

**REGIONAL SECURITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: ROLE OF
INDIA, 1996-2016**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "**Regional Security in Central Asia: Role of India, 1996 - 2016**" submitted by me in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for other degree of this University or any other University.

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I Dedicated My Work to Affectionate

Family

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Figure1:- Map of Central Asia.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquire Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AQ	Al-Qaeda
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CENTCOM	Central Command (United States)
CEPA	Compressive Economic Partnership Agreement
CICA	Conference on Interaction & Confidence-building Measures in Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CRS	Congress Research Service
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DISAM	Direct Indexed Sequential Access Method
DoD	Department of Defence
DPMB	Defence Pacts and Military Blocs
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific
ETIM	East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union
EurasEC	Eurasian Economic Community
FATA	Federally Administered Tribal Areas
GUUAM	Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HT	Hizb ut-Tahrir
IFRI	French Institute for International Relations

IMU	Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IPI	Iran-Pakistan-India
IPT	Islamic Party of Turkmenistan
IRNA	Islamic Republic News Agency
IRP	Islamic Revival Party
ISAF	International Security Assistance force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
IWRCC	Interstate Water Resources Coordination Committee
JKLF	Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front
JUI	Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam
JWG	Joint Working Group
LEMOA	Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
NA	Northern Alliance
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty of Organisation
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NDN	Northern Distribution Network
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
NSG	Nuclear Supplier Group
NWFP	North-West Frontier Province
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Conference
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PFP	Partnership for Peace
PKK	Kurdish Workers Party
POK	Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

PRC	People of Republic China
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RPF	Rapid Reaction Force
RSC	Regional Security Complex
RSCT	Regional Security Complex Theory
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Pipeline
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Front
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UPA	United Progressive Alliance
USS	United States Ship
USSID	United States Signals Intelligence
USSR	United Soviet Socialist Republic
UTO	United Tajikistan Opposition
XUAR	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

Chapter-1

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Regional Security

Introduction

Regional security plays a very significant and paramount role in the contemporary world politics. It has been long recognised that the concept of security is very essentially and a contested. There is no term that is as uncertain and unstable as “security”. The end of the Cold War rendered the settled, hegemonic understanding of security questionable and vulnerable to contestation. This traditional understanding was defined by Stephen Walt as the “threat to use and control of military force”. It translated into security for states against threats posed to them largely by other states (Mutimer, Grayson and Bejer, 2013). Much of early critical work in security studies demonstrated the politics of this concept of security; who it worked for and who it worked against. These was subsequently two ways of understanding; the first explored the way in which security came to be understood and practised and with what effects and the second in terms of the form of security that were masked or actively opposed to be the dominant understanding. Prior to 2001, the discussion on security was dominated by the understanding of security as state centric, military security. While a range of alternative understandings was being developed they were articulated exclusively in relation to the conventional conception. The event 9/11 and more importantly the decisions taken in response to these events fundamentally altered the terrain of contest over security (Sengupta 2014:1).

While concerns have assumed salience across the globe, Afghanistan’s proximity of Central Asia has meant that the security or perception of insecurity dominates the strategic discourses in the region. Issues that stand out include the challenges that the Central Asian states will face in term of stability, ethnic tensions and radicalisation of youth, destabilisation of commodity flows and energy security. The impact that these could have on Central Asian society. However, security cannot just be defined in terms of security at the borders. It needs to be defined in ‘cosmopolitan’ terms by any array of issues like movements across the borders, radicalism within states, the sharing of water and various multilateral attempts at combating insecurity (Burke, 2013).

This study focuses on the relevance of Central Asia from regional security perspective and examines how India and Central Asian states responded to security threats and challenges from 1996 to 2016. Regional security is one of the most important concepts and trends in contemporary international politics in which sovereign states come together and make collective response towards regional threats and challenges. The concept of regional security has become significant since it helps in minimizing threats in the region as well as seeks to provide regional security mechanisms to deal with such impending threats. With regional security mechanisms, states may succeed in managing ethnic, communal, sub-national and socio-economic tensions which often result in conflict situations in the region. There exists an assumption that a regional security mechanism can be evolved within the regional community appropriate to deal with conflicts whenever it occurs. The regional security mechanism seeks special power and responsibility to provide security to the region, which can bring stability in the region and secure the states from the traditional and non-traditional threats.

In the era of globalization, international community is interdependent. Lack of security in one state has its implications for overall security in the rest of the world community. To this extent, therefore, regional security will bring about fulfilling the collective interest of diverse regional actors. Regional security system is inextricably intertwined with the security of international system. The idea of regional security can be placed within the framework of international or global security and national or local security. It appears easier to achieve national and state level security but in an interconnected world that is not enough. Security at the regional level becomes the key issue.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a very significant or milestone event in the international scenario. Due to collapse of the USSR, the consequences for the world politics included end of the Cold War, no more ideological conflict among states and shift from multi-polar world to unipolar world and so on. The most important result was that in 1991 five new independent in Central Asian Republics - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan- came to existence. They have fundamentally changed the strategic configuration of the wider Central Asian regions and are attracting close international attention. The region today finds itself as subject of focus both in terms

of external interest as well as ongoing internal potential. The region's strategic re-emergence is compelling everybody to think about who will control this region next, following Mackinder's thesis of "he who controls the heartland, controls the world". After Central Asia's emergence in the post-Soviet period, the implications of geo-strategic upheaval could not be predicted with any certainty at that beginning (Jonson and Allison, 2001).

The context of regional security and stability in Central Asia was directly connected to the process of the formation of the nation state. The Central Asian states have already begun the process of developing regional security mechanism. Initially, it was bound to be by trial and error. Each step ahead revealed new problems. The people of Central Asia have not attained the status of advanced states so there were challenge. During the Soviet era, sovereign authority was centralized in Moscow. But at present, with the formation of civil society and political statehood in Central Asia, progress has been made towards mutual interdependence (Dononbaev, 2000). Since the emergence of the independent Central Asian states and disintegration of Soviet Union, there have been wide deliberations over developing a regional security mechanism for the Central Asian region. In this regard, the issues of regional security play a leading role in the foreign policies of the states of Central Asia after independence due to various factors.

At the time of collapse of Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries did not possess adequate resource to maintain their stability and security in the region. The Political, military and also economic stability and prosperity have been largely determined by the external powers such as Russia, West and China. They have played a significant role in the international systems of regional security. In this regards, major powers such as Russia, China and the United States have contributed significantly to the emergence of regional security architecture. These major power's contributions can insure the long term security and stability in the region. However, rivalry between these three major powers on the issue of regional security in Central Asian has also surfaced. The sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the new states of Central Asia have changed the entire geopolitical, economic and security landscape of Eurasia (Roy, 2009).

The Central Asia region had experienced some intense inter-ethnic clashes immediately preceding to independence. Growing ethno-nationalism combined with religious revivalism resulted in large-scale migration of Slavs from Russia to Central Asia. According to Patnaik, the security threats to independent statehood came not just from that endangered internal instability, but also from heightened insecurity from external threats. Along with the feeling of intense happiness and excitement of independence, there was a certain degree of vulnerability on economic and military weakness which added to the complex security problems of Central Asia. The region acquired not only immense geopolitical implication but also experienced a power vacuum. As a result, Central Asia region became crucial to the security of many states, huge and small. The anxiety of some adversary filling the vacuity impelled neighbouring states to pursue influence in the region. Russia, China and India were bothered about the possible threats to their internal stability emanating from Central Asia. Other sides, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Pakistan were excited to gain maximum influence at the cost of their regional rivals. Regional rivalries were getting mixed up with various forms of religious radicalism. This resulted in making the region very volatile (Patnaik 2016: 35-36).

