan Joint Working Group on international terrorism in Dushanbe in January 2006 and second in August 2006 in New Delhi. (MEA, 2004-2005).

The year 2006 is of special significance in the well progressing bilateral relations between the two countries. With the invitation from Indian Lok Sabha Speaker, a parliamentary delegation comprising 12 members from the lower house of Tajik Parliament led by Saidulloev Khairulloev, chairman of the lower house of Tajik parliament visited India in May 2006. However, a more significant visit was that of the State visit of Tajik president in August 2006. The Joint Declaration signed during this visit which in between reads:

“The Parties noted with satisfaction the increased bilateral contacts and the frequency of exchanges at political and senior official levels and expressed confidence that the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on Consultations between the Ministry of External Affairs of the Republic of India

and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan will further promote bilateral contacts and exchanges.

Both Parties noted with satisfaction the expansion of cooperation in the sphere of the personnel training within the framework of Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme and other programmes. India agreed to offer greater opportunities for Tajik nationals to pursue learning of the English language and other courses in India. India would also provide facilities for scholars from Tajikistan to undertake research and academic activities at the Centre for Central Asian Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

The Parties expressed the hope that India would associate itself comprehensively with the activities of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), directed at promoting greater economic and energy cooperation, cultural exchanges, and countering terrorism. India expressed appreciation of SCO's role in promoting peace and stability in the region and for building a common front against terrorism, extremism and separatism⁷.

During this significant visit, agreements related to cooperation in the fields of science and technology and cultural exchange programmes and MOU's on Foreign Office consultations, energy cooperation and Cooperation between Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) and Tajik Academy of Sciences. Tajikistan while condemning the terrorist attack in Mumbai and Srinagar in July 2006 expressed solidarity with India and called for enhanced cooperation and defense and security to fight this evil together (MEA, 2006). With People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT) consolidating its foothold via Parliamentary elections of 2005 and again Presidential election of 2006, President and Chairman of the party become more decisive in his decisions and consolidating his regime and marginalizing the opposition constitutionally and financially.

With continuous deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and violence meted out by Taliban on Indian establishment especially attack on Indian embassy and terrorist attack on the financial capital of India, Mumbai and involvement of Pakistani operatives in both kind of attacks led to more engagement in security and defense front with the Central Asian countries. Isolating countries sponsoring terrorism became crucial for India. And for this matter, Indian cooperation was only to be greater with Afghanistan and Tajikistan. During this time, Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Murli Deora, leading an Indian

⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, India.

delegation attended Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit meeting in Dushanbe in August 2008. While meeting with the Tajik President and other senior Tajik government officials' wider consultations on regional and global security situations and issues were held. At the same time, economic cooperation was also on all-time high with fourth and fifth Inter-Governmental Commission holding its meetings in Dushanbe and New Delhi in 2007 and 2008 respectively. The inauguration of the Indian constructed and up gradated Varzob-1 Hydroelectric plant and signing of Double Tax Avoidance Treaty between two countries were clear signs of enhanced bilateral cooperation in trade and investment fields (MEA, 2007-2008).

The first ever visit of the head of Indian state to Tajikistan in September 2009 furthered mutual confidence, trust and goodwill between the two countries. The Indian President was accorded the 'Guest of Honor' on the National Day Celebration of Tajikistan. This important goodwill visit also resulted in the inauguration of India- Tajikistan Joint business forum and thus reaffirming the bilateral cooperation at the highest level of political engagement (MEA, 2009).

Deteriorating internal security situation in Afghanistan along with the attack on Indian embassy in Kabul in October 2009 and targeted attacks on Indian establishment and projects there necessitated further deep cooperation between India, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. With Indian Parliamentary general election awarding UPA a second term for its measures like Right to Information and MGNAREGA like schemes and in Tajikistan Emmomali Rakhmonov's People's Democratic Party again gaining majority in the parliamentary election of 2010 led to the continuous engagement of the two countries on the almost same course of line and policies. Now, continuous defense engagements were the highlight of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The Army chief, V.K Singh visited Tajikistan in November 2010, Air Marshal Kishen Kumar Nakhor led a delegation in August 2011 and Minister of Defense, A.K Antony visited Dushanbe in October 2011. All these visits provided for more enhanced defense cooperation between the two countries along with discussing of regional and international issues and threats of mutual concerns. Minister of Power, Sushil Kumar Shinde attended SCO Heads of Government Meeting in Dushanbe in November 2010. He emphasized that Indian participation is imperative for the security, stability and development of the region and can play a constructive role in countering terrorism, separatism and drug menace. This period also saw some other

significant bilateral visits signifying increasing cooperation between two countries in areas like human resource development and trade.

Director General of Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) led a five-member delegation to the conference on India-Tajikistan relations which was jointly organized by Tajik Academy of Sciences and ICWA in Dushanbe in June 2010. India along with polio vaccines and scholarships under ITEC and ICCR also provided humanitarian assistance of two lakh UD dollar for flood victims in Khatlon province. Further, Sixth Session of India-Tajikistan Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation (ITJCM) in Dushanbe in May 2011 resulted in identifying ways to increase bilateral trade, economic and investment cooperation (MEA, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012).

India-Tajikistan relationship was elevated to Strategic Partnership during President Rahmon's last visit in 2012, which encompasses cooperation in the areas of defense, education, culture, sports, counter-terrorism, connectivity, trade, health, human resource development, science and technology, culture and tourism. The two countries have established bilateral consultative mechanisms such as, foreign office consultation, Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism, Joint Working Group on Defense Cooperation and with handing over upgraded Varzob - I Hydro Power Plant to Tajikistan in 2013 further took bilateral ties to a new level especially in development assistance and cooperation in defense and security. With Tajikistan celebrating its 21st anniversary of independence and two sides celebrating two decades of the establishment of diplomatic relations, India also supported the integration of Tajikistan into global economy via WTO membership that would enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Both sides noted that given the high level of mutual confidence in the ties and also mutual concerns regarding regional peace, security and stability coupled with this new strategic partnership will further result in enhanced cooperation in wide ranges of fields. Diplomatic ties received further impetus with the visit of Indian Foreign Minister, Shri S.M. Krishna and Vice-President, Hamid Ansari to Dushanbe in July 2012 and April 2013 respectively. Vice President, M. Hamid Ansari was on a state visit to Tajikistan in April 2013 along with Tariq Anwar, Minister of State for Agriculture and Food Processing Industries and four Members of Parliament. During this visit, a number of issues like regional security, development partnership, military, technical cooperation and terrorism were discussed. While

congratulating Tajikistan on becoming the 159th member of the WTO, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further develop closer cooperation in the diverse fields. India's plan of setting up of an IT Centre of Excellence at Tajik Technical University was also stated. Vice-President also visited Nukrek Hydroelectric power station during this visit (MEA, 2013-2014).

Diplomatic visits are not the sole driver of bilateral engagements between two countries. The active role of NGOs, regional organizations like SCO, conferences on bilateral and multilateral issues, think tanks and academicians and civil society is clearly evident in shaping bilateral relations between Indian and Central Asian republics and Tajikistan in particular. For example, Third Track-II India-Central Asia Dialogue was held in Dushanbe in October 2014. It was organized by the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA), New Delhi and the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan with around 75 scholars from India, Tajikistan and Central Asian countries participating in it. This dialogue resulted in several recommendations, suggestions and solutions to enhance cooperation between India and the Central Asian countries. Another such important event was that of an international seminar on "Indic Studies in Tajikistan" that was organized in Dushanbe in December 2015. It was jointly organized by Himalayan Research and Cultural Foundation, New Delhi and Tajikistan National University, Dushanbe. A monumental work on Tajikistan in the form of a book named *Tajikistan In The 21st Century: Society, Politics and Economy* edited by Prof. K. Warikoo and Prof. Kh. Umarov was launched. This book apart from introducing us to the state of affairs of present Tajikistan sheds light on India and Tajikistan relations.

The 2013 presidential election of Tajikistan and 2014 General Indian parliamentary election are significant events that were only going to provide further impetus to bilateral ties of the two countries. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, winning fourth consecutive term in November 2013 Presidential elections reflected the belief of vast majority of Tajik citizens in his leadership. It also showed that with lack of any suitable opposition, this would further the regime's authoritarianism and lack of transparency in government and more restrictions on opposition political parties. The Indian parliamentary election giving a strong mandate to BJP meant that UPA's policy paralysis resulting in indecisiveness in foreign affairs and corruption would lead to decisiveness in government foreign policies and good governance at home that would overall improve its international image. First such visit of new Indian

regime was that of Smt Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister leading a delegation to attend the Council of Heads of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit, held in Dushanbe in September 2014. However, the visit of Indian Prime Minister to the region was more significant. It was long due and happened at an important time of regional and international developments. Today, Central Asia is becoming a geo-strategic pivot for regional and global players and given the fact that Russia, China and Iran are continuously trying to increase their presence in Central Asia through economic aids, investments and multilateral organizations and at the same time these republics want the engagements with more international players like India, USA and European countries for their economic growth and political balance, so that they do not have to be dependent on bordering neighbors and their unjust political and economic influence. India with huge economic and political capabilities falls in their extended neighborhood and almost all these republics have favored closer engagement with India in the form of membership of the SCO and other means like Free Trade Agreements and supporting membership in the Ashgabat Transit Agreement. It was against this backdrop that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tajikistan resulted in both sides resolving their commitment for deeper bilateral engagement in defense, security and trade and at the same time making joint efforts to fight religious extremism and state sponsored terrorism in the neighborhood. A Programme of Cooperation in the field of Culture for the period 2016-18 and an MOU for setting up of computer labs in 37 schools of Tajikistan were signed during this visit. This year also witnessed the visit of Tajik Foreign Minister, Mr. Sirodjidin Aslov to India. The Ministry of External Affairs of India and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan signed a Programme of Cooperation for 2015-2017. This programme further strengthened the mutual trust and friendship by providing an effective and legal framework to strengthen bilateral cooperation and speed up the implementation of agreements already signed between two countries via joint activities in the form of bilateral consultation, regional and multilateral cooperation at UN and SCO, economic and commercial cooperation, training of diplomats, information and media exchanges and celebration of events of historic importance of two countries (MEA, 2015-16).

During the state visit of Tajikistan President in December 2016 both sides discussed the situation in the region and emphasized that terrorism and religious extremism threaten the very peace, stability and progress for all countries. Indian Prime Minister while appreciating

‘Tajikistan’s role in the Central Asian region as a mainstay against forces of extremism, radicalism, and terrorism’ emphasized on deeper relations between two countries. This visit also resulted in signing of several agreements like an MoU between the committee of television and radio of Tajikistan and the Prasar Bharati of India for cooperation on broadcasting in exchange of audio visual programmes, a Protocol amending the agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income, an MoU between Financial Intelligence Unit of India and the Financial Monitoring Department under the National Bank of Tajikistan on cooperation in exchange of financial intelligence related to money laundering, related crimes and financing of terrorism and also a bilateral investment treaty. Thus this visit provided further impetus to cooperation in economy, security and counter-terrorism matters especially intelligence sharing and de-radicalization (MEA, 2016-17). This visit of Tajik President to Sri Lanka and India clearly reflected the need for increased bilateral cooperation in economic, trade and security spheres between Central and South Asia. Now with India speeding up the work on Chabahar port and the likely functionality of International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), connectivity between two regions is expected to improve. This improved connectivity will provide new impetus to the economic and trade engagements among the Central and South Asian countries especially India countries, Further India’s full membership to the SCO which Tajikistan has always supported, would provide India this multilateral platform to enhance its political profile in the region and at the same time engaging with Central Asian countries in the sphere of economic, defense and security cooperation. With India and Tajikistan celebrating the 25 years of establishment of diplomatic ties between two countries in 2017, it is crystal clear that diplomatic ties between two countries have been satisfactorily contributing to the increased cooperation in defense and security arenas primarily due to convergence of mutual interest and common concerns about regional security and stability. But economic and trade relations, despite several efforts, are lagging behind due to lack of direct land connectivity, high transport costs and other structural and institutional reasons.

Chapter: 3

Economic and Trade Relations

Economic and trade relations are one of the significant aspects of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Although the major focus of high-level diplomatic engagements between India and Tajikistan has been on cooperation in security and defense arenas and that of human resource development, economic and trade cooperation has been getting comparatively less weightage due to structural and connectivity hurdles. There is vast potential of trade between Tajikistan and technology-rich India. Tajikistan is important for India for its untapped consumer market. By developing trade and economic ties with India and engaging with its private sector, Tajikistan can significantly enhance the competitive nature of its domestic industries and at the same time achieve export diversification. As Gulshan (2015) aptly states that:

“The trading and economic interests of India and Tajikistan are deeply rooted in historical ties, commonality of features and traditions and a long tradition of friendship and cooperation. She further stresses that India, today being the Centre of world’s IT infrastructure, agriculture and industry, Indian experience in these areas can be of vital importance for Tajikistan”.

In early 1990s, after the dissolution of USSR, five independent sovereign states namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became independent Republics. Under the former Soviet socialist model, self-sufficiency in the production of goods and services was the main feature of the economies of Central Asian republics, although they lagged behind in several other socio-economic parameters in comparison to other Soviet republics. Soon after the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, this centralized economic model failed and now Central Asian republics had to choose their own model of economic development. The sudden disintegration coupled with the painful transition to market economy brought economic, social and political miseries to Central Asian republics and in case of Tajikistan, Civil War further deteriorated the situation. The Soviet disintegration resulted in disruption in the production network. Loss of subsidies from the former USSR coupled with inexperienced and infant private sector, inadequate infrastructure and lack of institutions for a market economy and especially that of capital and labor markets and dying manufacturing sector due to breakdown of supply of raw

materials and lack of markets resulted in widespread poverty, unemployment, migration and severe food insecurity in some Central Asian republics particularly Tajikistan. Thus economic impact of disintegration was huge. Kazakhstan President, Nursultan Nazarbayev compared this loss in CIS countries to the destruction caused by Second World War. And further ethnic conflicts and civil war situation worsened the economic situation in these newly emerged republics (Gidadhubli, 1995:135). Now faced with these problems, Central Asian countries sought foreign trade ties with other countries and adopted the market capitalist model of economic development. This was the time when India initiated major economic reforms with economic liberalization, privatization and globalization policies in 1991. However what was common between India and Central Asian republics at this point of time, was the question of how to integrate into the global economy.

Economic and trade ties between the two historically familiar friendly regions go back to Silk Road days. During the Soviet era, trade with Central Asian republics was conducted through Moscow. And given the friendly ties with the Soviet Union, Indian trade ties with Central Asian republics were good and were conducted under the overall Indo-Soviet cooperation. India responded according to its geo-political, strategic and economic interests and started to develop its relations with new republics. India started its economic engagement with Central Asian republics like Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, with presidents of both countries visiting India during this period of time and signing agreements on economic and cultural cooperation (MEA, 1991-92). After Soviet disintegration, India was not a competitive player during the so-called New Great Game in the 1990s. With no direct road connectivity, domestic economic and political turmoil plus difficult market conditions in Central Asia, this region could not feature in its favorite trade destinations. And due to this in the post-socialist period and trade relations with Central Asia declined considerably (Sachdeva, 1995). But this decline was temporary and also overall relations in spheres of diplomatic ties and defense and security cooperation were increasing day by day. However, these very ties proved instrumental in increasing the trade ties between two regions.

To understand the economic and trade ties between India and Tajikistan, it is important to examine the overall trade and economic ties between India and other Central Asian republics. It is also important to understand their economies and trading patterns. Both India and Central Asian countries do not feature in their list of key trading partners and there is a low level of trade between the two regions due to lack of land connectivity and other

structural factors. But good trade relations with Central Asian countries are of great strategic importance for India due to their strategic and geo-political importance and enormous amounts of natural and energy resources. Thus they can meet India's energy requirements and helping it in sustaining its high economic growth. At the same time Central Asian republics can diversify their exports chains and can seek Indian investment and technology. Cooperation in trade will also help to maintain peace and stability in the region and avoid terrorism and related criminal activities.

Under the Soviets, these republics mostly acted as supplier of raw materials and manufacturing units were located elsewhere and economic policies were decided from Moscow. Soon after Soviet disintegration these supply chains of consumption goods and raw materials were disrupted and further land-locked position of these countries prevented them from major trading routes thus rendering their economic and industrial growth as very low and in some republics to even negative. Although these setbacks were temporary, by the end of the 1990s, most of these republics with economic and structural reforms attained good economic growth. But Tajikistan suffering from Civil War still faced abject poverty and economic distress of the Soviet fallout (Agarwal and Sangita, 2013:9 to10).

The dissolution of former Soviet Union, India's major trading partner, led to trade imbalance and culminated into the balance of payments (BoP) crisis in 1990 and prompting structural and major economic reforms. India adopted liberalization policies, opened Indian economy to the private sector, foreign trade and investment. Indian economy now registered tremendous growth and its exports increased manifolds. This was also the time when Central Asian republics came on the world map. Now India being an emerging economy sought economic and trade ties with these republics. The export and import data with Central Asian republics clearly shows India's improved trade ties with this region.

Table no. 1: Total exports of Central Asian Countries and India (billion US\$)

Year	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	India
2000	9.88	0.5	0.77	2.51	2.18	42.63
2001	9.09	0.48	0.65	2.56	2.09	43.32
2002	9.67	0.49	0.74	2.82	1.55	50.52
2003	12.93	0.58	0.8	3.45	2.02	61.13
2004	19.94	0.71	0.91	3.53	2.74	75.39
2005	27.69	0.63	0.91	4.95	3.61	98.21
2006	38.01	0.8	1.4	5.64	5.25	120.55
2007	46.98	1.13	1.47	6.3	6.29	153.78
2008	71.17	1.62	1.44	10.14	7.48	177.7
2009	43.19	0.9	1.01	3.08	4.77	165.19
2010	57.24	1.05	1.19	3.23	5.55	222.93
2011	80.19	1.14	1	7.59	5.59	307.11

Source: IMF 2013

Table no.2: Total imports of Central Asian Countries and India (billion US \$)

Year	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	India
2000	5.05	0.55	0.67	1.79	2.07	50.34
2001	6.48	0.47	0.69	2.21	2.29	50.14
2002	6.58	0.59	0.72	2.13	2.08	58.91
2003	8.41	0.72	0.88	2.51	2.48	74.08
2004	12.64	0.94	1.19	2.68	3.16	99.84
2005	17.47	1.11	1.33	2.61	3.57	139.89
2006	23.7	1.71	1.73	2.53	4.48	176.67
2007	32.6	2.42	2.54	3.36	7.02	235.03
2008	37.8	4.07	3.25	5.46	10.11	281.47
2009	28.36	8.22	2.51	6.54	9.04	257.67
2010	24.02	7.23	2.66	5.64	9.26	350.78
2011	21.42	9.08	4.77	7.68	10.75	465.13

Source: IMF 2013

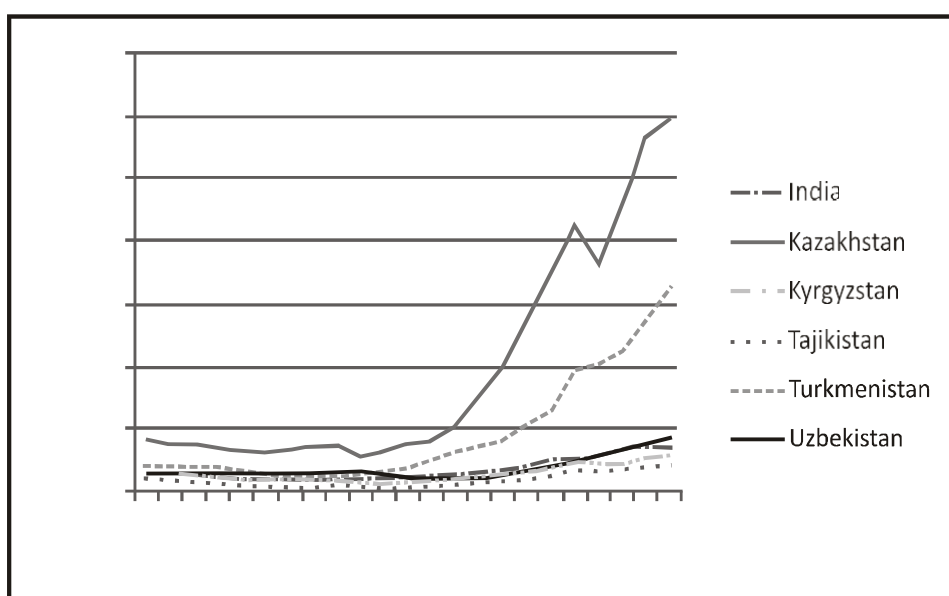
The main commodities imported by Central Asian republics from India include coffee, tea and spices; pharmaceutical products; electrical and mechanical equipment (Ministry of Commerce, India, 2013).

Tajikistan was one of the poorest republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Today it is the smallest republic in terms of geographical area and has a relatively higher population and the highest population density in Central Asia apart from Uzbekistan. The negative fallout of Soviet disintegration was worse in this Central Asian country due to historical neglect of this region and poor infrastructure in this region and it further worsened due to civil war. Although, India and Tajikistan relations are advancing well in diplomatic, security and strategic cooperation, but trade data show economic affairs between two countries being a low affair. Civil war, ethnic and regional conflicts to capture political power and limited economic resources of the country made sure that country remains poverty stricken and vulnerable to food deficit. Further landlocked geographical position with limited access to regional and world markets and poor transport infrastructure coupled with heavy dependence on aluminum and cotton as the first and the second largest sources of export revenues contributed to vulnerability of its economy and country as a whole (Fortucci, 2002). These are not the only factors that caused economic distress but uneven economic growth, poor governance and structural inequalities are some of the major reasons for the poor state of Tajik economy, widespread poverty, and unemployment and food insecurity. Low wages and high unemployment encourage migration of many Tajiks to Russia and other neighboring countries. Among the five Central Asian republics, Tajikistan is the most heavily reliant on labor migration as a source of employment and remittances with up to 2.5 billion dollars of its 7.5 million people working abroad.

Soon after its independence Tajikistan's economic development remained heavily dependent on Russia and its willingness to assist. Tajik leadership, therefore, saw the limited Russian economic engagement and investment as a problem. So Tajikistan started to pursue Open Door Policy interact with many regional and global countries in a wide range of fields. After the end of civil war and especially 9/11 development provided much-needed opportunity to forge closer relations with other countries and economic assistance and political partnership with regional and international countries as well as the international organizations. In recent times, Tajikistan has become a well sought after partner for many western and as well as Asian countries. Although it is not much rich in resources of oil or gas, Tajikistan is rich in coal, marble, gold, silver, aluminum, tungsten, lead, uranium and zinc, and has 65 percent of Central Asian water resources.

Given the mountainous terrain, arable land is scarce in Tajikistan but agriculture sector still accounts for large employment although it is a small part of its economy where service sector accounts more than half of its economy. Several efforts had been made in the 1990s to improve the status of economy. First basic strategy for transformation was adopted in 1992 and comprehensive reform programme in 1995, but all these measures could not succeed due to Civil War in the country. Peace agreement of 1997 provided hope of economic reforms and GDP growth but factors like 1998 Russian financial crisis and Afghan conflict again hindered the growth (Sachdeva, 2007:102).

Figure: 1, GDP per capita of India and Central Asian countries



Source: World Bank (2012)

Although its growth rate has been increasing particularly after the end of Civil War but as figure no. 1 shows its GDP per capita was the lowest in the five Central Asian countries and India. Its decadal growth rate of 1990's was negative clearly indicating the economic cost of country's ethnic and regional conflicts. Its average growth rate grew from -10.2 per cent over 1991–1999 to 9 percent over 2000–2009 and that too with a very high growth rate of more than 20 percent in 2006 and 2007. After 2007, the oil price shock and global recession affected Tajikistan and India equally and a slowdown in economic growth was the feature of both countries. Further continued global slowdown contributed to the decreased annual growth rate in Tajikistan (Agarwal and Sangita, 2013:8).

However, it can be noted here is that much cherished economic growth of the first decade (2001-2010) of the 21st century in both Tajikistan and India didn't contribute much in improving the living standards of people.

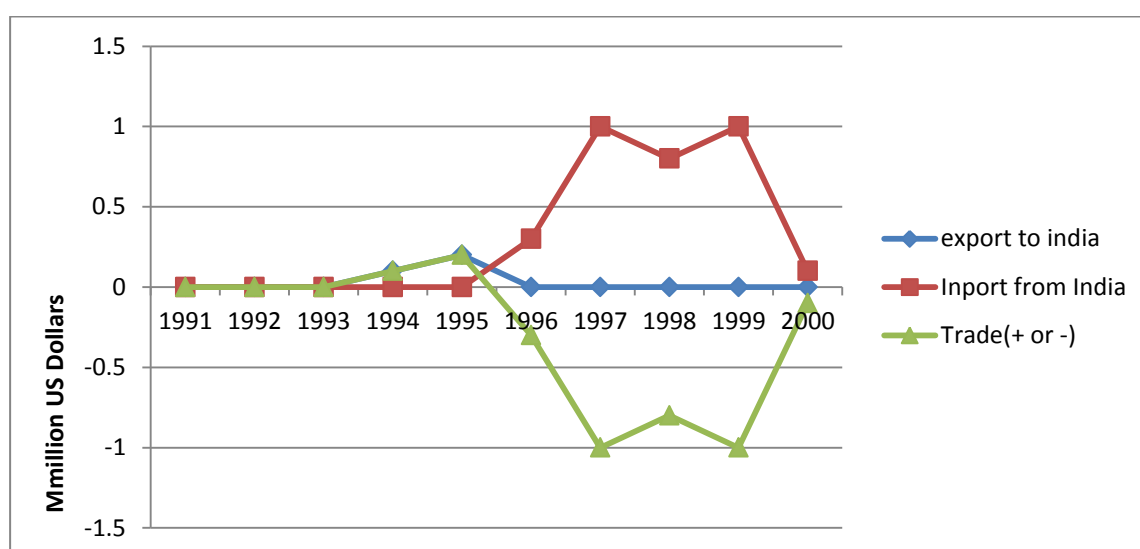
Tajikistan and India started their trade and economic engagements in the 1990s. Both countries opened up to the outside world for foreign trade and investment and to integrate into global economic and commercial world. But soon, Tajikistan caught up into Civil War and further due to instability in Afghanistan, Indian engagements were limited to humanitarian, strategic and security cooperation. Thus trade and economic ties took back seat during this period of time. There was a low level of trade between Tajikistan and its southern neighbors except Iran due to Civil War and volatile Afghanistan situation and India being last in the list. But after signing of General Agreement of Peace with United Tajik Opposition, the political environment in the country improved and its trade with southern neighbors and other Central Asian republics and countries bordering it grew significantly (Umarov and Warikoo, 2015:187,188).

India sent drafts of a framework for economic and cultural agreements for consideration to the republics of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in 1992. While other republics responded positively, Tajikistan due to internal disturbances couldn't respond timely. From figure no. 2, it is clear that period of the 1990s was marked by a very low level of trade between the two countries and there was trade imbalance. India was moving very fast in trade and economic relations with other Central Asian countries. Almost all Presidents of Central Asian republics visited India and signed agreements related to trade, commerce and technical cooperation in 1992. With the visit of Tajik Prime Minister, Abdumalik Abdullogjanov in February 1993 and establishment of the resident Indian Mission in Tajikistan, it was expected that bilateral trade and economic ties between the two countries will increase significantly. However, the first stimuli to bilateral trade relations was provided by the visit of Minister of State for External Affairs, Salman Khurshid in June 1994, who was accompanied by delegations of senior government officials and businessmen to Tajikistan. An Agreement for extension of an Indian credit line of US\$ 5 million was signed during this visit (MEA, 1992 to 1994).

In the wake of Tajik Civil War and rise of Taliban in Afghanistan, the visits of Tajik President in 1995 and 1999 in India were more with the security environment of the region

and as These disturbances had direct security implication for India, so Indian engagements were limited to security cooperation, human resource development of Tajikistan, humanitarian aid and assistance. However, agreement on setting up of Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological cooperation and protection of bilateral investments and cooperation in science and technology were some of the significant developments during the 1995 state visit of Tajik President. Trade between India and Tajikistan started between private sectors and first physical appearance of Indian private sector investment in Tajikistan was that of construction of a five-star hotel in Dushanbe by an Indian company named Cosmopolitan Hotels Ltd. (MEA, 1995 to 1999).

Figure no.2: Export, imports and trade imbalance between India and Tajikistan in the 1990s.



Source: Ministry of Commerce, India

Thus during the 1990s bilateral trade was not significant and averaged less than 1.5 million US dollars annually. What is worse is that imports from Tajikistan were negligible. Due to lack of direct flight between the two countries and along with other connectivity and structural problems like banking, importing Indian garments and goods from retail outlets in Dubai and Sharjah did cost less than importing the same from India (Olimov, 2016:21).

However, the state visit of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov in May 2001 was both significant and timely. During this visit, a commitment to develop bilateral economic and trade relationship was reflected in the document named *Joint Declaration of Principles of Mutual Relation* which, in between reads:

4. “The Sides note that trade and economic cooperation is an important component of Indo-Tajik relations and considers the essential potential of cooperation between the two countries in this sphere as yet under-utilized. The Sides stress their readiness to fully utilize available opportunities and to intensify the activities of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation”.

5. “The Sides agree to encourage all forms of trade exchanges, active participation of small and medium enterprises in economic cooperation, exchange of commercial and economic information, ideas and experience in the financial and economic policies, establishment of joint enterprises, and also the development of other forms of cooperation in the fields of industry, investment, banking and commerce”.

Further, bilateral agreements signed for the promotion and protection of investments, direct air services between Dushanbe and New Delhi, long-term cooperation in the field of trade and industry and an MOU in technical cooperation gave new impetus to largely stagnant trade and economic ties between two countries. Later in the year, the first meeting of Indo-Tajikistan Joint Commission was held and new areas of cooperation like Industry, tourism, civil aviation and training of business delegations were identified (MEA, 2001).

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Tajikistan in November 2003 further gave new impetus for closer bilateral cooperation in the economic sphere. Both sides noted that there is a huge potential of trade between two ties. The Indian side was interested to cooperate with Tajikistan in the hydel power sector. The Indian government also decided to extend a new economic assistance package of 40 million US dollars to promote joint ventures and investments in Tajikistan and it also included a credit line of 25 million US dollars for industrial and infrastructural projects. Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) exhibition named ‘Made In India’ held during this visit showed the willingness of Indian private sector to cooperate with Tajikistan in new and potential areas.(MEA, 2003).

Now, with the establishment of Tajik Diplomatic Mission in New Delhi in October 2003 and beginning of air services between two countries and establishment of India-Tajikistan Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation paved way for closer cooperation in trade and investment arenas. Although both Indian and Tajik economies were registering record growth in the first decade of the 21st century but still trade between the two countries was at its modest 32 million US dollars. Trade imbalance

has widened between the two countries. India's export to Tajikistan grew by more than 45% as against its 25 to 30% overall export growth during this period but in terms of value these are not even one percent of India's total global exports. More worrisome part was that India's import from Tajikistan was still negligible accounting for 18.5 crore in value for the year 2005-05, thus indicating an uneven trade balance between two countries (Sharma, 2007:118). The second session of India-Tajikistan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic and Related Matters was held in April 2005 and stress was given for closer cooperation in hydro-electricity, pharmaceuticals, information technology and tourism (MEA, 2005).

Third State visit of Tajik president to India in August 2006 took these slow and consistently moving trade and economic relations a step further. In the *Joint Declaration on Further Development of Relations, Friendship and Cooperation* between two countries, both sides expressed satisfaction over the bilateral meetings of Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade and Economic and made the commitment that:

“The two countries would work for closer cooperation in the field of technology, particularly information and communication technology, agriculture and exploration and development of mineral resources. The parties welcomed the signing of a programme of Cooperation between the Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan and The Department of Science and Technology of the Government of India for the period 2006-2008”.

Both sides also signed an MOU in the energy sector and India supported Tajikistan's accession to World Trade Organization (WTO). The third session of the India-Tajikistan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic and Related Matters was held in New Delhi in August 2006. A Joint Protocol containing measures to increase economic cooperation between the two countries was signed. Again, its 4th Session was held in Dushanbe in October 2007 along with a meeting of the Joint Business Council. Almost 20 representatives from the Indian public and private sector participated in it. The fifth Session of this mechanism to enhance bilateral trade was held in New Delhi in November 2008. India and Tajikistan signed a Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and India assisted Tajikistan in upgrading and modernization of Varzob-1 Hydro Power Station (MEA, 2006 TO 2008). Thus regular meetings of Inter-Governmental Commission mechanism along with bilateral visits transformed the trade ties between two countries. It helped in identifying

the new and potential areas of cooperation between two countries as well as analyzing and observing the progress of existing projects and trade agreements between two countries.