Security scenario of the Central Asia region, according to Patnaik, has evolved through three stages. The first period (1990-96) was till the mid-nineties before the upcoming of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. During this period, though Central Asian states were component of the Commonwealth of Independent States and its security complex, they sought to strengthen their relation with Islamic states. The second period (1996-2001) includes the Taliban years in Afghanistan. This period, Russia became the major security sponsor of Central Asian states, and continued the anti-Taliban front with support from states like Tajikistan, India and Iran. India faced with the acceleration of cross-border terrorism originating from Pakistan and Afghanistan, was looking at Central Asia as a region with which its security interests converged. Third stage started since 11 September 2001 terrorist attack in the United States. USA and Russia enlarged their foot prints in the region. Central Asia is protected from external threats by strong security cover provided by these two military superpowers (Patnaik, 2005).

The regional security system in Central Asian is very significant for the security and stability from Indian perspective. There is a common security threat that the Central Asian states share with Indian counterpart. Rising cross border terrorism, supported by the Taliban forces, sponsored by international terrorist groups and sustained by drug money, Chinese influence in Central Asia through SCO and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), internal and external instability in Central Asia, Islamic extremism and illegal drugs trafficking, are the biggest challenges for both sides. Therefore, there has been strengthening of their engagement over regional security issues for promoting peace and stability.

Evolution of the Concept of Regional Security

In order to analyse and understand the evolution of regional security it would be essential to deliberate upon the idea of security. Initially, security, (Latin: *securus* and *secura*) was referred by Cicero and Lukrez as “philosophical and psychological status of mind and it was used since 1st century as a key political context of Pax Romana” (Brauch, 2003).

Though it is directly linked to the process of the formation of the nation state in Europe in the 17th Century, the concept of the security can be drawn back to the ideas of Hobbes, Lock, and Rousseau, who advocated the "Social Contract Theory" in order to root out the supposed insecurity prevailing in the 'State of Nature'. Later, the idea of national security became relevant. The concept of security that emerged in the writings of Machiavelli's text, (*The Prince*; 1513) was equated with territorial defence (Barnett 2001: 25).

However, Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 was significant for development of the concept of national security, which initiated the demise of the church as the highest authority and ushered the era of sovereign political communities with the emergence of the territorially defined and militarily capable sovereign states (Barnett 2001: 26). As the system of the state developed in Europe and in other parts of world, the notion of national or state security assumed greater importance. However, right since its beginning, military security was basically understood as intrinsic to the idea of national security (Lahiry 2004: 57). After the Treaty of Westphalia, states were engaged in a system of cooperation and conflict with few formal rules to guide their behaviour.

The First World War (1914-1918) inflicted a greater shock to European civilization than any previous upheaval, threatening not only revolutions in the social structures of states but also in composition of state system (Buzan 1983: 163). By 1945, advances in military technology had undercut the idea of national defence in several ways. It was difficult to protect or preserve the sanctity of the state against powerful nations. After Second World War, security paradigm shifted with the impact of democracy, arbitration, disarmament and collective security. It resulted in what is known as classical political realist theory of security (Barnett 2001: 26).

Throughout Cold War period security was based on empowerment of military power as the cornerstone of national security. During this period John Hertz coined the term Hobbes's "security dilemma", which he defined to as the tendency of countries "to obtain more and more power to escape the impact of others", a propensity that has caused vicious rounds of mutual arms build-up (Brauch 2003: 53).

However, the first crack in the bipolar structure in the 1960s paved the way for the re-emergence of regionalism. Under different pretexts and for different objectives, this phenomenon has been expanded to many regions of the world over the last thirty years. Moreover, the fall of bipolarity encouraged this process as it removed the last structural barriers to the emergence of regional powers, which are dissatisfied with their role in international relations and feel strong enough to challenge the major powers over spheres of influence. As superpowers felt limited imposing their political, economic, and military/security arrangements on their allies and satellites, multipolar international power structures in different parts of the world a rose (Hooman 1998: 1)

On the other hand, the idea of security has faced genuine challenges from the shifting security and political circumstances in the world today. After Cold War period, for example, the integration Western states like (European Union- EU), as well as the disintegration of states (USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), have led to a 'security dilemma' among the states. The security setting in the existing world is further problematical due to numerous hypotheses arising from the West, like End of History (Francis Fukuyama), The End of Ideology (Daniel Bell) and Clash of Civilizations (Samuel P. Huntington). In fact, in the face of challenges, the concept of security has experienced a

sea change over the last few decades. The field of security studies has achieved domination within the broader arena of International Relations (Lahiry 2004: 57). The end of the Cold War paved the way for the gradual appearance of multipolar World on the one hand, and emergence of regional powers to solve the regional problems on the other. This increased the importance of the regional security to solve both traditional and non-traditional threats. The concept of regional security has taken shape to minimize or eliminated threats, dangers, fear or anxiety, and take a collective response to the threat in the region.

The whole nature of security has changed due to the emergence of the process of globalization. In conventional conditions, security mainly refers to safeguard and defend the territorial sovereignty and integrity of the nation, the protection of domestic political order in terms of both the economy and polity, basically from other states. However, security envisages defence and state's welfare vis-a-vis other neighbouring states. But the process of globalization has made the whole world a 'global village'. The States and communities come together to encourage their common interests either forgetting or ignoring differences.

Consequently, in such an interdependent world, Barry Buzan advocated that the multi-dimensional perception of security (as tacit in military terms) has assumed a means to a multidimensional idea of security, including within its fold economic, social, political and cultural security. The scope of security studies therefore is enriched with the appearance of concepts like comprehensive security and cooperative security (Lahiry 2004: 58). These new ideas helps states to push for states largely operative regional security arrangements as it allows the formation of regional institutions as well as multinational organisations and provides the apparatus by which states can peacefully tackle challenges like traditional or non-traditional threats.

The effect of the Cold War on the process of evolving regional security dynamics was universal, and the end of the Cold War, therefore, marks the opening of a clear third stage, the post- Cold War period since 1990. The end of the Cold War had mainly three major impacts on the evolution of regional security; first, it raised the superpower overlap from Europe, and radically changed the arrangements of superpower diffusion in North East Asia with the Soviet Union disintegration in 1991. Fifteen new states and a new regional

security complex (RSC) came into the picture. Second, by eliminating ideological conflict and Soviet Power from the equation, it greatly changed both the nature and intensity of international power penetration into Third World RSCs. Many regional level security dynamics emerged to get more operational autonomy than they had before because of the increased insignificance of the global powers to them and, third, the end of the Cold War exposed, and in several ways protected, the transfer in the nature of the security agenda to comprise a range of non-military issues and actors, which had been noticeable since 1970s (Jonson, 1998).

In a nutshell, though the meaning of security is very ambiguous and deeply contested, security is playing a very major role in every state to formulate their foreign policy. The simple meaning of security is the protection of the cherished values and social cohesion. The concept of regional security is intended to minimize or remove fear from danger or anxiety, and take a collective response to the threat in the region. Security can be categorised into two types - traditional and non-traditional security. The traditional concept of security is about the military security with the state as the main referent object. The primary function of the state is to defend the territorial integrity as well as promoting welfare of its subject. But on the other hand, non-traditional security is purely non-military security and comes from within the state where individual is the main referent object. In his book, *“People, States and Fear”*, Barry Buzan points out that the notion of security was ‘too narrowly founded’, and his goal was to, therefore, offer a ‘broader framework of security’ incorporating concepts that were not previously deliberated to be ingredient of the security puzzle such as regional security, or the societal and environmental sectors of security (Buzan 1991: 4-20).

Regional Security Complex

The theory of RSC advanced by Ole Waever and Barry Buzan is anticipated to give a tool kit for the clarification of security dynamics at regional levels. The description of a RSC is “a set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.” The conception of “security” is systematically separated into five sectors, such as military, societal, political, economic and environmental. These sectors are synthesised

through the social practices of actors which explains the rise of multi-dimensional, but logical RSCs (Buzan, Waever and Wilde, 1998).