The global recession of 2008 proved catastrophic to the economics of Both Tajikistan and India. Growth rate declined in both economies. Despite India's strong political and security ties and emerging defense relations, trade and economic ties were lagging behind. This dissatisfaction of continued low affair of bilateral trade despite immense potential for cooperation in trade was clearly expressed during Indian President's visit to the country in 2009. India-Tajikistan Joint Business Forum was inaugurated during this visit, which was jointly addressed by Indian and Tajik President. One of the important developments to enhance cooperation in the potential area of agricultural research and technology and allied sectors like animal husbandry and food processing was signing of an Agreement on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture and Allied Sectors in October 2010. This was followed by the sixth session of India-Tajikistan Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation (ITJCM) that was held in Dushanbe in which a lot of measures to enhance bilateral trade, investments, and economic cooperation were selected. However, despite many measures and new initiatives, bilateral trade decreased further to 21.8 million US dollars from 40.8 million US dollar due to global economic recession and other institutional factors. Bilateral economic relations got new impetus with the declaration of 'Strategic Partnership' with Tajikistan in 2012. A MoU between the Ministry of Energy and Industry, Tajikistan and Ministry of Textiles, India, Agreement on Mutual Cooperation between the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population, Tajikistan and the Ministry of Labour and Employment, India were hallmarks signed during the visit of the Tajik President in 2012. Upgraded Varzob - I Hydro Power Plant was handed over to Tajikistan by BHEL, an Indian Public Sector Unit (PSU) in 2013. Steady progress was registered in bilateral trade which was at 28.37 million US dollars million in 2011-12 but it was still low in comparison to 40.79 million dollars in 2010-11 (MEA, 2010-11 and 2011-12).

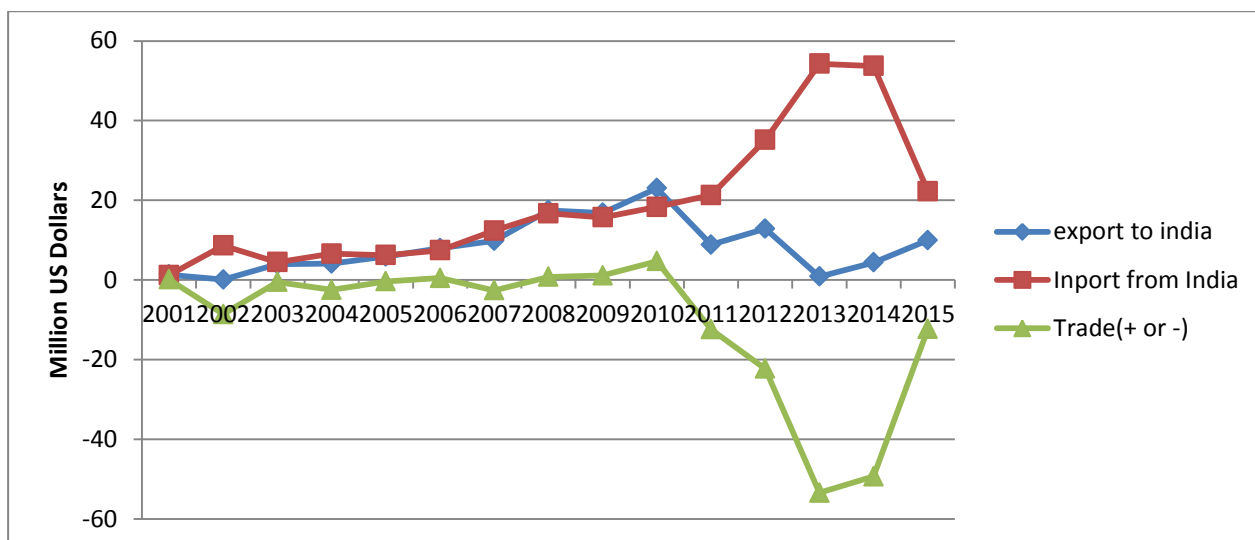
Tajikistan's integration into the world economy took a step further with it joining World Trade Organization (WTO) in March 2013 as its 159th member and being the second Central Asian country to do so. WTO membership is vital for its export diversification and as well economic growth as competitive industries like aluminum and cotton and the hydroelectric sector would be able to attract foreign capital and investment and markets for

their products. Apart from providing investment, it can also provide landlocked Tajikistan a solution to its connectivity and infrastructure challenges as WTO offers transit rights to member countries through other member states and for that WTO membership to Uzbekistan and Afghanistan is crucial. However, WTO membership came with some challenges too, as it might expose a small developing economy like Tajikistan to international market fluctuations and continued global slowdown might not result in expected gains. Tajikistan's accession to the WTO comes just after India launched its 'Connect Central Asia Policy', which focuses on economic cooperation with the Central Asian countries. The bilateral trade that was at modest at 40 million US dollars in 2013, much below to its potential, is expected to grow to new heights with Tajikistan's membership to WTO along with India's 'Connect Central Asian' policy can enhance business activities between the two countries and their entrepreneurs (Zafar, 2013:2 to 6).

Vice President M. Hamid Ansari's state visit to Tajikistan in April 2013 along with Tariq Anwar, Minister of State for Agriculture and Food Processing further strengthened cooperation in agriculture and allied sector. India proposed to set up an IT Centre for Excellence in the Tajik Technical University. Total bilateral trade for 2013-14 between the two countries stood at 55.13 million US dollars, a little higher than 48.02 million US dollars of 2012-13. However, Indian imports from Tajikistan still constituted 0.86 million US dollars in value, showing persistence in trade imbalance (Ministry of Commerce, 2015). Further SCO Membership to India has added a new dimension to bilateral engagements and it provides India a legitimate platform to play more proactive role in Central Asian affairs especially in security and economic affairs. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tajikistan in July 2015 elevated this strategic partnership to a new level and both sides decided to speed up cooperation in the fields of trade and economic ties and connectivity. India-Tajikistan Joint Commission Meeting on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation was held in Dushanbe in January 2016. A strategy on the promotion of India-Tajikistan trade and economic relations formulated during this meeting. The visit of President of Tajikistan Emamoli Rahmon to Sri Lanka and India in 2016 focused on increasing security cooperation and economic development between Central Asia and South Asia. Protocol amending the agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and a bilateral investment treaty was

signed during this visit. Total bilateral trade saw drastic reduction and stood at 32.24 million US dollars for 2015-16 but imports from Tajikistan increased marginally (MEA, 2015-16).

Figure no.4: Export, imports and trade imbalance between India and Tajikistan from 2001 to 2015.



Source: Ministry of Commerce, India

What we have seen in the 25 years of bilateral relations between two countries is that diplomatic efforts have yielded results in enhancing India's geo-political profile in the Central Asian region and Tajikistan for that matter but cooperation in trade and economic spheres still continues to suffer. Despite several major agreements and bilateral treaties like Agreement for Bilateral Investment Protection, Air Services Agreement and Agreement on Long-term Cooperation in Trade, Economic and Industry and institutional arrangements like setting up of an Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation and business forums and even after their several rounds of meetings, bilateral trade continues to be stagnant and there is huge trade imbalance as well. There are several administrative, structural and connectivity issues that are holding back two countries to realize their full trade potential. Professor (Warikoo, 2016) clearly states the following hurdles for this low level of trade between two countries:

- a. "Lack of direct overland access
- b. Macroeconomic instability in Central Asia
- c. Inadequate Banking facilities
- d. Strict Visa Regimes and Language barriers

- e. Lack of trade dynamism and entrepreneurship among Indian businessmen
- f. The absence of direct air connections, customs/tariffs bottlenecks for setting up of joint ventures”.

To start with, due to lack of financial and banking sector reforms, regular flights between two countries and security of businessmen, Tajikistan has been unable to attract the investment from Indian firms. However, after its accession to WTO, Tajikistan government has taken several structural and financial sectors reforms and thus improving the overall business environment of the country. But strict and complex visa regime and direct overland connectivity still remain the biggest hurdles. Another important reason for this low level of trade is the fact that there is lack of awareness in India and in Tajikistan about each other’s potential areas of cooperation. So increasing awareness through public and private media on both sides and informing the business community and entrepreneurs about the opportunities can be of significant help. And for this purpose an electronic interface in English and Russian languages with details of the business and economic potentials of both countries can be of great help in boosting economic engagement. Though schemes like Focus CIS Programme and Connect Central Asia policy provided much impetus to bilateral economic engagements but these remained on paper and actual implementation has been lacking and thus these programmes have not yielded the intended results.

Today India and Central Asian republics have a cordial relationship but the economic engagement between the two regions has been much below its potential. And this is due to direct overland connectivity between two regions. Although Tajikistan’s Gorno-Badakhshan region is only a few kilometers away from the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, but with Pakistan denying transit access and instability in Afghanistan, this trade has to be via alternative sea and land routes. Pakistan has been denying India transit access to landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries to weaken Indian influence there and at the same time deepen its own strategic and economic profile. But even Pakistan’s trade with these countries remains much below its potential due to lack of communication and transport infrastructure. It would have generated billions of transit trade while creating millions of job in Pakistan along with improving its transport infrastructure and linking its economy to South and Central Asian countries, had it allowed transit access to India through its territories (Gulshan, 2010).

Bilateral trade with Tajikistan is not at any significant level. This is hampered by the long route for transportation of goods (India to Bandar Abbas by sea route, from Bandar Abbas via Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan by land). Competitive nature of Indian goods gets eroded due to heavy transportation, logistical and transit costs and further complex transits procedures with different norms in different countries along with security concerns makes trade between two countries a costly affair. The same Indian goods can be purchased at Gulf and Iranian cities at much lower prices and thus reduce the incentive for imports from India by Tajik traders. At the same time, Indian traders have no permanent establishments in Tajikistan or links with Tajik companies and thus much sought Indian goods like tea, clothes and jewelry are bought from Gulf, Iranian and Russian cities at much higher prices than real Indian price of goods (Umarov and Warikoo, 2015:194).

Alternative routes of connectivity and improving the transport, communication and logistic infrastructure of existing routes are the need of the hour. Cheap and viable transport connectivity can significantly increase the economic and trade cooperation and people to people contacts. India has worked on many infrastructure projects in Afghanistan and Central Asian regions. Notably, Zaranj-Delaram road provides access to both Afghanistan and Central Asian countries especially Tajikistan to Chabahar port in Iran and further to India. But still most viable and shortest route from Central Asia to India lies through Afghanistan and Pakistan and improvement in India-Pakistan relations and political stability in Afghanistan is a prerequisite for that to become a reality (Bakshi, 2013:33). With Pakistan and its military establishment supporting cross-border terror in Afghanistan and India and its rising nexus with China in the form of Pakistan-China Economic Corridor, this reality seems far from realization. In this context, Professor K. Warikoo (2015) suggests, "Establishment of India-Pakistan-Central Asia transport corridor will reduce the cost of transportation by 5 to 15 times. In this case, Tajikistan can increase its list of goods which can be exported to India including fresh fruits, grapes, dried fruits etc." Thus the establishment of international transport corridor Dushanbe-Khujand-Salang-Kabul-Djalalbad-Peshawar-Amritsar-New Delhi can significantly enhance the trade between South and Central Asia and create millions of jobs in respective countries. But Pakistan continues with its policy of blocking Indian trade with Afghanistan and Central Asian republics and even not allowing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Trade Transit Agreement that was signed in 2010 is allowing Afghani trucks to carry goods to

Wagah border but is not permitting to carry Indian goods to Afghanistan. Afghanistan has accused Pakistan of not accepting 'national treatment' clause in this agreement. (Warikoo, 2016:8, 9). Transit access is the fundamental right of any landlocked country and any country denying that due to political reasons is a violation of international norms in this regard. What is needed are consistent diplomatic and legal efforts by Afghanistan, India and Central Asian republics for securing transit access through Pakistan territories.

Another important multilateral trade transit agreement is that of Afghanistan- Pakistan - Tajikistan Trade and Transit Agreement (APTTA). India's inclusion into this agreement would give it much-needed access to Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan. Although both Afghanistan and Tajikistan supports Indian entry but Pakistan still denies it.

'International Transports of Goods' Convention is another multilateral process having the potential to facilitate and increase trade and connectivity between the two regions. With Pakistan being Contracting Party to the Convention and Iran being an operational party, it may bring two regions much closer than never before (Zafar, 2016: 31 to 33). But in the backdrop of worsening political relations between India and Pakistan, Indian hopes are largely concentrated on International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which India along with regional countries launched in 2000 with the aim of connecting South Asia to Europe via Iran and Central Asia. Iran-USA nuclear agreement resulting in the removal of sanctions on Iran, a founding member of INSTC, has added new hopes to this project. Recently, member countries approved the draft transit and customs agreements thus providing a legal framework for moving freight on the ship-rail-road route and speeding the work on the already delayed project (Zafar, 2016: 33).

Another important route to connect India and Central Asia is the traditional route of Ladakh-Xinjiang connectivity. For India, this is most realistic and natural route to connect to Central Asia and wider Eurasian region thus bypassing the troubled Afghanistan-Pakistan and costly sea route. This route includes only one country and thus better transit and delivery facilities being there. But, this is not free of hurdles. India's concerns regarding China's recent One Road and One Belt and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that violate Indian territorial sovereignty and India-China boundary disputes are major hindrances for this to become a reality (Stobdan, 2015: 19 to 22). Many diplomatic coherent efforts are needed to clear insecurities and apprehensions of each other and once realized this would

integrate China and Central Asian republics with vast South Asian region thus bringing overall economic gains and prosperity to all partner countries.

New and Potential Areas of Cooperation

The Central Asian republics are landlocked countries and lack of direct connectivity and dependence on a third country for transit along with other structural, administrative and political factors, bilateral trade between India and these republics has been much below to its potential. After the breakdown of its manufacturing sector that resulted in widespread economic and social distress, now Central Asian states started interacting with global markets for production, supplies of raw materials and services. However, against the backdrop of fast changing economic environment; persistence of recession in western world and fall in oil prices are opening new chapters of opportunities for Central Asia-India trade partnership to grow to a new level. Against all these backdrops, the importance of India being a trading partner of Central Asia has been recognizing by all Central Asian republics. To quote one, Trade Representative of Tajikistan, Mahamadi Turaev in his interview said, “India was, is and will be one of the very important countries in the region, not only for Tajikistan but also for all Asia and whole world in the arena of trade and business. India is one of the fastest growing countries. Its economy is huge and there is great potential which could not remain unseen by other countries including Tajikistan”.

The gravity model of trade potential does indicate a huge potential for trade between India and Central Asian republics and Tajikistan in particular. Today many areas offers good opportunities for Indian business engagement and cooperation in Central Asian republics such as hydropower sector, mining, agriculture, animal husbandry and agro-processing industry, textile and leather industry construction industry, infrastructure development, entrepreneurship, information technology, education, health and pharmaceuticals industry and tourism (Stobdan,2015:36).

India, now being world’s third largest economy, has expertise in fields like information technology, health and pharmaceuticals, research and development in agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy industry and tourism. The country can play a significant role in the economic and social development of Central Asian countries, which are looking for markets for their energy resources and in order to diversify their exports, they are looking at India as a potential market for their energy resources and major investor for their economic

development. At the same time, to sustain the growth momentum of the economy, to ensure food, employment and energy security to its huge population, India needs viable energy and other natural sources and market for its goods and services. All these resources required by the country are available in these Central Asian republics and both the Central Asian republics and India are willing to be a partner in shared economic growth and prosperity.

With China increasing its foothold in Central Asia via initiatives like One Road, One Belt and pipeline diplomacy, India needs to enhance its economic integration with the region. Success of programmes like 'Make in India' largely resides on raw energy and natural resource and thus cooperation with Central Asia is imperative for that. Quality Indian goods and services in comparison to Chinese products are best sought in Central Asian republics. A large volume of trade with Kazakhstan only indicates to the huge trade potential with other republics as well. Today, major items of India's exports to Tajikistan constitute pharmaceuticals, tea, coffee, chemicals, textiles & clothing and machinery and the major imports include aluminum, cotton, dry fruits, vegetables, organic chemicals and essential oil. However, like many other Central Asian republics, there are a lot of new and potential areas of cooperation between Tajikistan and India as well.

Although pharmaceutical and health sector has been a traditional area of cooperation but it carries immense potential for further development as there is great demand for Indian pharmaceuticals products. Some fresh initiatives can be taken by private and public Indian companies to establish joint ventures and manufacturing units for pharmaceutical products. First Joint Venture Company named Tajik-Ajanta Pharma was established when India extended its first credit line of worth five million US dollar. But this project failed due to lack of professionalism of Ajanta Pharma Limited and due to unfavorable conditions of Civil War in Tajikistan.

India can significantly help Tajikistan in diversifying its export chains and its economic dependence on countries like China and Russia. Tajikistan's local goods and services industries are facing existential problems due to increased flow of cheap Chinese products. India can help in rehabilitation and restoration of Tajik industries like food and light industries, clothes and shoe factories and also replacement of outdated equipment, thus improving the overall competitiveness of Tajik industries. Given the fact that India has expertise and advanced and cheap technology for manufacturing and service sector

industries, cooperation with Tajikistan in areas like construction goods, production and preparation of marble and granite blocks and that of mineral water and development of fisheries can restore these industries to their previous status (Umarov and Warikoo, 2015:191).

Agriculture and food processing and animal husbandry are another potential areas of cooperation between India and Tajikistan. As India is making much progress in these areas and thus cooperation between two countries can result in enhanced agricultural and livestock productivity and these products having good demands in nearby European markets can significantly enhance the income of common Tajik people and at the same time providing employment to many and food security to Tajik society. Besides, there is also scope for cooperation in organic farming and organic products, which again has high demands in Russian and European markets. Agricultural cooperation can also be of help in India's food security. This cooperation in agriculture and animal husbandry can be further extended to the development of allied sectors related to this. One such area can be the restoration of poultry and cattle breeding farm companies and Indian specialists and doctors can be of paramount importance to Tajikistan. Tajikistan does not have advanced technology for the packaging industry and exports from agriculture and allied sectors suffer from this deficiency and thus cooperation and Indian knowledge and experience in this areas can significantly alter the exports dynamism of Tajikistan. Tajikistan implemented neo-liberal agendas in its efforts to turn to the market economy led to degradation of local Cotton and Silk industries due to cheap Chinese products flooding domestic markets and resulting in closing down of these factories. Using Indian experience of 'green revolution', expertise and technology in agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry practices can revive and make these industries competitive in nature and at the same time boosting its exports also. Thus cooperation in this area can significantly increase livestock productivity in Tajikistan and thus ensuring the rehabilitation of related industries and food security of masses at large (Umarov and Warikoo, 2015:189). Tajik President's 2012 visit was significant in this context when an MOU between the two countries inked for enhancing trade and economic relations in fields of textiles, fashion and clothing. Further, setting up of Joint Working Group on Textiles is expected to promote research, investment cooperation and promotion of textile exports in markets of both countries. Apart from these, Vakhsh River valley of Tajikistan is suitable for pulses cultivation and given the rising demand of

pulses in India, Indian agribusiness companies like Bharti or Reliance can set up agro-industrial complexes there.

Tajikistan has a huge hydropower potential. Its hydropower resources account 317 billion kWh per year but a meager 3-4 percent of it has been utilized so far. Over 90 percent hydroelectric potential is yet to be harnessed. India has significant experience in this field in Tajikistan. Modernization and rehabilitation of Varzob-1 Hydro Power Station by Indian public sector companies namely Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) was of significant importance. Further Indian cooperation and investment in this area can meet rising Indian energy demand and at the same time providing Tajikistan one more item to its export chain. Investment by Indian private sector hydropower companies in small and micro hydropower plants in Tajikistan can be of much significance. But the high initial project costs and the insufficient short-term returns coupled with direct land access to transportation of electricity results in not much Indian engagement in this area. However, providing profitable credit lines and of assured returns, can help in generating incentives for increased Indian private sector investment there. But given the geo-strategic position of Tajikistan, India must not care much about profitable returns and should enhance its development assistance in building Tajik economy and society. As an independent Tajik economy with less dependence on foreign aid would result in an independent Tajik foreign policy too and it would be in India's larger foreign policy interests. It was noticed that due to Russian pressure on Tajikistan, India could not use Ayni air base (Mullen and Prasad, 2014:5, 6).

Indian private sector engagement in Tajikistan and for that matter in the Central Asian region can significantly enhance Indian political and economic profile in the region. Indian private sector has sufficient experience of working in Tajikistan in fields like construction, hydropower, pharmaceuticals, mines and minerals and Information technology. Construction of a five-star hotel in Dushanbe by CHL Company, Indian restaurants in Dushanbe city, exploration of natural gas in South Tajikistan by Marvis Ltd., supplying of vehicles and equipment's like 7MW generator to Tajik company 'Pamir Energy' are some of the projects undertaken by Indian private establishments. Indian businessmen have also formed Indian Business Advisory Group to facilitate the private sector cooperation between two countries (Roy, 2013:60, 61). But existing private sector cooperation between two countries is not up to its full potential. There is immense potential for Indian private sector

in areas like infrastructure building, exploration and extractions of minerals, hydropower development, and construction and tourism industry.

Tourism is an important area of cooperation in this regard. Tajikistan has a good prospectus for the development of mountainous tourism like trekking and adventure tourism and related sports but due to lack of infrastructure, this has not developed in a profitable venture. Indian private sector which has sufficient experience in developing tourism infrastructure at home and abroad can be a significant help. Improvement in connectivity especially air links and simplification of visa procedures are the first steps towards this cooperation. Indian film industry can also be made aware of the scenic beauty of untouched and rugged Tajik mountains and valleys to shoot their films by means of “road shows” in Mumbai and Delhi and other Indian cities at much less cost than European and Russian regions. Another important area of cooperation is medical tourism. Today, India is home to world-class low-cost medical facilities with its state of art hospitals and medical research institutions and Central Asians countries including Tajikistan are well aware of this Indian advancement in medical science. But lack of information and communication barrier is the major hindrance to this. This can be overcome by institutional procedures by employing language interpreters and increasing awareness about Indian medical facilities. Although, Tajikistan lacks in medical infrastructure but there is a large pool of well qualified doctors and nurses in this area. Major Indian medical chains like Apollo, Fortis and Max can set up state of the art hospitals in the region to tap the easy available trained human resources there and thus can provide affordable world class medical assistance to the Tajik citizens. Central Asian people are fond of naturopathy, traditional and classical Ayurvedic medicines, Tibetan medicine and various traditional therapies along with Yoga and meditation at various treatment centers in India.

In the wake of continuous economic growth in Central Asian urban conglomerates, Indian private sector has huge potential to engage and cooperate in activities like construction, engineering, tele-connectivity, space and satellite technology, management and consultancy services, IT and software development. Industrial construction like hydro- power development, metallurgy, roads and mining and construction and engineering projects in big cities like Dushanbe offer excellent opportunities for Indian private sector which has experience in financing and development of such projects. Further given the fact that Parsee businessmen are historical relatives of Persian-speaking Tajik people so engagements of

industrial-financial groups like Tata, Godrej, Azim Premjee with Tajikistan can help it in inviting foreign investment as well as expertise for restoration and reconstruction of telecommunication network of the country and development of hotels and various mechanical and mines related industrial complexes (Dostboev, 2003:114,115).

Given the lack of surface connectivity between the two countries, cyber connectivity has huge potential to bring two regions closer without any means of physical connectivity corridors and with lesser investments. India having advanced communication systems and equipment and world's largest sourcing destination for the IT industry possess sufficient experience in building IT infrastructure like establishing IT Centre in Dushanbe and computer labs in Tajikistan. This cooperation can be further developed to the areas of teleservices like telemedical links between two countries and tele-education along with skill development and capacity building. First such telemedical link was established with Kyrgyzstan during Indian Prime Minister's visit to that country in 2015 and this experience can be replicated in other countries including Tajikistan. Besides, India can also provide dedicated communication and other weather satellite to the country to develop its electronic media networks and boosting its weather forecasting system and this would help in return to India by helping it in having better communication connectivity with country and awareness about Indian business and market and goodwill towards India as a whole (Zafar, 2016:32). The Indian government can encourage Indian institutions like Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) & Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) to open their educational centers in the country to impart world class education and helping it in developing its human resources.

Trade facilitation centers and the establishment of Joint ventures are required by Indian private sector to organize trade in Indian tea, cooperation in precious and semi-precious stones and jewelry and promotion of already popular Indian entertainment industry and exports of Tajik dry fruits to India. Indian Tea Board can take initiative like setting up of a tea blending & packing factory and tea outlets in Tajikistan to offer the best quality Indian teas to Tajik people so that they do not have to buy it from Gulf or Russian markets. As professor K.Warikoo and Kh. Umarov propose to enhance Indian private sector cooperation by establishing Joint Ventures in following areas:

- (a) "Gathering and processing of medicinal herbs for pharmaceutical industries of India, particularly in ecological clean areas of Pamir mountains.
- (b) Marketing of Tajik origin commodities in India.

- (c) Production of packaging materials.
- (d) Supermarkets for sale of Indian goods in Dushanbe and Khujand.
- (e) Repair and technical services of cars.
- (f) Production of leather goods from local raw materials (animal hides).
- (g) Extraction, cutting and polishing of precious and semi-precious gems.
- (h) Extraction of decorative stones and production of building materials and different stone articles”.

To overcome the problems like low level of trade along with high transport cost in trade relations between two countries, improvement in air links and exploring alternative routes of connectivity along with structural and institutional reforms are must for more increased trade and economic cooperation between two countries.

India’s role in Human Resource Development of Tajikistan

Despite India’s several efforts, trade between India and Tajikistan continues to be much below its potential. Having failed to become a major economic player in Central Asia and Tajikistan in particular, India has maintained its influence by providing development and humanitarian assistance in the form of aids and grants as well assisting in developing human resources of Tajikistan. Today, India’s desire to assist Tajikistan in its efforts of diversification of its economy as well as in boosting of Tajikistan’s IT, energy and education sector by providing technical and development assistance, while at the same time securing its own demands and addressing shared security and geo-strategic concerns.

Although India was busy in focusing on domestic issues during the 1990s, but with the Taliban gaining strength in Afghanistan in 1994, Tajikistan and India feared the political fallout of this on their internal security. Both countries decided to cooperate and Tajikistan agreed to facilitate India in providing aid and assistance to anti-Taliban resistance forces. First such visible form of humanitarian assistance was the setting up of Indian military hospital on Tajikistan-Afghan border to treat Northern Alliance soldiers led by Ahmad Masood and civilians. After noticing the geo-strategic importance of the Central Asian region and for that matter Tajikistan, India started building development partnerships with

Tajikistan. This was in the form of humanitarian aid and assistance and disbursing Lines of Credit (LOCs) and budgetary loans. First such major aid of five million US dollars was offered during the visit of Tajik Prime Minister, Mr Abdumalik Abdullogjanov, to India in February 1993. India also gifted medicines and blankets as assistance to help Tajikistan to overcome from its Civil War miseries. India has been committed to overall development of Tajikistan rather than just seeking geo-political interest in the region (MEA, 1993). Although, India was unable to raise its political profile in the region so far but after the first state visit of Tajik president in 1995, efforts were made to set up a joint venture for the manufacture of pharmaceuticals, training of Tajik diplomats and specialists in fields like banking, computer and English language. The second line of credit worth five million US dollars as sought by Tajikistan was kept pending in concerned Indian ministry and a decision on this could not be taken due to domestic turmoil in Indian politics and thus delaying bilateral engagements between two countries (Singh, 2003:201).

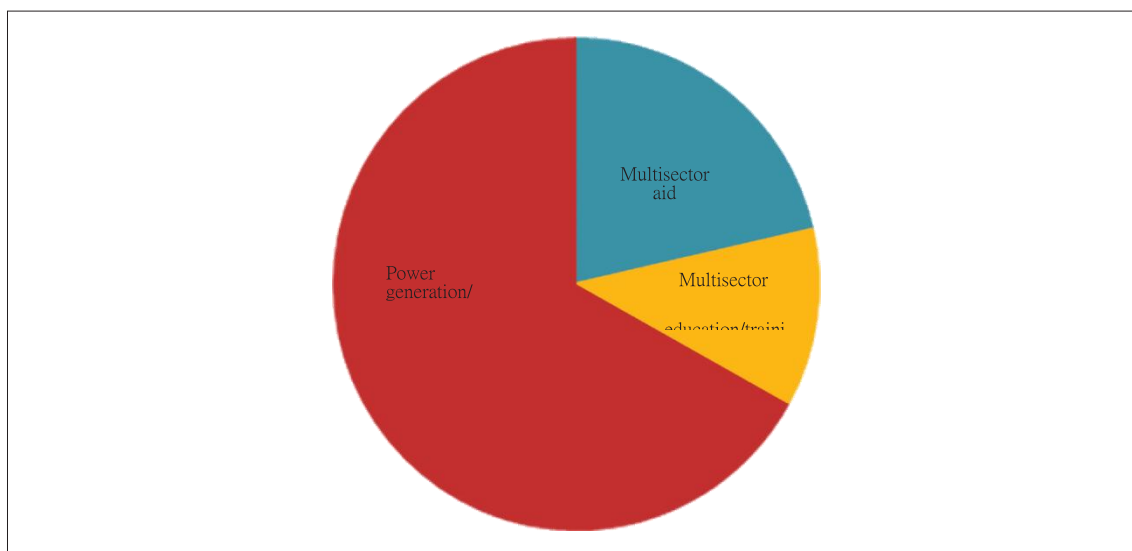
Tajikistan was offered budgetary loan of 5 million US dollars to boost pharmaceutical production in 1995 and a joint venture plant for this purpose became operational in 1996-97. However, in later years, the Tajik government due to Civil War conditions failed to sustain the project. So the Government of India converted it into a grant in 2003. Important project assistance included a grant of 0.6 million US dollars for a Fruit Processing Plant that was established in 2005. India being the hub of IT infrastructure of the world, assisted Tajikistan in the establishment of Bedil India-Tajikistan Centre for Information Technology (BITCIT) in Dushanbe in 2006 as a step forward in the development of human resources of Tajikistan. It was intended to promote e-governance and developing human resources in Tajikistan. During the visit of Indian Prime Minister to Tajikistan in 2015, a project for setting up of computer labs in 37 schools of Tajikistan was announced and it was delivered in August 2016 (MEA, 1991to 2017).

Tajikistan and India have no direct land connectivity. One such argument in favor of development assistance to Tajikistan is that India can secure its trade interests if it focuses its development assistance to Tajikistan on some sectors even in the absence of a direct land corridor. Indian development assistance covers a wide range of areas and has been to sectors that are unlikely to benefit India directly. For example, humanitarian assistance too has been part and parcel of overall Indian aid and assistance to Tajikistan. India extended relief goods of 50 lakhs to overcome the damage caused by sudden rains in Tajikistan in 1999. And

again humanitarian assistance of 5 million dollars was supplied to mitigate the damages caused by various natural calamities in 2001-02. India granted 100,000 US dollars as humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan for providing relief to flood affected people in Pamir and Rasht Valley in 2015. The humanitarian assistance of 100,000 US dollars was extended to Tajikistan to mitigate the damages caused by avalanches in Tajikistan in January 2017.

India continued with this tradition and further Indian development assistance was provided such as 600,000 US dollars grant for a fruit processing plant, a 20 million US dollars grant for the up gradation of a Hydro Power Station and the humanitarian assistance such as 2 million polio vaccines given through UNICEF in 2010 of over 220,000 US dollar. India provided a grant of 2 million US dollar partially in cash and in the form of power cables, generator and pump sets to overcome the problems of harsh winter of 2008 and also 200,000 US dollar cash assistance was given to mitigate the havoc caused by heavy rains and floods of 2009. This clearly indicates that India is not there just to seek resources for its requirements or to address shared security concerns, but to help Tajikistan in its efforts to diversify its economy and to assist with humanitarian efforts (MEA, 1991 to 2017).

Figure no. 3: Sectoral Distribution of Indian Grants to Tajikistan (2006-2013)



Source: Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) Program at the Centre for Policy Research

Although Tajikistan's economy started to grow after its civil war ended in 1997, this remittances dependent country suffers from poverty, unemployment and poor infrastructure. Indian aid and assistance can help in capacity building and information technology infrastructure and thus having a positive impact on the health, education and power

generation sectors in Tajikistan. A major part of Indian development assistance has gone to hydro power sector of Tajikistan. India assisted in rehabilitation and modernization of Varzob-1 Hydro Power Station through Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited and National Hydroelectric Power Corporation. It was inaugurated in December 2012.