For an examination of a RSC, it is important to look at the arrangement which comprises the anarchic structure, boundary, polarity (the allocation of power among the units) and social production (patterns of friendship and hostility among the units). Therefore, there are three possible developments for a RSC: preservation of the status quo, outside alteration (contraction or expansion of the boundary) and internal transformation (changes in social construction, polarity and, more rarely, anarchic structure). Buzan and Waever provide a complete typology of RSCs. In a standard RSC, the polarity is defined by regional powers. Unipolar RSC, where the pole is signified by a huge power or a superpower, is called “centred”. A RSC with two or more poles where each pole is a great power is a “great-power” RSC. To define the cases of high and strong security interdependence between RSCs, the term super-complex is coined. Within RSC sub-complexes, groups with specific arrangement of interactions might be existent (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

Barry Buzan defines security complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”. The regional complex states are protected into collective security concerns and connected to each other in such a way that the actions of one state to go forward with its security are likely to have consequences also for other parts of the complex. It is significant to note that a security complex can exist and function regardless of whether or not the actors involved identify it (Jonson and Allison 2001: 5-6).

The states of complex may be related by security concerns, regardless of whether the leaders of these states recognize the situations or not. Alexander Wendt (1999) pointed out, 'security complex' model has constructivist backgrounds, because the creation and operation of regional security complexes (RSCs) hinge on patterns of amity and enmity between the units in the system, which makes regional systems reliant of the actions and interpretations of actors, not just a mechanical reflection of the distribution of power. Buzan uses the terms 'enmity' and 'amity' to define the poles along the lines of division. Amity can be regarded as ‘relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectations

of protection and support’, while enmity can be understood as ‘relationships set by suspicion and fear’. Patterns of relations of these kinds reflect issues such as border disputes, interests in ethnically related populations, ideological alignments and long-standing historical links (Jonson and Allison 2001: 8).

Barry Buzan was critical of security studies experts and suggested a new structure for regional security studies. Looking back, his proposition can be considered to have two categorises. First one is now named as the “classical security complex theory” and another is a wider version of this theory; “regional security complex theory”. The latter came from the aspiration to meet the needs of security analysts when investigating the complicated world formed as a result of the end of Cold War. Buzan’s chief goal was to incorporate as many different kinds of threats and actors as possible to the security studies as a reaction to traditionalist’s narrow agenda and state-centric focus. Therefore, he began with giving no special concern to any level of analysis. For this end, he depended on the hypothesis that after the Cold War, international relations would take on a more regionalized nature (Williams 1996: 81-93).

Buzan sets out the framework of analysis based on the relations between domestic security situation of societies, states and regional security complexes and at the arrangement level where the great powers penetrate into matters of local complexes. Therefore, it needs to be recognized that the degree of order and security at the regional level is crucially influenced by variables operating at the global and domestic levels (Ayoob, 1999).

At the national level, the early phases of state-making and nation building include the use of vigorous means by the state to encompass and combine its control over disputed demographic and protective space and counter-violence on the part of those segments of the population attacking the extension and consolidation of such control. State building is not conducted within specific countries that are demographically, territorially or politically isolated from each other. Colonial legacies and underdeveloped nationhood lead to the proliferation of challenged territorial and demographic space and to frequent interstate clashes in post-colonial regions that extremely undermine regional order (Bilgin 2002: 100-118).

On the counterpart, regional dynamics are determined not only by the domestic procedures of the nation building and state-building processes. They are also influenced by the prevailing global balance of power and competitions among the major powers. For their part, regional state elites attempt to utilize issues relating to the global balance to enhance their own state and regime interests. This leads to the unavoidable intertwining not merely of global and regional, but of global and domestic dynamics as well. Together, the latter two have remarkable impact on issues of regional security. The post-Cold War era provided numerous examples that demonstrated the intermeshing of these three dynamics. Recurrently, the interests of global powers, mediated by domestic contests within states, and vice versa, appeared to determine the contours of the relationships of states within particular regions (Ayoob 1999:251-252).

Buzan points out that the central features of a regional security complex can be found in the lines of separation between states and in the power balance between them. The interchange of external and internal factors results in a structure for interaction between states in the region and with external powers. An interaction in the economic or even cultural field may develop into a mutual interest in developing cooperation in security and military affairs as well. An intensified network of contacts and exchanges may even foster common values and interests and consequently results in close security collaboration in the form of a 'security community' of states.

According to Jonson and Allison (2001), in order to understand the consequences of the engagement of external powers in Central Asia better, it is necessary to examine more closely the dynamics of the region with regard to conflict and cooperation and to consider what influences those dynamics. A distinction can be made between cooperative dynamics, which hamper conflicts, stimulate cooperation and strengthen peaceful relations between states of the region and conflictual dynamics which aggravate conflicts and tensions. Interaction between the commitment of external powers in the Central Asian region and regional dynamics works in both cooperative and conflictual directions.

Regional dynamics are often so strong that they make external powers to fall in line with the prevailing pattern of power relations and separating lines between states of the region at the time when such powers begin to engage with regional ones. However, outside powers

do have influence over the regional security complex. This can be done by influencing the conditions of the region that affects the policy choices and policy making of the states there which result in a further chain of events. The state's engagement with other states in international relations has 'spill over' impacts which implies that with the changing of relations of enmity and cooperation in one region will result in similar positive or negative changes to other regions.

Regional Security in the Context of Central Asia

The Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides to an analytical framework to understand the security challenges to the post-Soviet Central Asian states. It is applied to Central Asia, because it facilitates analysts to distinguish among the complicated methods of the regional security structural design, unlike realist and neo-realist paradigms.

Central Asia can be measured as a regional security complex with its disorganized transition in the aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union for two core reasons. Firstly, it is the common heritage of the five Central Asian states in cultural and geographical terms put them as a regional security complex. However, Central Asia has significant inter-state security relations creating regional patterns. These regional patterns are fashioned by the demarcation in the middle of the units of the complex, patterns of antagonism and harmony among these units and, as a consequence, the allocation of power. It should be noted that according to Roy Allison, they will utilize "friendship" and "mistrust" instead of antagonism and harmony as these states were part of the some country until recently. For that reason, it is too inflexible to argue an antagonism versus harmony among them as the means as Buzan argues in structural terms (Allison and Jonson 2001:8). Secondly, Central Asia can be considered as the ground for the interplay of internal and external factors resulting in a structure within which the states of the region form the regional patterns of interaction between each other and external powers as well. To grasp these interactions and possibilities for change in Central Asia, one should take into account the cooperative dynamics that prevent tensions, stimulate cooperation and conflictual dynamics that aggravate tensions, shaping the regional structure that is mutually constituted with the actors. This brings us mainly to the recent version of the regional security complex theory (Allison and Jonson, 2001:8-14).

This perspective, representation the line starting from household conditions to regional stage and then to universal arrangement, concerning the household level under the rubric of supportive dynamics, one can determine numerous factors. The general inheritance of the Soviet Union, common history and cultural camaraderie can be cited in this category. On the other hand, under the rubric of conflictual dynamics, cultural trouble, competing national strategies, political and economic challenges, namely nation and state building processes, social conditions, fundamentalist Islamic tendencies, and water disputes can be cited. Though the conflictual dynamics signify to growing tensions, proportions of cooperative and conflictual dynamics form an equilibrium where the Central Asian states went for the middle ground regarding the criteria for friendship and suspicion. The states of the region distinguish each other as threats but completed arrangements to decrease security dilemmas as discerned in many attempts of regionalism and also in the several organizations that the Central Asian States have participated in, one of which appears to be the SCO (Allison and Jonson, 2001:14-18).