Another important area in the human resource development of Tajikistan has been the education and capacity building of Tajik students, experts and scholars in a wide range of fields like the English language, banking and finance, information technology, income generation, rural development, industrial development and management. India is developing human resources of Tajikistan by providing ICCR scholarships and training under ITEC and training of defense personnel and diplomats. Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) was started in 1964 as a bilateral programme of assistance of the Government of India. Tajikistan has been the major beneficiary of India's ITEC partner since 1996. Since then, around 1,200 scholars from Tajikistan have benefited from this programme. ITEC slots for Tajikistan have been increased consistently first in 2009 to 100 during Indian President's visit and again in 2012 during Tajik president's visit to India to 150. Indian commitment to develop human resources of Tajikistan takes a further step with India announcing to set up an 'India-Tajikistan Modern Engineering Workshop' at Tajik State Technical University in Dushanbe. It was inaugurated in 2011. This Tajik Technical University also signed an agreement with the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, to facilitate academic exchange and promote joint research (Roy, 2013:56). ICCR scholarships also have been an important component in human resource development of Tajikistan as many Tajik students have completed their studies in economics, sociology, management and business administration. Since 2005, ICCR decided to provide 25-30 scholarship slots to Tajik nationals. Another Important component is the training of Tajik diplomats at Foreign Service Institute of Ministry of External Affairs. At the same time, many Indian students are studying at Tajik State Medical University (Embassy of India, Dushanbe).

The significance of these programmes is that most of these ITEC and ICCR alumni are in high positions in banks, government administration, NGO's and international organizations due to their knowledge of English language, specific skills and qualifications (Olimov, 2016:18).

It is evident that many high-level visits of government officials and leaders to each other's countries in the past years, and signing of a Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2012, relations between India and Tajikistan have been growing rapidly and Indian assistance in education and capacity building further strengthens these ties. Visit of Tajik President in 2012 was instrumental in these areas and especially in the development of human resources of Tajikistan. Agreements related to cooperation in education, sports, health and medicines were signed. India continued this engagement of capacity building via trainings, scholarships and humanitarian and developmental aids and assistance in all bilateral visits. Indian side helped in setting up computer labs in 37 Tajik schools in 2015 only points to it. This has helped India in acquiring the goodwill of people and strategic outreach in the region.

Chapter: 4

Defense and Security Cooperation

Given its geo-political and strategic location, Central Asia has been the area of competing interests of world powers wherein Great Game was played in the 19th century and New Great Game continues in present with global and regional powers seeking their strategic, economic and cultural interests in the New Central Asia. Central Asia that was a meeting point between Middle-East, Europe, China and India had wide influence over the developments in these regions. What shaped its own past and now influences and defines its present are some major events in its history. Firstly with Muslim conquest in seventh century, Islam rendered unique identity to life and culture of people; secondly, Mongol conquest of the region and launching military expeditions as far as India, Babur who hailed from Fergana valley founding Mughal empire in India; thirdly, power rivalry between Great Britain and Russian empires and subsequently Russian annexation and consolidation of the region in the second half of the 19th century. This region following the disintegration of the Soviet Union gained distinct political identity and with the emergence of five Central Asian republics on the global map this region again came to light and became the center of attention and interests of different regional and global powers. With all these historical experiences and sudden independence of Central Asian republics what is most important is the fact that these republics along with economic and transitional miseries, security and stability of the regimes become very crucial. Different domestic ethnic, regional and political factions and also foreign factors following the Soviet disintegration competing for power and influence made security situations in many republics endangered. Russia was the first country to come to help these republics and to guard their borders, especially along Afghan-Tajik border. Almost all these countries signed security pacts with Russia to bring stability and security to the region. Security threats emerged from both internal and outside factors. Among local elites and different political factions competing for interests, the rise of Islamic movements like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan crisis are very important outside factors. Border dispute arose as borders were set arbitrarily on ethnic lines and also natural resources dispute like water dispute between upstream and lower stream states constitute reasons for major interstate conflict in the region.

Tajik Civil War and External Factors in It

These internal and external disputes along with varying types of political confrontations between ethnic and political groups with significant external influence led to instability in Post-soviet Central Asian republics and even to Civil War notably in Tajikistan.

Tajik Civil War was the manifestation of not only the sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union but the historical and economic neglect of the region. Being poorest Soviet Republic, Tajikistan was one of the first republics to react to policies of glasnost and perestroika. There were regional disparities like economically developed northern Khojdent region, while the south and east Tajikistan especially Kulyab and Garm regions were lacking in this economic development. Tajikistan's independence didn't result in ending its miseries. Instead it fell in the messy situation of social and economic miseries and further ethnic and political fighting for resources and powers led to civil war in the republic. While stressing upon the multi-faceted nature of Tajik Civil War, renowned scholar, Muzaffar Olimov (2016:44) counts three major reasons for the crisis in Tajikistan in the post-Soviet disintegration.

1. "The conflict between local elites over power and resources in the territory after the break-up of Soviet Union.
2. The conflict between the state and Islam.
3. Political resistance to reform".

The economic and social factors like unemployment, widespread poverty along with cut in Soviet aid and fall of Soviet economic model with regional and political discrimination and new government's inability to even provide half of public services resulted in the obvious discontent among general public and violent clashes among regional and ethnic elites for possession of resources and power (Aripov, 2016:61). These socio-economic factors were not merely the fuel to the civil war and political fighting but these also resulted in the rise of major socio-political movements in Tajikistan in the 1990s. Formation of Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) was also the result of such a movement (Olimov, 2019:46).

Immediate causes are not limited to just socio-economic distress but it is interesting to note here that from structural factors i.e. state illegitimacy and inability of the Nabiev regime to

incorporate all the local elites in the administration and government to political and regional discriminations and even inter-political and clan rivalry are some of the other factors that made the situation worse. The political developments and answer as to why unlike in other Central Asian countries the Civil war in Tajikistan lasted so long lies in the Soviet political norms and traditions. Another peculiar factor was that of regionalism. It led to political discrimination that has been one of the forces for the longevity of the Tajik conflict. As Makhsud Aripov (2015) rightly contends that:

“Although regional identity was also vivid in the form of social class, geographical characteristics, inter-religious sects, but the more mobilized sense of it was shaped by the long-term political domination of clans from the northern region of the country over others”.

Thus there was obvious discontent against this regionalism induced political discrimination especially in Eastern and Southern ethnic clans and opportunities like glasnost and perestroika provided them of chances to express that openly and to fight for their own regional identity and civil war leading to misuse of this disparity by Southern religious fanatics. Clan based political struggle for power resulting in regional cooperation and inert –clan cooperation despite significant religious struggle is also an important factor for this Civil War crisis in Tajikistan as there was an absence of any mechanism like that of signing of pacts among clans in order to avoid conflict or to maintain balance of power as it is found in the case of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. This failure of not having this unity mechanism led to ethnic and regional actors struggling for power at the cost of social and economic well-being of the country as a whole (Collins,2002:137-152).

Formation of powerful political factions just after Soviet disintegration and these supported by regional and ethnic clans resulted in formation powerful opposition forces and this meant more severe fighting in days to come. By 1992, two main group namely Popular Front (Pro-Communist group) and United Tajik Opposition (an alliance between Democrats and Islamists) led this conflict to full blown civil war with openly armed fighting between the two (Olimov, 2016: 47). While Islamic Renaissance Party was the main constituent of United Tajik Opposition having Southern Clans in its fold and an important point was that leader of United Tajik Opposition was Abdulla Nuri, the same man who is responsible for starting the Movement for Revival of Islam in Tajikistan (MIRT) thus wielding Islamic influence in United Tajik Opposition which otherwise was just an opposition to ruling

government. At the same time Popular Front was composed of people from Kulyab region and was anti-Islamic and pro-communist movement and with military support from Russia and Uzbekistan was able to consolidate government's position in many areas and later on it was given the recognition of National Army (Aripov, 2015:58).

Now local elites from Kulyab, having more say in government and Nabiyev's effort of ending fighting by forming a power-sharing platform named Government of National Reconciliation (GNR). Although his this effort along with Tajik Supreme Soviet meeting in Khujand resulting in failure led to the ousting of Nabiyev and with coming of Rakhmonov, a new twist came in Tajik civil war. Rakhmonov's crackdown mostly on opposition parties' especially Islamic factions resulted in uniting them under the Islamic Revival Party in 1993 in Afghanistan. With popular cross-border cadre and material support, this faction became important in United Tajik Opposition group. In the year 1993, Rakhmonov led regime was able to consolidate its position in most of Tajikistan except in Southern region where tough terrain hindered the progress of Tajik forces and this area was also breeding ground for Islamist radicals and other opposition groups with Afghan Mujahidin actively supporting these groups and thus posed threat to the slow progressing stability and peace in Tajikistan (Warikoo, 2015:72). Apart from these domestic factors external factors in form of cross-border man, material and ideological support influenced the developments in Tajikistan. Rising threat of Islamic radicalization as domestic Islamic factions like Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan seeking cross-border support to establish an Islamic State in Tajikistan especially from Afghanistan Mujahidin's and somewhat from extremist groups based in Uzbekistan, Iran and Pakistan worsened the overall security scenario of CIS countries. Although the awareness about their Islamic identity among Central Asian People dates back to their movements against Communists firstly in the form of Basmachi revolution and later on against collectivization, but development of Islamic radicalization in the form of militant form and Jihad starts from the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1978 and Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 further provided impetus to this development.

Here the role of Pakistan agencies in providing support to these Islamic outfits and Pakistan's own efforts to seek strategic depth in Central Asian republics by exploiting the common religious identity is worth mentioning.

Given the common geographical, linguistic, religious and ethnic similarity between Tajikistan and Afghanistan especially Gorno-Badakhshan regions of both countries and coupled with tough geographic terrains and poor border management has served the important route for cross-border movement for radical ideas, arms and drug smuggling in Tajikistan. This constitutes the basis for the role of Afghanistan based actors in Tajikistan crisis. As Professor K. Warikoo (2004:142) rightly puts it, “Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was perceived as a direct Communist attack on Islam”. As a result of it, this attack provided Mujahideen in Afghanistan to establish contacts with their religious counterparts in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and with the active support of Pakistan and its agencies after the disintegration of Soviet Union, all these actors supported Islamic fundamentalist in Tajikistan. Tajik- Afghan border became very volatile and open smuggling of arms, drugs, Jihadi literature and cadre worsened the internal situation in Tajikistan. The killing of 25 Russian border guards along with civilians was the highlight of this problem (Warikoo, 1995, 302).

It is very clearly evident that cross-border support to Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan and other Islamist groups provided them a more say in United Tajik Opposition. With active man and material support from Islamic extremists in Afghanistan like Jamat-i-Islami led by Burhannudin Rabbani and Hizb-e-Islami led by Gulbadin Hikmatyar to wage Jihad against Tajik government and increasing influence of Wahabism along rural Tajik- Afghan borders, Tajik Islamic extremist factions like Islamic Revival Party refused to be part of any peace talk with Tajik government. These forces also established a radio station named “Voice of Free Tajikistan” in Afghanistan to propagate radical ideas and Jihad in Tajikistan. Even earlier Tajik Wahabi leader Abdullo Saidov called to establish Islamic State in Tajikistan and jihad against Communists. Soon after disintegration practical work of this ideological foundation began in form of cross-border smuggling of arms and drugs and money (Warikoo, 2015:69, 73).Further, Professor K. Warikoo (2015:70) points out:

“Obviously the Afghan Mujahideen groups with active guidance and assistance of Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) played a key role in fomenting the Islamic militancy in Tajikistan with a view to establish a friendly Islamic State there. The then Deputy Chairman of Tajikistan’s KGB, Belousov openly accused Pakistan Intelligence services of carrying out a subversive programme code named ‘M’ to destabilize the socio-political situation in Central Asia”.

Although with partial success in Soviet period, now with disintegration of Soviet Union coupled with volatile situation in Afghanistan and for seeking strategic depth against India, Pakistani support to Islamic extremist groups in and around Afghanistan continued. It worsened security scenario in CIS countries especially in Tajikistan which was already struggling with bloody civil war and external factors were only worsening the situation.

Afghanistan based extremist groups interfering in Tajikistan and spread of Islamic radicalism in Tajikistan not only worsened the civil war situation in Tajikistan but it posed a serious threat to the internal security of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Thus CIS leaders particularly Uzbekistan and Russia concerned over uninterrupted cross-border supply of terrorism, drugs and arms that were slowly jeopardizing the overall security of Central Asian republics, President Islam Karimov along with Tajik government stressed on the need of Tajik-Afghan dialogue process to resolve the outstanding issues of both sides. Islamist radicals who set up Tajik Government in exile in Afghanistan along with Afghanistan based support groups particularly those of Hekmatyar and Rabbani tried to disturb any peace talks between Afghanistan and Tajikistan government (Warikoo, 2015:81). Peace talks between Tajik and Afghan authorities failed to yield any results due to varying nature of actors in Afghan government. However, Civil War in Tajikistan by end of 1996 was coming to conclusion but hopes were of short-lived as rise of Taliban and fall of Kabul to it in September 1996 again made worst fear of Islamic fundamentalism spreading to CIS countries especially Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and also destroying the ongoing peace talks in Tajikistan. The grim realities of porous and corruption-ridden nature of Tajik-Afghan border even today pose significant security threats to Tajikistan due to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and free movements of extremists, arms and drugs. Although Tajik-Afghan border now is monitored by Tajikistan itself but poor border management still worries Central Asian security experts. As General Sharef Fayzulloev, Deputy Commander of Tajikistan border troops observes:

“Most of the border outpost along Tajikistan’s Southern frontier was built before the 1960's and are beyond rehabilitation. Soviet-era vehicles have outlived their use. Every kilometer of barbed wire installed along the Afghan border would cost 1 million US dollars and even this barrier would not stop cross-border crime”.

Afghanistan conflict was not the only external factor that influenced the domestic development in Tajikistan's crisis but equally important is the influence and effect of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan along with the role of Iranian and Pakistani and Gulf countries. Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan which was an important part of United Tajik Opposition drew support not only from Afghan mujahedeen but also radical volunteers from Uzbekistan especially Islamic fundamentalist movements like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), *Hizb-Ut-Tahrir* (Party of Liberation) and *Islamic Movement of Turkestan* (Central Asia). Even one of the causes of formation of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was to stop the United Tajik Opposition to sign any peace accord with Tajik government. The main aim of the IMU was to overthrow Karimov regime of Uzbekistan and after that establishing Islamic State there. It has been involved in trafficking drugs from Afghanistan to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and further to Russia and Eastern Europe via Northern route. Thus along with this narco trade and active military support of Arab and Pakistani agencies in Afghanistan provided them strength to destabilize the governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Juma Namangani, one of the commanders of IMU, fought along with United Tajik Opposition (UTO) forces against Tajik forces (Dwivedi, 2015:129). Thus with support from Islamic factions and some countries like Saudi Arabia supporting Wahabism by financial and ideological means and Pakistani government agencies, this movement created havoc by deadly attacks and by destabilizing the socio-political fabric of both countries. Its impact was not only limited to crisis during civil war but the presence of this group especially in restive Fergana valley created tensions in the bilateral relations of two sovereign states of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This movement still has its presence in countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan and is successful in recruiting young cadre from these countries and has been thriving on narco trade and posing serious security threat to Afghanistan and Central Asian republics.

This movement also showed the nefarious design of Pakistan in supporting religious extremism for gains in both Central and South Asia. Pakistan has acted as a major destabilizing factor for promoting religious extremism by supporting Mujahideen and Taliban in Afghanistan and IMU and other Islamic fundamentalist movements and parties in Central Asian republics and state sponsored terrorism in the Indian state of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

Famous Pakistani scholar Ahmed Rashid (2002:140) clearly points out the role being played by Pakistan as an international promoter of terrorism by stating that. “Peshawar- was the center of not only Pakistani and Islamic activism but also pan-Islamic jihadi groups”.

Islamic influence especially during Tajik civil war from countries like Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan has been in the form of promoting extremist version of Islam along with financial and material support to militant and Islamic factions and radicalization through mosques and madrassas. At the same time Iranian support was there to United Tajik Opposition to revive the Islamic identity of Tajikistan by giving funds for mosque building and other religious and cultural exchanges. Iranian support was not for ideological reasons alone but also to maintain power balance and to stop Saudi-backed Sunni fundamentalist groups (Dwivedi, 2007:171-172). Thus Iranian support has been to maintain stability in the Central Asian region via cultural and economic cooperation and it has been involved in facilitating peace talks between Tajik government and Opposition groups.

With the rise of extremist Taliban and escalation of cross-border terrorism and extremism coupled with related violent crime and increased drug trafficking by Taliban regime, stability and security of CIS countries was threatened. Due to this regional and international actors like Russia along with Iran and other Central Asian countries and United Nations wanted an immediate political compromise to end Tajik problem. For this matter, an agreement was reached between Tajik President Rakhmonov and United Tajik Opposition leader, Said Abdullah Nuri, on 23 December, 1996 for the creation of Commission of National Reconciliation (CNR) to suggest constitutional reforms and changes in government structure and General Peace Accord in June 1997 (Jonson, 2006:45-46). With the signing of the Peace Accord, further stimulus was expected between the bilateral relations between India and Tajikistan.

Strategic, Security and Defense Cooperation

Although India’s engagement with Central Asia dates back to ancient time but the history of modern day engagements especially in security and defense arena can be traced back to the Soviet period. Soon, after independence, India’s friendly relations with the Soviet Union paved way for good relations with Central Asian republics of the modern day. After the Soviet disintegration, these republics opened up for interaction with outside world and the

very geo-strategic location along with abundant natural resources made this region a priority in the foreign policy of regional and international actors. This advantageous strategic location came with new challenges and problems like religious extremism, terrorism, drug trafficking and related crimes emanating especially from volatile Afghanistan made the Central Asian region central in the real sense to neighboring countries.

Why India needs to raise its strategic profile in the region along with enhancing security and defense cooperation with the Central Asian region is a question of utmost importance and answer lies in various dimensions and aspects as well as changing geo-political and power equations of the world. This same question also goes true for Central Asian republics especially Tajikistan and Afghanistan for enhanced cooperation with India. Today India is an economic powerhouse with strong armed forces and culture. But at the same time, it is not alien to the problems of religious extremism, state-sponsored terrorism, increasing radicalization, separatists movements. What is important here is a third country namely Afghanistan is central to both Central and South Asia particularly India. As political developments and challenges occurring in Central Asia have a direct bearing on the internal security of India, so Indian engagement with Central Asia is natural and in the same way Tajikistan needs a partner to fight instability and threats emanating from within its territories as well as from its volatile neighborhood.

Afghanistan is the breeding ground of religious extremism and Pakistani agencies sponsoring cross-border terrorism and separatism In the Indian state of Kashmir. Tajikistan also faces the problem like drug Trafficking, religious radicalization and cross-border terrorism emanating from almost the same sources. Thus both countries shared mutual concerns about the regional security and stability that have bearing on each other's internal security and these very mutual concerns brought two countries closer to seek deep cooperation in defense and security arenas. On the other hand, these are hostile neighbors like Pakistan and China, and seeking strategic depth in Central Asian against them is in the best interest of India.

Soon after the Soviet disintegration, Islamic awakening was one of the features of these republics. Islam as a religious identity was kept in suppressed form during the Soviet period. Religious revivalism was seen as going back to their original identity. Central Asian Islam is not inherently fanatical due to moderate Sufi practices and Hanafi schools of thoughts. But

with interaction with outside world especially Islamic countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and the Gulf States and also ideological and financial support by these countries in helping Central Asian republics gaining back their original identities in some ways destroyed their moderate Sufi Islamic culture and paved the way for radical Islam and radicalization. After the Soviet disintegration, Islam as a political tool was presented as a cure to problems of economic and social unrest due to widespread poverty, unemployment and overpopulation especially in rough geographical areas like the Ferghana Valley, which has been divided between the three states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, thus paving way for religious extremism. With more Central Asian people identifying themselves with religious identity and existence of extremist militant groups like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Islamic Revival Party in these areas and their wide support points to the increased religious awakening among the Central Asian people. Although increased radicalization among young educated youths in cities is seen after the developments like 9/11 and subsequent USA's War on Terror. Uzbekistan President, Islam Karimov openly acknowledged accepted that the threat of foreign-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism is both real and alarming (Dwivedi, 2002:110-115).

Tajikistan being the front line state, fears the infiltration of radical ideas, arms, and ideological and financial support to extremists by the Saudis, Pakistan and Taliban. Although its approach to Islamic fundamentalist groups like Islamic Revival Party after the civil war has been to co-opt them but this hasn't stopped religious extremism in the country. These very fundamentalist groups with external support are active in spreading religious extremism in the name of the revival of original culture or identity. Islamic fundamentalists have secured their share in administration after the peace agreement with Tajik government but Rakhmonov is still trying to build Tajik nationalism by stressing on the Tajik national identity and quoting their Avestan ancestry. But Islamic opposition is a major challenge for him (Chatterjee, 2004:220).

While Central Asian republics have acted by banning Islamic fundamentalist parties. But efforts need to be made to include Islamic practices in culture and social sphere and a complete ban on Islamic political activity. At the same time while promoting democracy and pluralism focus should be on the economic development of the country and seeking international cooperation with like-minded countries like India to counter the threat of Islamic militancy and religious extremism. Increasing religious extremism supported by

same external actors in Central Asia and Afghanistan which are India's extended neighborhoods results in cross-border terrorism and separatism and thus impairing the internal security of India. It is against all these developments, religious extremism is a real threat to both Tajikistan and India and closer defense and security relations between the two countries are the manifestation of these mutual concerns and deeper engagements are required, given the fact that this menace continues to haunt both countries.

Religious revivalism resulting in Islamic radicalization and terrorism and developments in Afghanistan worried both Tajikistan and India. Instability in Afghanistan after the fall of Soviet-backed Kabul regime to Mujahideen supported by Pakistan and other Islamic countries had serious repercussions to the regional security of both Central and South Asia. Thus common concerns related to security and stability made the two countries to seek closer cooperation with each other. While Tajikistan's internal security is central to stability in Central Asian republics, at the same time peace and stability in Afghanistan is central to both Central and South Asia. Afghanistan conflict had an adverse impact on the Tajik civil war and is threatening the internal security of Tajikistan after the civil war. The roots of problems like cross-border terrorism, extremism and separatism go not only to Pakistan but Afghanistan also and thus stability and peace is vital for both country and closer cooperation with countries in and around Afghanistan is needed. For that matter Tajikistan was a bright spot to cooperate with along with other Central Asian and CIS countries (Gulshan, 2015:200). Mujahideen were the main supporter of Tajik Islamic extremists groups and were the factor behind worsening civil war conflict in Tajikistan. At the same time these very groups with their domestic players like Hizb-ul-Mujahideen with Pakistani support has been at the forefront in supporting Islamic militants to wage Jihad in Indian state of Kashmir leading to the mass killings and exodus of Kashmiri minority community from Kashmir valley in the early nineties.

Afghan situation and rising threat of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in the region played an important role in shaping Indo-Tajik relations. Indian perceptions about closer cooperation with Central Asian countries especially with Tajikistan were radically transformed with the fall of Kabul to Pakistan-backed Taliban in 1996 and also due to fear of escalated cross-border terrorism in the Indian state of Kashmir (Singh, 2003:200). Pakistan, frustrated with its failure of installing an Islamic regime in Afghanistan via Mujahideen's and also the failure of Pakistan-Turkic and Iranian influence over Central Asian regime for so-called Islamic grouping, now made desperate

attempt by creating Taliban to seek strategic depth in Central and South Asia (Asopa, 2003:185). The renowned scholar Sheel K. Asopa rightly contends:

“After the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Pakistan’s strategy in Afghanistan changed, as it was now concentrating on stabilizing its hold through the Taliban-run government. The mujahidin were diverted to India’s borders to indulge in sabotaging activities against its defense forces and border security guards and promote insurgency in the state of Jammu and Kashmir through local sympathizers. Pakistan’s policy towards India and Afghanistan was inter-linked. Tajikistan also became an additional target of that policy. In the post-Soviet period, Pakistan increased its support for Tajik Islamists in their war against the government in Dushanbe”.

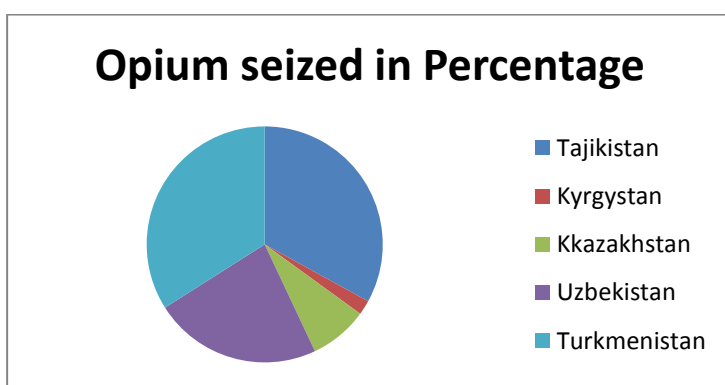
Thus these developments in and around both countries provided much-needed impetus to the much deeper bilateral engagements especially in defense and security dimensions between the two countries. Taliban turned Afghanistan into a breeding ground for terrorist groups like IMU and also sponsoring cross-border terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir thus impairing the internal security of both countries. The rise of evil Taliban to full power in 1996 and its political fallout threatened internal security of India as well as CIS countries especially those bordering Afghanistan. It became crucial to maintain contact with the legitimate government (Rabbani government) of Afghanistan and to deliver material and humanitarian assistance to Northern Alliance. India started searching for a partner in this work and Tajikistan was the bright spot to cooperate with.

Indian engagements with Tajikistan start with the support to Northern Alliance commander, Ahmad Shah Masood, primarily in the form of humanitarian assistance as well as goods, materiel and intelligence support. Though economic ties and bilateral trade were not significant, India started to strategically engage more with Central Asian republics bordering Afghanistan and Tajikistan in particular. Tajikistan besides providing India a route to deliver material and intelligence support to the Northern Alliance, also facilitated Indian contact to the ethnic Tajik leadership of the Northern Alliance. India also opened a military hospital near the Tajik-Afghan border at Farkhor to treat soldiers of Northern Alliance as well as civilians and also airfields around Dushanbe for channeling military goods and humanitarian assistance to the Northern Alliance (Mullen and Prasad, 2014:2).

Taliban government was successful not just because of external support of Jehadi ideology but it used drug trade to finance its military activities successfully. This drug trade along with related crimes threatened peace and stability of the entire Central Asian region and Tajikistan in

particular, as northern route that goes to Russia and Europe passes through Tajikistan. Tajikistan being the most popular transit hub for Afghan opium, this drug trade has negative fallout like violent crimes, increased corruption and serious health implications in form of HIV/AIDS and addiction especially among youths. India too is worried about this development as this trade is the major financial source for militant organizations based in Pakistan to wage a guerrilla war against India (Dutta, 2015:285-287). Figure no. 1 clearly shows the distribution of opium seizures in 2010 where Tajikistan accounts for 33 percent of total opium seized in Central Asian countries in 2010.

Figure no. 1: Distribution of Opium Seizures, 2010



Data Source: UNODC, Annual Report, 2011

Given the porous border of 1,344 Kms with Afghanistan, largest producer of opium in world, along with ethnic and linguistic and cultural similarities between Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, wide spread poverty and unemployment on both sides, poor border management due to lack of communication infrastructure and corruption are the major reasons of virtually unhindered flow of narco trade via this route. Further migrant Tajik workers to Russia provide easy access to the Russian and European market in this trade.

Several diplomatic visits during this period of time, paved way for more active Indian role in the security and stability affairs of the region. President Rakhmonov's working visit to India in January 1999 led down the foundation of strategic cooperation between two countries and concretized the relations in the security affairs for the very cause of peace, and stability in the region that is equally important to both countries (Kumar, 2007:32).

Why India is so proactive in having bilateral cooperation with Central Asian republics especially Tajikistan can be understood by analyzing the geo-political realities of this region. Central Asia is a region with unique geo-strategic position. Given the geo-political

and geo-economic importance due to its strategic location and vast natural resources especially hydrocarbon and water and virtually untapped commercial market, soon after Soviet disintegration, both regional and international powers eyed engagements with this region to realize their respective national interests. While USA as part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces is there for their mission called 'War on Terror' and stabilizing Afghanistan, but in reality it wants to maintain military presence here given the geo-strategic position of the region. European countries eye on natural oil and gas reserves and trade potential of this region; China and Russia want to end the three evils namely drug trafficking, religious extremism and separatism elements as problems in Xinjiang (China) and Chechnya (Russia) have direct links to Central Asian and Afghanistan-based militant outfits and at the same time both want an active economic and strategic cooperation with Central Asian republics.

Indian engagements with Central Asia were delayed due to obvious reasons like the disintegration of its dependable ally, former Soviet Union and unstable domestic political and economic factors. But India was quick to recognize this delay and started active cooperation with this historical familiar region of the world. One of the main objectives of Indian foreign policy in this part of the world is to check religious extremism and militant Islamic extremism. Pakistan along with its Gulf partners has used its Islamic card to gain strategic depth in the region and for this purpose has promoted religious extremism in the form of cross-border terrorism and militant Islamic fundamentalist movements in Central and South Asia. Both Central Asian republics especially Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and India have borne the brunt of religious fundamentalist movements in disturbing internal security and stability of the region. Both India and Central Asian republics have high stakes in the security and stability of Afghanistan and for that purpose, there has been an active cooperation between the two regions. For this purpose India has signed several bilateral agreements with countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on countering terrorism, establishing Joint anti –terrorist groups, sharing intelligence and experience and conducting Joint military exercises and training of armed forces (Maytdinova,2013:37-38).

Despite once-defeated Taliban by NATO forces, it has once again started propping up and continuous support of Pakistan to this group on their territory remains a constant worry for both Tajikistan and India. While stating the 'double speak' of Pakistan on terrorism,

Vladimir Plastun, famous Russian expert of Oriental studies once remarked, “Pakistan cannot decide whether it wants to fight terrorism or encourage it as a state policy”. This clearly states the role of Pakistan agencies in jeopardizing the security and stability in the Central and South Asian region. Further, a former adviser to the USA president on the Middle East and South Asia, Bruce Riedel, is also of the same opinion about Pakistan. He contends:

“Pakistan has become the most dangerous country in the world...It is the epicenter of the global Jihadist movement that attacked New York in 2001 and Mumbai in 2008. Its weak civilian government may have good intentions but seems powerless to address the country’s multiple crises. The army remains the patron of parts of the jihadist Frankenstein even as it fights other parts of the monster. The ongoing revelation of David Hedley on the ISI’S role in Mumbai 26/11 only underscores how dangerous is Pakistan today”⁸.

What emboldens hostile Pakistan in the region is the aggressive China. China is the major player in Central Asia mainly in economic and security affairs given its direct land border connectivity with the Central Asian region. It has successfully carved out its pipeline and roads diplomacy to exploit the rich natural resources and at the same time exporting its goods to Central Asian markets. SCO Membership has further legitimized its actions in the region. Although India stands nowhere in comparison with China in fields like economy and trade but both countries have common mutual concerns regarding stability and security of the entire Central Asian region as religious fundamentalism in this part of the world provide impetus to the separatism problem in their respective Xinxiang and Jammu and Kashmir. But China’s increasing relations with Pakistan and snatching away projects from Indian companies in Central Asian countries have worried India. So, India needs new strategic partners in this context and alternative routes of connectivity to enhance cooperation with Central Asian countries especially Tajikistan to solve this geo-political reality of the time. Although SCO membership has provided legitimate strategic depth to India in Central Asian affairs but due to obvious limitations like direct land connectivity, this has not yielded the expected results.

Threats of religious extremism, terrorism and separatism coupled with volatile Afghan situation paved way for high-level diplomatic visits between Central Asian republics

⁸ Times of India, October 30, 2010.

especially Tajikistan and India, which further resulted in the enhanced cooperation especially in defense and security spheres. Approaches to security have changed from cold war traditional notion (politico-military) of security to post cold war where challenges from religious extremism to security is debated in international security discourses. As Barry Buzan contends:

“Security is about the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile. The bottom line of security is survival but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence”.

Thus security in Central and South Asian contexts must be seen through the angles of religious extremism that in some or other way paves way for terrorism and related crimes. Initial diplomatic visits between India and Central Asian republics and Tajikistan, in particular, resulted in much needed strategic cooperation along with stress on economic and trade cooperation. Although commercial relations are important to forge closer ties with any region, however increasing defense and security cooperation are seen as part of their foreign policy. Due to various increased challenges to the security and stability of both regions, these very visits along with economic cooperation paved way for cooperation in security and defense areas.

Although defense and security cooperation with Central Asian courtiers date back to the Soviet period but after the disintegration of Soviet Union, the focus was more on political relations with Central Asian states along with cooperation in trade and strategic spheres. India at that time was not using defense and military cooperation as a foreign policy tool but in recent times defense and military cooperation with South East Asian, Gulf and Central Asian countries is seen as a change in its earlier position. Defense cooperation with Central Asian countries and particularly Tajikistan is lagging behind in many sectors.