Central Asia is a regional security complex and security community region for its geopolitical security scenario. In his book '*People, States and Fear*', Barry Buzan applies the analysis on regional security complex (RSC). The present security architecture in Central Asia can be better described by considering all levels of Central Asia insecurity. In this regard, combination of Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex theory and Karl W. Deutsch's notion of 'security community' proves to be a valuable instrument for analysing the regional security. The collaboration within RSC is defined by the patterns of "amity and enmity between states" that stems from distribution of power within the RSC, long-term historical links and particular issues such as border disputes, ethnic relations, common culture and so on (Klimenko, 1998).

The major advantage of Buzan's approach is comprehensive analysis of regional security by concentrating on three levels of RSC: domestic (domestically created uncertainties), regional (common security concerns and adaptation of mechanism to tackle them) and international (role of external powers in the region). At the same time, his theory attracts only general picture of security architecture. It responds to the questions of "what is happening on one or the other level?" and "when it happens"? But it does not give an

answer to the question “why”? Basically, Buzan’s theory is empty in content and value free. It can prove the different spectrum of intense relationships that can range from excellent relations to wars. It is in fact also one of the intense relationships, but this does not explain why countries take one or the other dangerous steps (Buzan 1991:190).

The concept of RCS can be traced back to Karl Deutsch’s theory of “security community,” a group of people or states incorporated to the point that they resolve their tensions without resort to war. Deutsch goes deeper into understanding why states go further from being a security complex meaning simple security interdependence, which still has the possibility of going into war, to becoming a security community that excludes conflicts. In this regard, the combination of the RSC theory and the theory of security community provides a good theoretical framework to study regional security as they meaningfully supplement each other. The RSC theory helps to structure the analysis of security architecture by splitting it into three levels, whereas the security community concept provides deeper insights into the internal characteristics of states that influence the security dynamic in the region (Klimenko, 2011).

In the international level analysis, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, scholars and policy makers have started to talk about the new “Great Game” in Central Asia. Indeed, due to the vast energy resources and significant geo-strategic situation, Central Asia has become a zone of competing interests of many players of the international arena. Nowadays, in addition to the Russian and U.S. presence, the strategic environment in Central Asia is also characterized by considerable involvement of China. Overall, the interests of great powers focus on two spheres: political/security and economic. From the regional or interstate level of analysis, there is a number of security concerns that unites all Central Asia countries: problems of water/energy management and potential for conflict among Central Asia states related to it, and border security that includes such issues as drug trafficking and the spread of Islamic extremism. At the domestic or local level of analysis, Central Asia has significant potential for internal conflicts due to the considerable concerns regarding difficult economic conditions, human security and possible ethnic clashes. The situation becomes worse with the presence of authoritarian governments and corruption (Ahrari, 1996).

Independence was so sudden from former the USSR that the new countries in Central Asia did not know what kind of relations would develop among themselves and with other states. There are serious territorial disputes, presence of large ethnic minorities, and the incidents of inter-ethnic conflict that happened in 1989-90, the spectre of war and civil war affecting neighbours. Lack of a strong regular armed force heightened their fears from more powerful neighbours. The vulnerability of the new states could start a competition for influence in Central Asia. Some scholars even talked of a “new great game”, especially with the region’s oil and gas resources coming to international limelight. In this perspective, there is need for regional mechanism to deal with securitisation of local and global level interactions (Kleveman, 2004).

Review of Literature

Although, it is not possible to divide regional security in Central Asia into different parts, but to have a better understanding of this topic, a thematic arrangements has been made by splitting into three main areas i.e. Regional security issues in Central Asian States, Role of major powers in Central Asia States and finally, India’s approaches to regional security issues in Central Asia.

Regional Security Issues in Central Asian States

Central Asia is one of the diverse regions of the world which is situated in the centre of the Eurasian continent. According to Kembayev (2009), its area extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the boundary of Western China in the east. It occupies an area of 3,994,400 square kilometres which is little less than the total area of the European Union and almost half the area of the US. With the result, Central Asia borders on the strategically most important regions of the Eurasian continent, situated in the east are China and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region; in the south-Afghanistan, Middle East and the number of other Islamic states; on the west are the Caucasus region, Turkey, Russia and Europe.

Independence was so sudden that the new states in Central Asia did not know what kind of relation would evolve among themselves and which their regional neighbours. In the views of Swanstrom (2004), Central Asia has re-emerged from the fragments of the USSR in 1991 as one of the new regions, having immense significance with regard to regional security. With the disappearance of the power of USSR, there was no mechanism to deal

with regional and internal conflicts. Central Asia has been suffering from such problems like terrorism, extremism, separatism, existence of extremely unstable regional environment (Afghanistan, Ferghana Valley and Northern Caucasus); vulnerable border, expansion of drug trade, conflicting interests of leading powers and religious extremism. Patnaik (2016) rightly argued that given the territorial disputes, presence of large ethnic minorities and the recent incidents of interethnic conflicts in 1989-1990, the spectre of war between neighbours and within the states could not be ruled out.

The region of Central Asia is caught in the whirlpool of security challenges and threats that may appear episodic but are determinative. According to the importance of security for Satish Kumar (2000) views that religious extremism and its violent manifestation have been perceived as the most potent single menace to the security and stability of post-Soviet Central Asia. The leadership of Independent Central Asian states was steeped in the values of communism, which had been super imposed on an Islamic society with strong traditions of Sufism going back to medieval times. It was naive on the part of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran to believe that the newly independent Muslim states of Central Asia would be easy targets for induction of their respective brands of Islam. In the point of views for Bhadra kumar (2009), the biggest threat to regional permanence comes from Afghanistan in the activities of radical extremists and drug traffickers. Islamic radicalism and appearances of separatism and extremism using terrorist methods add to the instability in Central Asia.

The problem of the potential rise of inter-ethnic conflict in the Central Asian region can be qualified as a challenge to security. In this perspective security issues, Dmitriyenko (2004) argues that a significant potentiality for the rise of an inter-ethnic conflict continues to remain in this region. In the Central Asian conditions of shortage of arable land, unresolved problem of redistribution of power and water resources and sharp demographic explosions, any ordinary ethnic conflict can easily change into a widespread inter-ethnic confrontation. The current scenario of Central Asia, George (2009) argues that Ferghana Valley covers portion of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and contains a mixture of ethnic discrimination. The biggest ethnic strains in Ferghana Valley have occurred between Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations, which are mixed in the area, with some Uzbek villages lying in Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz villages in Uzbekistan.

When Central Asian States achieved independence in 1991, they inherited boundary disputes and territorial conflicts. There are potential threats in the form of territorial claims, disagreement over border lines, and the rise of a regional hegemonic state. According to Hooman (1998), the separation of Central Asia into five republics planted the seeds for border dispute and territorial claims. Thus, all the Central Asian States have territorial claims on each other. The new state borders of the republics do not resemble with their ethnic borders. Then there are some problems which are emerging from the region itself such as religious extremism, trans-border terrorism, separatism, illegal arms and drugs trafficking etc. These problems have been major concerns for regional security mechanism in Central Asia.

Drug trafficking is a main source of non-traditional security threat pretence a serious danger to the stability of Central Asian states. In the view of Mohapatra (2007), Central Asian states are facing a grave threat to their security from drug trafficking in recent years. Geo-strategic location, unstable socio-political situation, and emergence of radical parties are providing the leitmotif to the proliferation of illegal trade in this region. The effects of illicit production and cross-border transfer of drugs and narcotic substances become disturbing when viewed in the company of other unconventional sources of threat to security of states such as religious fundamentalist groups, organized crime and mass-migration. According to Dolzhikova (2008), the magnitude of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asia, which has increased, seriously complicates the situation in Kazakhstan. For about 30 per cent of drugs get transferred through the northern route of Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Kazakhstan. According to the UN estimate, at least 10 per cent of drugs going through the country in transit are used within. Central Asia has become not only a drug trafficking zone, but a zone of mass consumption of drugs.