The process of defense cooperation especially with Central Asian countries starts after earlier impetus provided by strategic and security cooperation and more enhanced defense cooperation after mainly the year 2001. Today, Indian defense and security cooperation with Central Asian republics ranges from intelligence sharing, providing training and assistance, military and technical cooperation, joint military exercises to Joint Working Groups on counter-terrorism (Roy, 2013:65).

Table NO. 3: Overview of India's Defense and Military Cooperation with CARs.

Country	Formal Defense Agreement	Formal Defense Cooperation Agreement	Security Dialogue	Active Annual Cooperation Plans	Military courses	Military Exercises
Kazakhstan	No	Yes	No	No	Yes in India	No
Kyrgyzstan	No	Yes	No	No	Yes in India	No
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes in India	Yes
Uzbekistan	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Turkmenistan	No	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Bakshi, Jyotsna, *Geopolitical Dynamism of India-Tajikistan Relations*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2013, pp. 65-66.

From this table, it is clear that defense and security cooperation with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is more than other central Asian republics like Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Defense and security cooperation with Tajikistan is of special importance and seeds of that were planted via strategic cooperation sought just after its independence. Fall of Najibullah government in Kabul and vulnerability of Tajikistan and India to Mujahideen influence and later on the Taliban threat to internal security of both countries provided further impetus to cooperation in defense and security spheres.

Although many Tajik and Central Asian scholars have advocated close India–Central Asia especially Tajikistan cooperation but the same appeal coming from Northern Alliance Commander Ahmad Shah Masood clearly signals the strategic significance of India in Central Asia. He called for Indian assistance to defeat the Taliban and to check separatism and cross-border terrorism in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and to bring stability in Tajikistan and Afghanistan (Gulshan, 2015:201). In this context, visit of Tajik Prime Minister, Abdulmallick Abdullajanov in February 1993 was a starting point when both sides discussed the problems of religious extremism and cross-border terrorism sponsored by the third state to destabilize their internal security situations.

Although the first half of the nineties was not significant in terms of actual security and defense cooperation with Central Asian countries, but India's strategic role and recognition of its ability to be an active security partner in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries were well known by this time. The State visit of President of Tajikistan, Emomali Rakhmonov in December 1995 strengthened the mutual understanding regarding regional peace, security and stability between the two countries. Invitation to then Indian foreign minister, Salman Khurshid by Uzbekistan to attend a seminar on *security and cooperation in Central Asia* to discuss the proposal for peace and security in Central Asia was clear indication for more active role of India as a regional player for assisting Central Asian republics in achieving peace and security for their all-round developments (MEA, 1995). While India maintaining its firm 'No' to external interference in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, started its active cooperation especially in security and humanitarian arenas with support to the Northern Alliance.

The working visit of Tajik president to India in January 1999 and Major General Saidamir Zuhurov in April 1999 against the backdrop of vicious threats of cross-border and state sponsored terrorism, concretized Tajikistan-India relations in the realm of security. This visit led to active cooperation between relevant organizations and in sharing intelligence (Gulshan, 2015:202). These visits along with Foreign and Defense office consultations were instrumental in framing proper strategies for regional security which is a mutual concern of the both countries (MEA, 1999). During the Kargil war, role of foreign militants based in Pakistan and Afghanistan fighting for jihad against Indian state with the help of Pakistan army is clearly evident. Further due to pan-Islamic ideology, an ideological unity was consolidated between Afghan Mujahideen and Kashmir militants and later on during Taliban regime it got intensified with Pakistani support (Warikoo, 2006:16). This alarming situation of external security threat from North especially Al-Qaeda and Taliban and global attacks like 9/11 led to Indian strategic and security cooperation to active and enhanced defense cooperation With Afghanistan and Central Asian states particularly Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Setting up of a military hospital at Farkhor by Indian army to treat injured anti-Taliban resistance fighters on Tajikistan- Afghanistan border was first such physical appearance of this active cooperation that was later to be used by Indian Air Force. This was also used to supply the Northern Alliance with military equipment, ammunitions and intelligence, and also to repair its combat helicopters. By signing Defense Agreement

with Tajikistan in 2002, India upgraded Ayni airfield with the cost of 70 million US dollar that included upgrading the runway, construction of the traffic control tower and administrative buildings ultimately handing over it to the Tajik defense ministry in 2010 (Dzutsev, 2004). Although this development led to the widespread rumors of India building its first airbase in Central Asia and deploying MiG-29 fighter jets and Mi-17 multi-purpose helicopters there, but neither side confirmed about India's interest in having air base at Ayni. Many analysts observe that India was denied this access due to Russian, Chinese and Pakistani pressure on Tajik government. On the contrary Russian defense minister Sergei Ivanov on his visit to India in 2004 welcomed Indian participation in any form to aid Central Asian republics (Pandey, 2007:59). If this development comes true, it would provide 'strategic longer reach' in the Central Asian region to India and at the same time enhancing Indian role to promote stability in Afghanistan and check extremism and terrorism along with Indian access to energy resources and Central Asian markets. As Stephen Blank opines:

“The potential implications of this base go far beyond the Indo-Pakistani rivalry on the subcontinent. First of all, the Aini base is a tangible manifestation of India's move to project her power in Central Asia, a policy goal formally enunciated in 2003-2004. It is not only signifies India's determination to play a role in Central Asian security, but her genuine ability to do so”.

India's defense cooperation with Tajikistan is not limited to just revamping the airfield and having a military hospital there but with time it has expanded to a wide range of new domains. This includes sharing of information, material support and Joint military exercises. India's ties with the Tajik military have not been limited to revamping the airfield. In 2003, it conducted its first Central Asian military exercise with Tajikistan and since then military exercise between the two armed forces is one of the features of defense cooperation. This cooperation also includes training and capacity building of Tajik armed forces, Tajik officers attending Young officers' course, English language training and India also planning to assist Tajikistan to build an effective Air Force. One of the significant aspects of this defense cooperation is human resource development in the form of training young Tajik cadets at National Defense Academy, Khadakwasla. This training programme started in 1998 and since then has resulted in the increasing number of Tajik officers graduating every year from this academy. Apart from the human resource development, India has also provided military hardware and equipment like military livery, aviation suits, computers and

it also includes two Mi-8 helicopters along with critical spare parts, trucks and other vehicles. India also announced a grant to upgrade Tajik Military Institute (Gulshan, 2015:202). Thus India is committed to upgrade the defense infrastructure of Tajikistan and cooperation in the development of its human resources, especially in the defense arena.

Visit of Indian defense minister to Tajikistan in April 2002 and deputy defense minister of Tajikistan in December 2002 opened new field and prospects and reviewed the existing defense and security cooperation between the two countries. A high-level military delegation led by him discussed matters like training of Tajik defense cadets, English teaching to Tajik army and air force personnel and supplies of military equipment and spare parts. Although Tajik armed forces are small compared to that of India, but there is a possibility of cooperation in retrofitting as both armed forces use similar kinds of equipment like T-72 tanks and BMP-1 infantry combat vehicles (Roy,2013:67). Again during visits of Tajik president and Tajik Defense Minister, Indian side reviewed regional security scenario (MEA, 2001). While expressing the similarities of views on wide ranges of regional (Afghanistan issue) and international issues (international terrorism) of security and stability, the document named *Joint Declaration of Principles of Mutual Relation* called for close cooperation between two sides to fight terrorism and related crimes which in parts reads:

11. "The Sides recognize the serious threats posed to nation states and international peace and security by international terrorism, extremism and separatism, which have acquired an even more menacing dimension following the growth of linkages with drug trafficking and arms smuggling. Both countries condemn terrorism in all its forms, irrespective of political, philosophical, ideological, religious, ethnic, and racial or any other consideration that may be invoked to justify them. The Sides call on the international community to intensify its efforts to combat international terrorism and its growing linkages with drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. They reiterate their resolve to work to strengthen the international consensus and legal regimes against terrorism, including early finalization of a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

12. The Sides agree to promote close cooperation between the law enforcement agencies and other competent organs of both States with the aim of prevention of organized and transnational crimes and offenses connected with the illegal transfer of weapons, as well as the production, processing and illegal trafficking of narcotic and psychotropic substances and chemical precursors. With this objective in mind, the Republic of India and the Republic of Tajikistan have decided to conclude an

Agreement for Mutual Cooperation for Drug Demand Reduction and Prevention of Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs, Precursors and Psychotropic Substances and related matters; and an Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters"⁹.

Thus both sides called for measures like reform in United Nations Security Council, UN-sponsored Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, enhanced regional international cooperation to fight challenges of extremism and various transnational crimes and to bring peace and stability to restive Afghanistan, showing the similarity of views and approaches of India and Tajikistan to global and regional issues. And this very fact acts as an enhancer for further active cooperation especially in security and defense arenas between the two countries.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Tajikistan in November 2003 provided new impetus to closer cooperation especially in defense and security spheres. Joint Declaration *on Friendship and Cooperation between Republic of India and Republic of Tajikistan* signed during this visit provided for Establishment of Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism which reads:

“The sides noted with satisfaction the formation of a Joint Working group to combat international terrorism. They expect the group’s work will aid cooperation in combating organized crime' money laundering, illegal trafficking in weapons' ammunitions and explosives, international terrorism and other trans-national threats. In this context, they reiterated that terrorism cannot be justified on any ground whatsoever. Terrorism is an attack on the human rights and civil liberties of the citizens of the world. It must be condemned unambiguously and eradicated wherever it exists. The sides also condemned the supporters of terrorism and those that finance, train or provide support for terrorists.

The sides were pleased to note the steady progress in defense exchanges and the intent to further intensify relations in this area in the future”.

Along with the signing of several other important agreements to combating terrorism and expanding cooperation in defense and other strategic areas, the signing of extradition treaty was another milestone in the security cooperation between two countries. The joint declaration signed by former Prime Minister Vajpayee and Tajik President Rakhmonov during former's visit to Tajikistan in November 2003 clearly stated that both sides are satisfied by the progress in defense cooperation and both sides intend to take this progress

⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, India

further (MEA, 2004). Indian Prime Minister announcing infrastructural assistance to Military Training College in Dushanbe also said that, “We are cooperating well in the field of defense training. We have agreed to institutionalize contacts between our armed forces in specialized areas.”

Tajik President while acknowledging the existing level of defense cooperation between two countries declared "I would like to state for the record that we will continue military co-operation between the two countries in all areas". These statements of two leaders hint towards the growing security and defense cooperation between two strategically located countries (Pandey, 2007: 52). As defense cooperation is just a part of wider security and strategic cooperation and given the fact that Both Tajikistan and India are faced with a wide range of international terrorism, extremism, and narcotic trafficking, both need to be more proactive in dealing with common security challenges. It was against this backdrop that the First meeting of India-Tajikistan Joint Working Group on international terrorism was held in Dushanbe in January 2006 and second in August 2006 in New Delhi. (MEA, 2004-2005).

Closer bilateral or multilateral security dialogue and active defense cooperation with friendly countries remain an important objective and component of India's overall defense and foreign policies. These have been reinforced by the major changes that have taken place in recent years in the global security and regional security, political and strategic environment. The emergence of international terrorism, as one of the primary threats to regional and international security, has brought likeminded countries together and has led to closer security and defense exchanges and cooperation. These have also taken the form of increased defense diplomacy in the form of high-level defense and security related visits. It is against these backdrops that high-level defense and diplomatic visits have resulted in defense cooperation with countries like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the form of training exchanges, combined exercises, development, production and marketing of defense equipment, and military and technical cooperation. Visits of Defense Minister of Tajikistan, S. Khairulloev visiting India in January 2005, Indian Army chief, General V.K Singh visiting Tajikistan in November 2010, Air Marshal Kishen Kumar Nakhor leading a delegation in August 2011 and Minister of Defense, A.K Antony visiting Dushanbe in October, 2011 provided for more enhanced defense cooperation between the two countries along with fruitful dialogue on regional and international issues and threats of mutual concerns (MEA, 2012-2013).

The continuous worsening situation in Afghanistan and the resurgence of Taliban, Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups since 2006 constituted a threat to the stability of the entire South and Central Asian region. Taliban attack on Indian embassy in 2009 and at home terrorist attack on the financial capital of India, Mumbai in 2008 and involvement of Pakistani in both kinds of attacks led to more engagement in security and defense front with the countries of Central and South Asia. Isolating and seeking punitive actions against countries sponsoring terrorism became crucial for India. And for this matter Indian cooperation was only to be greater with Afghanistan and countries bordering Afghanistan especially Tajikistan to secure and protect its interests in the region and the continuous defense engagement with Tajikistan was one of the ways of doing all these. Against these backdrops, the state visit of Tajik President in 2006 and again in 2012 and that of Indian President and Vice President's visits in 2009 and 2013 assumes significance. Dialogue on regional security and stability and cooperation in defense arenas was the main point of these talks. However, 2012 state visit of Tajik President is of more significance given the fact that bilateral ties rose to a new level of strategic partnership of which cooperation in the areas of defense, counter-terrorism is an integral part. Tajikistan is the third Central Asian country to sign such agreement with India, first two being Kazakhstan (2009) and Uzbekistan (2011). Another important feature of defense cooperation between the two countries was that of the establishment of Joint Working Group on Defense Cooperation to speed up cooperation and identifying new and potential areas of cooperation and removing technical bottlenecks in the bilateral cooperation in this area. Its first meeting was held in Tajikistan from in 2012, co-chaired by the joint secretary on the Indian side. The second and third meetings of the India-Tajikistan Joint Working Group (JWG) on Defense were held in India in March 2013 and March 2014 respectively (Ministry of Defense, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014). In 2003, New Delhi conducted its first Central Asian military exercise with Tajikistan. The Joint Special Forces exercise was held between the Armies of India and Tajikistan in 2013 in India. Further, SCO Membership to India has added a new dimension to bilateral engagements and it provides India a legitimate platform to play more proactive role in Central Asian affairs especially in security and defense cooperation and giving strategic depth to some extent against China-Pakistan axis in the region.

India's defense and security cooperation with Central Asia received significant momentum with Indian Prime Minister's visit to Central Asian republics in 2015. India signed Defense

Agreement with countries like Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and Defense and Military Technical Cooperation Agreement with Kazakhstan, India also agreed to step up cooperation with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in defense and counter-terrorism matters. Major General Satinder Kumar Saini visited Tajikistan with a delegation from National Defense College (NDC) in May 2015. Defense cooperation between India and Tajikistan progressed well with Fourth and Fifth Joint Working Group on Defense Cooperation was held in New Delhi and Tajikistan in April 2015 and November 2016 respectively (MEA, 2015-16).

Although most of Central Asia especially of Tajikistan tour of Indian Prime Minister was devoted to more economic and human resource development matters, military and security ties got somewhat less attention. But it is clear that this region occupies a greater place in India's geopolitical imagination and enhanced defense and military cooperation are here to stay for longer period of time. This is clearly reflected in the press statement of Indian Prime Minister during the state visit of Tajikistan president in December 2016 in which he said:

“We appreciate Tajikistan’s role in the Central Asian region as a mainstay against forces of extremism, radicalism, and terrorism. President Rahmon and I agreed today to strengthen action on this front based on mutually agreed priorities. We will do this on multiple levels –

through reinforcing overall bilateral security cooperation;

through greater training, capacity building and information exchanges; and,

through active coordination in regional and multilateral contexts”.

Further, signing of MOU related to cooperation in the exchange of financial intelligence related to money laundering, related crimes and financing of terrorism also points to the continued progress in defense and security arenas.

Need for deeper cooperation in strategic, security and defense

Soon after the disintegration of Soviet Union, Central Asia became important from geo-strategic and political angles and further given the abundance of rich natural resources especially energy resources, it became the fertile ground for regional and global powers seeking their political and economic interest in the region. However, given the poor infrastructure and lack of connectivity and unsupportive authoritarian regimes in the Central Asian republics, this region remained a low profile in international arenas. But the rise of

Taliban in Afghanistan and USA war on terror after 9/11 twin tower bombings, brought this region again in the limelight. The rise of terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking and related crimes in the region pose a serious threat to not only regional security and stability of Central Asian republics but also regional and international security. Further, new challenges like emergence of new radical Islamist groups like ISIS, rise in cross-border and state sponsored terrorism, withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and resurging Taliban, Al-Qaeda and extremist groups coupled with fast changing geo-political global power equations and security environment necessitates in this new security environment, cooperation among Central Asian republics as well with regional countries including India.

Firstly, a stable Afghanistan is imperative for the peace and security of both Central and South Asian region. The Afghanistan factor which is the mutual security concern for both India and Tajikistan, played a key role in bringing two countries together especially in security and defense cooperation. Both India and Tajikistan cooperated in supporting Northern Alliance against Pakistan-sponsored Taliban. Toady in the wake of foreign troops withdrawal from Afghanistan and resurgent Taliban along with other extremist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda are posing serious security threats to both Central and South Asian and regional countries especially Iran , Afghanistan, India, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which have faced the brunt of cross-border and state-sponsored extremism and terrorism. All these countries need to cooperate to eliminate these threats and to seek stability in Afghanistan. Security scenario has worsened in Afghanistan in last few years and now Taliban and other extremist groups control almost half of its territories. In this regard, protecting religious and other national minorities like Sikhs, Hindus, Tajiks and Shia Hazaras from the wrath of Pashtun-dominated Taliban and other Sunni radicals like ISIS and Al Qaeda is crucial for both India and Tajikistan. This cooperation needs to be strengthened further as India is working on several humanitarian and developmental projects in Afghanistan. Recent attacks by Pakistan supported Haqqani Network on such Indian projects and establishments like attacks on embassy and diplomats have resulted in huge human and material loss for India. With volatile Afghanistan situation having a direct bearing on the internal security of both countries, India can consider the deployment of Indian troops there and support of Tajikistan is crucial in this regard for material and logistic supplies.

Secondly, Pakistan is continuing with its dirty war of promoting cross-border terrorism in India seeking to destabilize the government in neighboring Afghanistan and spreading and

religious extremism in the region. Many regional countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Iran along with the victims of state sponsored terrorism like Afghanistan and India face security threats due to this. What is worse is that China is continuously supporting it even on matters of terrorism. For example, it is continuously blocking Indian request of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar being declared as a UN-designated terrorist. Apart from this, China is continuously deepening its economic and political clout in Afghanistan and Central Asian region via its cheap exports and pipeline diplomacy. China's growing economic and strategic ties with the Central Asia are further turning into military cooperation as well. The Chinese military exercise with Tajikistan in 2017 is certainly a wakeup call for India. This China-Pakistan axis in the form of large-scale economic and strategic engagements like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is proving a worrying matter for India. As Indian Army Chief, General Bipin Rawat (2017) argues that in order to effectively counter the two and half dirty war (referring to tensions with China and Pakistan and internal security challenges like Naxalism and insurgencies in North-East Indian states), India needs to find more strategic partners and deepen its relations with neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asian republics namely Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. This statement finds merit in the wake of rising cross-border infiltrations and terrorism coupled with the rise in local militancy in the Indian state of Kashmir especially after Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani's death and local protests to support the militants. Tajikistan is also facing the same challenges of extremism. The defection of a top Tajik police officer, Gulmurod Khalimov to ISIS in 2015 shows that even educated Tajik youths are very much prone falling prey to forces of extremism and thus bringing instability in the country. With radical Islam posing serious threats to predominantly Muslim majority Afghanistan and Central Asian republics and India with its considerable Muslim population and being in their neighborhood needs to engage in counter terrorism and military cooperation with Central Asian republics. Russia equally fears all these worrisome trends and Indo-Russian pro-activeness to fight extremism, separatism and terrorism in the neighboring Afghanistan and the Central Asian region as a whole would add a new dimension to Indian defense and security cooperation with Central Asian republics particularly Tajikistan.

Thirdly, last few years have seen a change in the geo-political equations of the world. With more assertive Russia in world affairs as have been seen especially seen in Ukraine crisis, aggressive China and hostile Pakistan, the India has seen its developing relations with the

United States. But this has its own fallout like Russia conducting its first ever military exercise with Pakistan and a possible formation of Russia-China-Pakistan axis which may certainly threaten Indian outreach to the Central Asian region. Russian support is crucial for India to remain an important player in the region. Although Indian membership to SCO provides it a chance to raise its political and economic clout in the region but entry to the organization like Dushanbe Four which is a Tajik initiative to counter narco trade and promoting economic cooperation and sharing electricity can significantly add a new dimension to Indo-Tajik security and economic cooperation. Further, India and Tajikistan need to cooperate at regional and global multilateral platforms. In this regard, Tajikistan supports permanent Indian membership at United Nations Security Council and supports Indian demand of conducting Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to define terrorism and showing the world that there is no good or bad terrorism. India reciprocated by supporting Tajik membership to World Trade Organization.

India is pursuing a well-coordinated defense and security policy as part of its foreign policy with Tajikistan since the emergence of extremist Taliban and the rise of state-sponsored terrorism of the 1990s. But general observation has been that India's has been reluctant to expand its geo-political profile in the Central Asian region and Tajikistan in particular in comparison with regional players like Iran and China. And further, just one-way cooperation in defense and security has its own limitations. Tajikistan needs to reciprocate Indian eagerness to become the major security and defense partner of the country by providing it access to use Ayni airbase and other similar projects. What is worth mentioning in the relationship of two countries is the fact that both are strategic partner to each other and recognize the centrality of each other in maintaining peace and stability in Central and South Asia. During Tajik president's visit in 2016, India regarded Tajikistan as a major mainstay against the forces of terrorism and extremism and Tajikistan recognizes Indian participation as imperative for the security, stability, and development of the entire region.

Chapter: 5

Conclusion

Tajikistan-India relations are shaped by shared history, culture and civilizational links. And in modern times, these ties are driven by convergence of geo-political concerns and interests and also similarity of world views, a high level of mutual trust and confidence and their commitment to build a modern secular, pluralist and democratic polity. Since the inception of Tajikistan as an independent sovereign state in 1991, bilateral relations between Tajikistan and India in diplomatic, economic, defense and security spheres have progressed well but not to its full potential. Indian inability to come out of the shock of the sudden break up of Soviet Union coupled with domestic economic and political turbulences and also the Tajik civil war delayed the much-needed cooperation with this strategically located historical friend. However, India could not afford to remain a shy power in the region when regional and global powers were seeking their footprints in this region. India woke up when the Taliban took over Afghanistan and this moved the two countries closer due to mutual concerns about its spillover effects on the internal security and stability of both countries. This development along with global events like 9/11 resulted in high-level diplomatic visits between the two countries. Tajik President's state visits in 1995, 2001 and 2006 sowed the seeds of vibrant development partnership and mutual understanding on security and stability of the region. Each visit was instrumental in shaping bilateral ties in new dimensions. Indian Prime Minister's visit in 2003 laid down the framework for mutual geo-strategic cooperation in the region while Tajik President's Visit in 2012 elevated bilateral partnership to the level of long-term strategic partnership. Measures like Establishment of Joint Working Group on Terrorism, Defense and India-Tajikistan Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation along with several business forums were instrumental in taking bilateral ties forward in the fields of security, defense and trade spheres. Military hospital at Farkhor, upgradation of Ayni airbase and Varzob-1 hydropower plant, fruit processing plant and IT Centre of Excellence in Dushanbe and other several humanitarian aid and development grants with training and scholarship to Tajik students and defense personnel under ITEC and ICCR are some of the visible features of this development partnership. Tajikistan reciprocated by supporting permanent Indian membership at United Nations Security Council. It also

supports Indian demand of conducting Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to define terrorism and showing the world that there is no good or bad terrorism. It also supported Indian entry to regional organizations like SCO. Thus these diplomatic visits brought the two countries closer than ever in trade, defense, security, human resource development and humanitarian and development cooperation.

With India and Tajikistan celebrating 25 years of establishment of diplomatic relations, bilateral ties have progressed well and that too in a friendly manner but certainly not to the level that was expected when Tajikistan emerged as an independent country on the world map in 1991. But the obvious questions that come to one's mind is that despite being geographical and historical neighbors, with similarities and convergence of mutual interests and threat perceptions and desire on both sides to seek alternative routes of connectivity and developing trade relations in many new potential areas and elevating strategic partnership between two countries to a new level, why we are still distant neighbors? Why did India fail to be a prominent player and proactive in its diplomacy in the Central Asian region and for that matter Tajikistan, the nearest Central Asian republic. Last but not the least why there is more pessimism than optimism? The Tajik dissatisfaction is still relevant. As early as in 1994, Tajik Foreign Minister, Rashid Alimov said, "Indian response has been lower than expected." But certainly this needs to be corrected. Simply stating that there are some obvious hurdles that are stopping our bilateral relationship to reach its full potential would be just an Indian way of neglecting pressing questions. What is required are the concerted efforts from both sides to understand various dimensions and factors behind these constraints and political and bureaucratic will to redeem those hurdles. Both countries need to recognize the centrality of each other. India needs to be proactive in its diplomatic efforts to secure its strategic and economic interests by being the major development participant in Tajikistan and continuing developing strategic, security and defense cooperation. But these ties need to be sustained and further strengthened. In this regard, Singh (2003) points out that "The ancient tradition of the Great Silk Route which united these people who lived in peace and prosperity during the Kushan Age known for its spirit of religious tolerance, cultural pluralism rather than the competitive spirit of the New Great Game, should serve as a guide for the leadership of our people in the present time".

Being the third largest economic power, India is making new strides in economic growth

and is an emerging economic and political power in the world. It is the hub of present-day industrial, agriculture and information technology infrastructure in the world. But the question is, has this status of major emerging economic and political power made any real impact in the Central Asian region in general and Tajikistan in particular in the wake of overemphasis on shared past? And, the answer is a big no. India has failed to be a major economic partner for Tajikistan and this has also cost it dearly in its efforts to raise its strategic and political profile in the region. The distance between Indian capital, New Delhi and Tajikistan capital, Dushanbe is much less than it is between New Delhi and Mumbai or Chennai. The point is direct land connectivity hurdle is the biggest thorn in the ties of two countries especially in the spheres of trade and economic cooperation. Imperialistic territorial and natural resources ambitions coupled with power rivalry separated the historically connected regions of South and Central Asia. Indian independence followed by occupation of part of Indian Kashmir by newly created artificial state named Pakistan and which is now denying transit access has completely put a stoppage to the direct land connectivity between the two regions with catastrophic implications for otherwise great potential of trade and economic relations between two countries. What India needs to realize is that the same power and resource rivalry in the present day in the form of New Great Game is being played in both Central and South Asia, which is impairing the already volatile security and stability in the both regions. India has to be proactive in building alternative routes of connectivity and in its diplomatic efforts to remain politically and strategically relevant in this region. And participating via economic cooperation, aid and Indian private sector investment in the development of Tajik economy is the best way to do that.

What we have seen in the 25 years of bilateral relations between the two countries is that diplomatic efforts have yielded results in enhancing India geo-political profile in Central Asia and Tajikistan for that matter but cooperation in trade and economic spheres still continues to suffer. Despite several major agreements and bilateral treaties like Agreement for Bilateral Investment Protection, Air Services Agreement and Agreement on Long-term Cooperation in Trade, Economic and Industry and institutional arrangements like setting up of an Indo-Tajik Joint Commission for Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation and business forums and even after their several rounds of meetings, bilateral trade continues to be stagnant and there is huge

trade imbalance as well. There are several administrative, structural and connectivity issues that are holding back the two countries to realize their full trade potential. There is the untapped potential of trade and economic cooperation between resource rich Tajikistan and technical capability of India. Tajikistan is a landlocked country, with Uzbekistan blocking its goods, Pakistan denying Indian access to its markets. Import of cheap and low-quality Chinese goods and services have an adverse impact on its local industry. So Tajikistan presently needs an alternative route to market its goods and services as well as receive technical support to enhance the competitive nature of its manufacturing units. Here, Indian cooperation becomes obvious which in return may fulfill to secure its energy security by tapping the vast hydel resources of Tajikistan. Further, as it is generally observed that poverty breeds extremism. Parts of Southern Tajikistan like Ferghana Valley and Gorno—Badakhsan region are more prone to extremism emanating from neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan. Indian cooperation especially in the form of building infrastructure for mountain tourism, technological and scientific cooperation in agriculture, animal husbandry and related activities can significantly generate viable income sources for local Pamiri Tajik people and thus ensuring stability in the region which is central to larger South Asian peace and stability. However, challenges are numerous in doing this but potential opportunities for bilateral cooperation outweigh them. With Tajikistan joining WTO and some recent structural reforms in Tajik economic and improvement in investment and banking facilities and the establishment of direct air links between two countries signal good prospects in trade ties in the coming years. Tajikistan further needs to ease strict Visa procedure for Indian businessmen and easing tariffs norms for setting up of joint ventures and investment projects. There is lack of information about each other's economic and trade potential and electronic and print media can significantly bring change in this situation. Indian private sector setting up joint business ventures there might result in enhanced cooperation between the two countries. Alternative routes of connectivity and improving the transport, communication and logistic infrastructure of existing routes are the need of the hour. Cheap and viable transport connectivity can significantly increase the economic and trade cooperation and people to people contacts. In this regard, India needs to make much effort in the completion of already delayed North-South Transport Corridor at the same time seeking direct land connectivity to the region by concerted diplomatic and legal efforts. India's role in human resource

development and development and humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan is appreciable. This has resulted in boosting capacity in IT, energy and education in Tajikistan. But this pace needs to be increased further to acquire the goodwill of people and strategic outreach in the region. Establishing additional fruit and vegetable processing plants, setting up of language centers, and supplying machinery for agriculture and enhancing cooperation in hydropower and solar energy, space and tourism are well on the bilateral agendas of two countries.

In the wake of volatile Afghanistan situation and escalation of cross-border terrorism situation in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s, India started defense cooperation with Tajikistan in order to counter state-sponsored terrorism, extremism and separatism. It is the most vibrant aspect of bilateral cooperation between the two countries and has been consistently growing in newer areas. But, just one-way cooperation in defense and security has its own limitations. Tajikistan needs to reciprocate Indian eagerness to become the major security and defense partner of the country by providing it access to use Ayni airbase and other similar projects. Indian and Tajik diplomatic proactiveness is required to take Russia in confidence to make it a reality. What is important to note here is that similar kind of security situation has arisen in the extended neighborhood of India. With the new challenge like emergence of new radical Islamist groups like ISIS, rise in cross-border and state sponsored terrorism, withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and resurgent Taliban, Al-Qaeda and extremist groups coupled with fast changing geo-political global power equations and security environment necessitates deeper defense and security cooperation between Tajikistan, Afghanistan and India. Pakistan is continuing with its old tactics of sponsoring cross-border terrorism to disturb peace and stability in Afghanistan and India. Non-state actors like Haqqani Network and Taliban and other militant groups sponsored by Pakistan are continuously attacking Indian humanitarian and development projects in the region in order to curb growing Indian influence in Afghanistan and Central Asian republics. Apart from India and Afghanistan, countries like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran are also suffering from the terrorism emanating from Pakistan-based terror camps. India needs to formulate a proper action plan to take these countries on board to united stand against state-sponsored terrorism and diplomatic efforts to isolate Pakistan over this. With the formation of the hostile China-Pakistan axis through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that violates India's

territorial integrity, India needs to pursue a well-coordinated defense and security policy as part of its foreign policy with regional and global powers like Russia and USA. Although in the case of Central Asia and for that matter Tajikistan, India is doing this since the emergence of extremist Taliban and the rise of state-sponsored terrorism in the 1990s. But general observation has been that India has been reluctant to expand its geo-political profile in the Central Asian region and Tajikistan in particular in comparison with regional players like Iran and China. What is worth mentioning in the relationship of two countries is the fact that both are strategic partner to each other and recognize the centrality of each other in maintaining peace and stability in Central and South Asian region. During Tajik president's visit in 2016, India regarded Tajikistan as a major mainstay against the forces of terrorism and extremism and Tajikistan recognizes Indian participation imperative for the security, stability and development of the entire region. Capitalizing on this mutual trust, confidence and goodwill and building deeper development partnerships will certainly bode well for India's broader aspirations in energy-rich Central Asia in general and strategically located Tajikistan in particular.

To sum up, emphasis on having close historical, cultural, and civilizational and trade ties between the two countries needs to be matched by significant improvement in economic and trade relations. Proactive diplomacy is the need of the hour to address the vital issues of connectivity, ensuring stability, security and peace in the region along with economic prosperity via human resource development, shared knowledge and innovation. Both countries need to build a long-term strategy and secure their national interests by curbing the menace of separatism, cross-border terrorism and religious extremism. There are immense opportunities and challenges before the two countries, but sustained and close cooperation in diplomatic, trade, defense and security arenas will certainly move the relations between the two countries to new heights. As Bedil, the Tajik poet urged, "The Sea of time and place, for you, is but one gulp limit, not your boundless imagination".

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