The environment and water is taking on special importance in Central Asia. In the perspective of environment, Turbiville (1992) argues that with the Semipalatinsk (the main Soviet nuclear test site), Baikanour (the principle Soviet space launch site), other metal mines, a booming hydrocarbons industry, many chemical plants, one of the world's largest aluminium factories and disturbingly high morbidity rates for a range of environmentally-linked maladies. Central Asia has been facing an environmental disaster. According to

Sievers (2002) pointed out that with the quickly shrinking Aral Sea, an immense cotton industry, huge desert, advancing desertification, concern over potable water, the dying Caspian Caviar trade, despite having one of the world's longest rivers, and the fourth deepest lake in the world, Central Asia's water problems have been complex and compelling.

In the context of ideological conflict, the Caspian Sea region has been one of the richest oil regions of the world. Dmitriyenko (2004) argues that the energy wealth of the Caspian Sea is becoming a cause of the conflict of geo-political and geo-economic interest of many states, oil consumers, as well as large multinational companies and a number of international organizations. The interests of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan clash in the Caspian region since their territories touch the Caspian Sea. In this respect, Central Asian Security has very much to do with the geo-economic interest of the Central Asian Republics. In the view of Roy (2009), the obstacle to regional security in Central Asia is that, in the present geopolitical environment, the region has been showing to the conflicting ideologies, namely, Western democratic movements, Soviet ideological trends (the quasi-democratic), and Islamic ideological tendencies. These conflicting ideological trends add to the existing problems now a days which are facing all the Central Asian Republics.

The mistake of the regional actors is at first view one of the main problems to the regional stability in Central Asia. According to Swanstrom (2004), political structures in Central Asia are still rather weak with battered economies that make the Central Asian states weak both politically and financially. The perception is that any limitation of national jurisdiction can initiate the division of the states in the region. It has also proven especially difficult to engage in multilateral cooperation without any external powers such as Russia or China. Here, Dolzhikova (2008) argues that recurrent threats of political destabilization superimpose on a whole range of unresolved socio-economic problems. In order to purely domestic factors, there are number of regional issues, which threaten the security of the region. Various forms of extremism and terrorism, usage of drugs and drug trafficking and illegal migration across Central Asia are already having negative impact on Central Asian's security.

Role of Major Powers in Central Asia States

Central Asia has emerged as a geo-strategically significant region for external powers since its inception in 1991. Central Asia borders with strategically most important regions of the Eurasian continent. The role of major external powers like Russia, China and the US and their influence need to be evaluated from the perspective of traditional security of Central Asia. According to Jonson and Allison (2001), the new relations evolving between major states and Central Asian states can be characterised as resulting from historical and cultural affinities, economic interests, security concerns and strategic interests. The historical and cultural affinities are reflected for example in Turkey's role in all Central Asian states except Tajikistan, Iran's role in Tajikistan, the Russian role in Kazakhstan and China's growing trade with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; Turkish and US investments in the regional economies as well as security concerns. Russia, China and Iran share borders with Central Asian states, which create a direct interest for them in the region's strategic interests. The strategic interests of external powers may combine goals such as maintaining the status quo, denying the strategic access of other powers or increasing their own influence in Central Asia.

From Russian perspective, Central Asia has always been of specific significance by advantage of its strategic geographic situation and its prosperity of natural resources. Paramonov and Stolpovski (2008) argues that only when Moscow had stable situations in Central Asian region was she able to apply much influence in the development of a favourable balance of powers and securities in Eurasia. It is apparent that the accomplishment of these strategic purposes is directly connected to a drive for multilateral collaboration among Russia and the states of Central Asia in the security sphere. Strengthening regional security with the active participation of Moscow is also vitally important for all the countries of Central Asia. For the views of Jonson (2001), realising its loosening influence over Central Asian region, which Russia viewed it as its own 'backyard', Russia struggled to find a policy to counter its detachment from the region. The major security concerns of Russia from the Central Asian region were also non-military security threats and challenges concerning to terrorism, religious extremist, drug-trafficking, flow of weapons, and refugees from south bound for Europe. Russia was also

facing challenges to maintain its own security and territorial integrity as well as protection of Russian minorities in Central Asia which were affecting Russia's stability.

In Chinese perspective, after the end of the Cold War with the return of geo-politics back on the agenda, Eurasia turned into a competition ground for influence and one of the potential players was China. Yahuda (2001) explained that besides bilateral relations with Russia referring to a discourse of multi-polarity, China, by turning to Central Asia for the first time since the Mongol dynasty and the Great Silk Road, sought to fulfil its 'Grand Strategy' that consists of three main objectives; economic development, security and superpower status. In analysis of this article Mariani (2013) argues that there is a long list of security threats in Central Asia, from domestic grievances undermining stability to regional ethnic tensions and negative spill over effects from Afghanistan. Currently, the biggest long-term security concern is related to the planned withdrawal in 2014 of NATO troops from Afghanistan. The key question for China is whether the region will become more unstable after NATO's withdrawal. China has had many security initiatives such as negotiating territorial questions, the ongoing separatist movement in Xinjiang Province, decrease in the level of military existence in border region, as well as economic issues. However, in recent years China's main concern from this region has been the emergence of separatism, religious extremism, terrorism and their negative influence on its Xinjiang Province.

The United States has been playing a prominent role in improving regional security in Central Asia region. In the view of Blank (2001), The United States has constantly expressed its preference for this area's economic, political and military improvement that could only be helped by a sustained or even highly enhanced American role. The United States allowed Russia to deal with instability in Central Asia, which became evident when the US refrained itself from active involvement in negotiating the end of Tajik civil war (1992-1997). The United States did not respond to Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan as well. According to Patnaik (2016), the US presence in Afghanistan since 2001 and its growing footprints in the former soviet space created enormous opportunities to squeeze Russia out of Central Asia region. With Russia also re-emerging as a strong player after 2000 and making a number of moves to reintegrate the region, American officials and

strategic thinkers hit upon the idea of 'Greater Central Asia' and 'Silk Road' strategy to pull Central Asia away from Russia. This began with the US Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, which talked of transporting the Central Asian region's natural resources to the international markets. With the active support of the United States, a security arrangement was established known as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). With the membership of Uzbekistan in April 1999 GUAM were known as GUUAM. Security challenges posed by the rise of Taliban, Al Qaeda and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), during the period of 1998-2001, brought new urgency to address it. The United States since 2001 has concentrated on the issues of countering terrorism, preventing Islamic extremism, enhancing border controls, and fighting narcotics trafficking etc. and willing to address these with a regional security mechanism in the region.

In the perspective of Iran, being the weaker side, often played the classical game of power-balancing by relying on anti-Russian European states. Sayed Kazem (1994) argues that neither the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, nor the Islamic revolution of the 1979 changed the nature of this asymmetry; both relations, in fact, complicated this power relationship by adding an ideological dimension to it. The breakdown of the Soviet Union has brought a new phase in the relationship between the newly independent Central Asian countries and Iran. According to Garsoian (1983), Iran's policy with respect to the Central Asian countries is based on three pillars: the first is security in the Persian Gulf and cooperation with the northern neighbours. The second factor that determines Iran's policy is the changing domestic situation in these republics and the new international events. Thirdly, Iran gives Russia central importance in making its policy towards Central Asia. Iran is fully aware of Russia's actual and potential power in the CIS, and is careful not to pursue policies that could jeopardize its relationship with Moscow. The analysis of IRNA (2005), antagonistic relations between the United States and Iran created a motivation for Tehran to foster close ties with its neighbours in Central Asia in order to guarantee its security and economic interests. Because stability in Afghanistan is serious for the security of the region, Iran's leadership has stressed that a continued international presence in Afghanistan is necessary under United Nations (UN) supervision.

Turkish policy towards Central Asia has an emphasis on Turkey's security interests. In the views of Jonson and Allison (2001), Turkey's security means economic and energy aspects as well as military and defence perspectives. The impact of developments in Central Asia on Turkey's ties with this region will be crucial from a broader perspective, taking into account the interests of other states like China, Iran, Russia and the USA. The significance of Turkey's membership of NATO is also playing very vital role in the perspective of regional peace and security. Turkey has concluded agreements with the Central Asian Turkic states to cooperate against organised crime, arms smuggling, terrorism and separatism. According to Wheeler (2013) analysis, Turkey today "shares particular concerns about destabilising factors such as extremist movements, drug and arms trafficking, and terrorist activities within the Central Asian republics ... As such, the government provides financial assistance and military training to these countries alongside its development capacity assistance."

India Approaches to Regional Security Issues in Central Asia

India's sphere of geo-political and strategic interests widened considerably when the five states of Central Asia unexpectedly gained independence in 1991. Located in the centre of Eurasia, flanking major and regional powers, and possessing enormous wealth of raw materials including energy sources, the Central Asian region has witnessed intense rivalry for control and influence. India's role in regional security issues in Central Asia are anti-Taliban movement, cooperation with SCO, dynamics of internal and external conditioning, tackling the spreading of Islamic extremist and stabilising Afghanistan. India with all her seriousness peeps into the changes happening in Central Asia and tries to deal with all the states in friendly and cooperative manner.

According to Joshi (2005), the geographical contiguity of Central Asia to India has led the latter to consider the region as part of its extended neighbourhood. It implies that the developments in the Central Asian region have a crucial a bearing on India's national interests. Active engagement of the Central Asian Republic (CARs) consequently became an essential component of India's security policy after 1991. The analysis of Patnaik (2005), Peace and stability in Central Asia is crucial for India's security concern. For these causes dictated by geography, India's strategic apprehensions are tied up with the security

and political stability in the Central Asian region. Any geopolitical change in the region has its effect on several countries in the neighbourhood, including India. As an emerging power, India is obviously interested in any changes in and around the Central Asian region, which could have implications for its own security. Central Asia security is interconnected to peace in Afghanistan and Indian subcontinent.

Basically, India's security in the mid-1990s was focused in order to check the Taliban government of Afghanistan, the eliminating Islamic extremism and terrorism in the Central Asian region. New Delhi continued its support to the Northern Alliance to counter the Taliban threat. Therefore, India was supplying the Northern Alliance with military equipment, advisors and helicopters technicians, and both India and Russia were using military bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for their operation. The next major issue that India's security depends on the stability in Afghanistan and its reconstruction for developmental needs. The informal alliance of India and Central Asian countries that had developed in the course of sustaining the United Front (Northern Alliance) contributed substantially to the campaign against international terrorism. Due to the unstable situation in Afghanistan, the need for continued cooperation between India and Central Asia is very critical. India's national interests lie in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Therefore, India should support all efforts towards improving the security situation and providing good governance. It is only through sustained reconstruction and concerted socio-economic development that future stability can be assured.

India's role in security in the region began was from the Taliban government in 1996. Victory of the Taliban in almost the whole of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s brought Central Asia under pressure from internal and external fundamentalist forces. The common threat of terrorism made India realise that Central Asia detained the key to its own security and chose to co-operate closely with Central Asian States. Patnaik (2013) argues that India supported with financial assistance to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood. It apparently supplied the United Front with high attitude warfare equipment, worth about US 8-10 million Dollars between 1999 and 2001, set up a military hospital in southern Tajikistan and sent defence advisers as well as helicopter technicians. In the view of Ganguly (2001), India had several reasons for supporting the United Front

in Afghanistan. It has always been concerned about security in its northern and north-western border areas. New Delhi was also greatly concerned that the Taliban brand of highly radicalized Islam would inflame communal tensions at home. However, One of India's overriding concerns has been the repercussion that the Taliban appearance has had on the Kashmir imbroglio.

Pakistan always has tried to gain 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan and Central Asia, India enjoys good relationship with other regional key players like Iran and Turkey. Roy (2008) argues that today the major concern for India is the security situation in Afghanistan. So far, the US and NATO forces have not been able to provide stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan's ethnic linkages provide ample opportunity for Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to counter any Indian plans in Afghanistan. While Pakistan is in no position to neutralise India's influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it can impede India's infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. In the views of Patnaik (2005), both Central Asian states and India have a big shake in safeguarding economic reconstruction, inter-ethnic harmony, and stability in Afghanistan. As a sign of significance that India attributes to Afghanistan, New Delhi has converted to grant \$100 million loan it had earlier extended to Karzai government. Ultimately, the stability of the post-Taliban set-up in Afghanistan can improve the security scenario in Central Asia as well as India.

Central Asia states and India share the goals of security and stability in the region, and curtailment of drug trafficking and international terrorism. According to Sahgal and Anand (2011), India has been cooperating in the Central Asian states both bilateral and multilateral levels. It has Joint Working Group (JWG) on Combating International Terrorism with Uzbekistan, a JWG with Tajikistan on counter-terrorism, and a JWG on international terrorism other types of crimes with Kyrgyzstan. These JWG's have had regular meetings to address threats arising from instability and fundamentalism in the region. Patnaik (2013) argues that India has focused in non-traditional security challenges which would create sufficient goodwill among the member states. It is willing to participate in Conference on Interaction & Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA). It is also member of CICA- a Kazakh sponsored initiative of eighteen Asian nations that includes Central Asian states

(minus Turkmenistan). Many member states view CICA as useful venue for pursuing bilateral relations with individual states.

Regional security issues are very important for the Central Asia and Indian perspective to peace and stability for their region. Therefore, Indian leaders, scholars, intellectuals have given their perspectives through bilateral treaties, dialogues, conferences etc. “Opening remarks of the Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the press conference in Almaty June 05, 2002 had said that Kazakhstan had set up a Joint Working Group against international terrorism. A Memorandum of Understanding on Military and Technical Cooperation was also signed on 4th June. He participated in the ‘Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)’. This conference was aimed at spreading the message of peace, security and regional cooperation” (MEA, India, 2002). “Foreign Secretary’s presentation at IFRI (French Institute for International Relations), Paris 17 December, 2002 had talked about menace of international terrorism and stabilisation of Afghanistan” (MEA, India, 2002). “External Affairs Minister Shri Yashwant Sinha's keynote address at the Third India-Central Asia Conference in Tashkent on November 06, 2003 had also focused on international peace and security” (MEA, India, 2003). “Address by Shri E Ahamed, Hon’ble Minister of State at the Release of the Book “India-Tajikistan Cooperation: Perspectives and Prospects” January 17, 2007 highlighted areas of mutual cooperation that include combating international terrorism and drug trafficking” (MEA, India, 2007).

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is evolving into a strong security and co-operation organisation and participation of India could fill the gaps in the regional security complex. SCO charter (2006) article one says about the main goals and tasks of regional security which are to “consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, to fight against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of criminal activity of a transnational character, and also illegal migration”. According to Patnaik (2012), fifth SCO Summit in Astana July 5, 2005 the leaders agreed to grant SCO observer status to India. At this summit, SCO member countries signed agreements on fighting the three “evil forces” of

terrorism, separatism and extremism. Now it is a full membership of SCO. India can check the influence China factor in Central Asia and play an active role in SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structures (RATS) for fight against the extremist and terrorist groups in the region. India's imperatives are looming security concerns such as the spread of terrorism, the Afghan fallout and the growing footprint of ISIS in Central Asia. The three SCO observer countries are India, Pakistan and Iran which have already articulated the importance of the SCO and are interested in acquiring full membership. India's joining the SCO as an observer helped broaden the cooperation beyond Afghanistan and created multilateral cooperation against terrorism, drugs, human and arms trafficking in Central Asia and other member states. The SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent has an important to play check the growth of extremist and terrorist influences in the region. Now, India is a permanent member of SCO which can play active and constructive role in the perspective regional security issues and challenges the dominance of China in the Central Asian region.

In the contemporary security scenario, India's foreign policy to the Central Asian states proved a smart strategic and diplomatic achievement. During the UPA government, India's diplomatic thrust in the Central Asian region got a boost after Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Uzbekistan in April, 2006. The analysis of Dwivedi (2006), they shared concerns over threats from religious fundamentalism, terrorism, extremism and cross-border terrorism. Roy (2011) argues that the extension relation between India and Central Asia, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh paid an official visit to Kazakhstan in April, 2011. The visit aimed at enhancing the strategic partnership launched during Kazakhstan President Nazarbayev's visit to India in 2009. In the role of NDA government, Stobdan (2015) explained that Indian Prime minister Modi's visit to the Central Asian states in 2015. During PM Modi's visits in Central Asia, many security treaties were signed likes cooperation on cyber-security, defence security and counter-terrorism with Uzbekistan and wide-ranging defence cooperation pact with Kazakhstan. It also signed treaties with Turkmenistan for defence cooperation, cross-border threats of terrorism, organised crime, illegal-drug-trafficking, reaffirmed commitment for a stable Afghanistan. India also signed agreements with Kyrgyzstan on defence, security, military, education and training, conduct of joint military exercises, exchange of experience and information, exchange of military

instructors. Lastly, defence and security cooperation treaties were signed by PM Modi with Tajikistan.

There has been cooperating between India and the Central Asia states through bilateral treaties, agreements and visits of government officials. According to Sajjanhar (2016), the state of bilateral ties is that India does not share physical borders with any of the Central Asian states. No direct route from India to these countries is available as Pakistan does not permit goods, cargo or people to move through its territory to Afghanistan, let alone to Central Asia beyond it. India has registered significant progress in concluding a multilateral agreement for renovation of Chabahar port, development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and becoming a member of Ashgabat Agreement. India's membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as also of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) should go a considerable way in bridging this gap.

India's proactive security policy towards the Central Asia in the future perspective is very vibrant in recent political scenario. Therefore, India is actively formulating its foreign policy to the Central Asian region through a future agreement with the Eurasian integration like Custom Union, TAPI projects, links with INSTC, new silk route etc.

Definition, Rationale and Scope of the Study

Central Asia is a regional security complex and security community region for its geopolitical security scenario. Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), "a group of states whose primary security concerns linked together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another." A RSCT is characterized by a set of intense security interactions between the members of a RSC that have strongly pronounced inward-looking character. The interaction within RSC is defined by the patterns of "amity and enmity between states" that stems from distribution of power within the RSC, long-term historical links, and such specific issues as border disputes, ethnical relationships, common culture etc. Another perspective, the concept of RCS traced back to Karl Deutsch's theory of "security community," a group of people or states incorporated to the point that they resolve their tensions without resort to war.

The regional security and stability in Central Asia is directly connected to the process of the formation of the nation state. The Central Asian states have already begun the process

of developing regional security mechanism. Since the disintegration of Soviet Union and emergence of independent Central Asian states, there have been wide deliberations over developing a regional security mechanism for the Central Asian region to address the regional tensions. Political, military, and, to a large extent, economic stability in the region have been sustained by external factors, which include Russia, West, and China. They also have played a significant role in the international systems of regional security.

There have been many studies on Post-Soviet Regionalism in Central Asia and related tensions over contested territorial claims, inter-ethnic conflicts and economic conflicts and role of major power in shaping regional security in Central Asia. The study specially focuses on both the role and function of Indian and Central Asian states in defining the Central Asian regional security and the changing dynamics of engagement by having a special focus on India's approach to multilateralism. In this regards, peace and stability in Central Asia is crucial for India's security concern. For these causes dictated by geography, India's strategic apprehensions are tied up with the security and political stability in the Central Asian region. Any geopolitical change in the region has its effect on several countries in the neighbourhood, including India. As an emerging power, India is obviously interested in any changes in and around the Central Asian region, which could have implications for its own security.

Here, the scope includes delimiting the area of my research. It includes not only conflicts but also cooperation and also other problems and issues relating to be engagement India and Central Asia region. India's role in regional security issues in Central Asia are anti-Taliban movement, cooperation with SCO, dynamics of internal and external conditioning, tackling the spreading of Islamic extremist and stabilising Afghanistan. India with all her seriousness peeps into the changes happening in Central Asia and tries to deal with all the states in friendly and cooperative manner through bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. Particularly, this research also looks into the new prospects that has arisen out of engagement of India and Central Asia.

India's role for regional security in Central Asia from 1996 to 2016 has relevant. Basically this period, its role in security was starting from the Taliban government in 1996. Victory of the Taliban in almost the whole of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s brought Central Asia

under pressure from internal and external fundamentalist forces. The common threat of terrorism made India realise that Central Asia detained the key to its own security and chose to co-operate closely with Central Asian States. India has been cooperating to resolve regional security issues in the Central Asian states both bilateral and multilateral levels during this period. India signed the memorandum of obligations in June 2016 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, thereby starting the formal process of joining the SCO as full members. Now, India is a permanent member of SCO which can play active and constructive role in the perspective regional security issues and challenges the dominance of China in the Central Asian region.

Research Questions

1. Does the regional security framework have importance in the context of Central Asian states?
2. What are the regional security issues and challenges facing both India and Central Asia?
3. How can Central Asian states adequately respond to regional security issues?
4. What are the role of external powers to address the regional security issues in Central Asia?
5. Is India's involvement in the Central Asian region effective in tackling the rising insecurity and vulnerability in the region?
6. Does India's association in Central Asia bring perceptible changes of security in the region and what are its implications for India?

Hypotheses

1. Threats from Taliban international terrorism and drug-trafficking brought about the convergence of Central Asian and Indian security concerns.
2. India's engagement with multilateral regional mechanisms in Central Asia (like Northern Alliance and SCO) has contributed to security and stability in the wider region including Afghanistan.

Research Methodology

The proposed study is based on the historical, descriptive and analytical methods of research. The study will be based on the critical analysis of how India's regional security issues promoted widening to the relationship in Central Asia region. In order to prepare an academic report it will take number of variables such as treaties, agreements, speeches of the leadership of both India and Central Asia states, governmental and official documents, journals, magazines, thesis, newspapers, books, media etc. The study also uses the inductive and deductive methods of research. The primary and secondary sources are taken into consultation for the study. The primary sources are official data, documents, treaties between India and Central Asian states. The secondary sources will be books, journals, newspapers and articles as well as internet sources. The relevant information from lectures, seminars, workshop and symposium are used in filling the gap.

In the methodology part, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides an analysis that is used to study the security challenges of the post-Soviet Central Asian states. It is applied to Central Asia, because it has numerous opportunities that facilitate analysts to distinguish among the complicated methods of the regional security structural design, unlike realist and neo-realist paradigms. Central Asia is a regional security complex and security community region for its geopolitical security scenario.

In his book *People, States and Fear*, Barry Buzan focuses his analysis on regional security complex (RSC). The current security architecture in Central Asia can be better explained by considering all levels of Central Asia insecurity. The major advantage of Buzan's approach is comprehensive analysis of regional security by concentrating on three levels of RSC: domestic (domestically created uncertainties), regional (common security concerns and adaptation of mechanism to tackle them) and international (role of external powers in the region).

The concept of RCS traced back to Karl Deutsch's theory of "security community", a group of people or states incorporated to the point that they resolve their tensions without resort to war. Deutsch goes deeper into understanding why states go further from being a security complex meaning simple security interdependence, which still has the possible of going

into war, to becoming a security community that excludes struggling. In this opinion, the combination of the RSC theory and the theory of security community provides a good theoretical framework to study regional security as they meaningfully supplement each other. The RSC theory helps to structure the analysis of security architecture by splitting it into three levels, whereas the security community concept provides deeper insights into the internal characteristics of states that influence the security dynamic in the region.

The analysis of all available primary and secondary sources are supplemented by information generated through consultations with visiting academicians, and professionals. Therefore, field studies to the Central Asian Countries and Russia would be very helpful. Interview with academicians, professionals and policy makers will be conducted during the field studies, to have a better understanding of the issues involved. In the proposed study, the above research methods will be utilized.

Tentative Chapters

Chapter – 1 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Regional Security

The introductory chapter in brief discusses the evolution of security and regional security in Central Asian region as well as international perspective. It also offers analysis of the theory and practice in various forms, debates, interpretations and directions, over time changes and current discourses.

Chapter - 2 Regional Security Issues in Central Asia

This chapter focuses on the regional security issues and challenges in Central Asian region. It also elaborates on the importance of these issues and securitisation of these challenges.

Chapter - 3 Role of Major Powers in Central Asia States

This chapter will discuss the role of external powers especially Russia, China, USA, Iran and Turkey in the Central Asian region. It will also discuss the role of external powers, the competitive and cooperative aspects of their engagement

Chapter- 4 India's Strategic and Security Concerns in Central Asia

This chapter briefly discusses the geostrategic significance of the Central Asian region from Indian perspective. It also elaborates the security threats and challenges facing both

states in this region, and how India can actively engage in this region deal with to securitisation of these issues.

Chapter – 5 India’s Approach to Multilateral Regional Security in Central Asia

This chapter examines and focuses on the role of India in regional security issues in central Asia through multilateral regional mechanism (Northern Alliance, CICA, SCO, Chabahar, INST etc.). India’s strategy of engagement in this region is being calibrated like from observer status to full membership in the SCO. After getting full membership in SCO, India experts to play an active role to securitisation the Central Asian security related issues.

Chapter - 6 Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarizes the finding and observation and it also tests the hypotheses and answers the research questions.

Chapter-2

Regional Security Issues in Central Asia

Introduction

Central Asia is one of the diverse regions of the world which is situated in the centre of the Eurasian continent. Its area extends from the Caspian Sea in the west to the boundary of Western China in the east. It occupies an area of 3,994,400 square kilometres which is little less than the total area of the European Union and almost half the area of the US (Kembayev 2009: 186). With the result, Central Asia borders on the strategically most important regions of the Eurasian continent, situated in the east are China and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region; in the south-Afghanistan, Middle East and a number of other Islamic states; on the west are the Caucasus, Turkey, Europe and Russia.

With the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), Central Asia, a landlocked region, has acquired geo-political, geo-economic and geo-strategic significance. It is one of the world's earliest inhabited places and home to an ancient and highly developed civilization. Central Asia emerged as a factor in the security concerns in Asia at the end of the closing decade of 20th century. This emergence itself was novel, coming as it did almost as if by accident and with the Republics assuming independence almost reluctantly. By the end of that century its role in Asia assumed significance, compared to the seventy years, it had remained dormant as a part of the larger Soviet Union (Benarjee 1991-92).

Central Asia occupies a distinct space of geopolitical importance in the post-Cold War era. A landlocked region of the gigantic Asian continent, it is contiguous or in proximity to six large states of Russia in the West, China in the East, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and India in its southern fringe apart from Afghanistan. Its neighbouring landmass almost from all sides is washed by warm waters, either of the Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Bay of Bengal or of the Indian and Pacific oceans. These six littoral states have maritime linkages with the world (Reese 2000:22-23). Central Asia, on the Other hand, is dependent only on the land routes. Depending on the viewer's orientation, there are varying perceptions of Central Asia. A

minimalist approach restricts the region to an area between the Caspian Sea and the Tien Shan Mountain, covering mainly the ethnic Muslim majority areas, whereas maximalists interpretation attempts to include a region termed as "inner Asia" which is simply larger area of nomadic civilization that incorporates the frontiers of Russia and China, the Middle East as well as the north-western parts of India. But taking the geopolitical considerations of the region it is better and more imperative to include a wider area (Armstrong, 2007).

This will reflect the influence prevailing in the area and in the adjacent regions. But in this study concentration would be on five Central Asian Republics, which were part of the Soviet Union prior to its (USSR) disintegration. These five states are Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The emergence of Central Asia, largely a product of the Soviet collapse, has generated a wave of strategic debate which raised diverse issues pertaining to both opportunities and challenges of the post-Cold War era. They range from ideological issues to the systematic problems of nation-building, economic change and ecological crisis, democratization and human rights, ethno-nationality and religious revivalism, terrorism and arms proliferation, territorial integrity and security issues (Megoran 2004:25-26). This landmass inherited from its Tsarist and Soviet predecessors is also called "geostrategic trauma". Despite its civilization background, Central Asia is faced with the enormous difficulty of evolving a fresh conceptual framework for itself. It is a debatable issue whether Central Asia has ever been the core region. Major parts of its history suggest that the region remained a periphery of the major settled civilizations of Europe and Asia. A series of political and cultural identities were imposed and super-imposed over each other in the region, the last two being Islam and Marxism (Robyn 2000: 32-33).

Traditionally, Central Asian cultural cohesiveness, as well as its prosperity, depended largely on diverse interaction with the neighbouring countries, viz., China, India, Russia and the Middle East. On the other hand, these interaction have also shaped the political history of its neighbouring regions. In the case of India too, its demography and the subsequent political history were influenced by Central Asia. It appears that on the chess-board of Central Asia, an open-ended game is currently being played, the final outcome of which or at least a more stable equilibrium has yet to emerge. Central Asia can emerge as

a stable and prosperous region, thanks to its immense oil and natural gas reserves and other mineral and metal resources and an educated and skilled manpower, the credit for which largely goes to the spread of literacy and the inculcation of a scientific and secular approach during the long decades of the Soviet rule (Sodikova 1999:75-76).

It is also possible that the region may degenerate into inter-ethnic clashes and conflicts over oil and natural gas pipelines, which may also lead to economic inequalities within the region. If the leaders of governments and Central Asian states play a wise, harmonious and mature role and the outside powers also play a positive role and do not try to accentuate existing contradictions in the region, there is a likelihood of this possibility not taking shape. One thing that is certain is that it is impossible for any single power or power centre to establish its exclusive hold over the region (Roy 2002:45-46). Formation of multiple new successor states to the former USSR has literally and figuratively changed the map of Asia. This change is more important in the new global political environment in which they have emerged. International politics for the last many decades was dominated by the massive ideological struggle between communism and the democratic world in which international relationships of states were often gauged by their impact on the global balance of forces between East and West. With the decline of communism, that obsessive factor in geopolitical thinking is now gone. With the end of the global ideological struggle, international politics has now grown immeasurably more complex than at any time since the end of the Second World War (Bakshi 1998: 130)

The new nature of international politics in Asia is described by some as “the back to the future” of 19th century politics. Most of these newly emerged states never before had an independent modern state with the exception of a brief interlude for the three states of Transcaucasia after First World War. For the Central Asia, the very concept of Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Tajik as the basis of statehood was entirely new under early Leninist policies and was also somewhat artificial since the essential elements of genuine sovereignty were almost totally denied to them during the whole period of the Soviet Union. And, however, gratifying their new independence is to the fulfilment of their national aspiration may be the basic fact is that independence came far earlier than anyone could have expected, and probably faster than most would have wanted, forcing them,

without political, economic or psychological preparation, to face a brand new world. Thus the states of Central Asia emerged in the 1990s in search of an understanding of the most fundamental elements of statehood (Bakshi 1996: 337).

Central Asia re-emerged from the fragments of the USSR in 1991 as one of the new regions, having immense significance with regards to regional security. With the disappearance of the power of USSR, there were no mechanisms to deal with regional and internal conflicts. The negative trends were strengthened by the low economic development, lack of trust and high degree of intra-state as well as inter-state conflicts (Swanstrom 2004: 41). Additionally, Central Asia has been suffering from such problems like, terrorism, extremism, separatism, existence of extremely unstable regional environment (Afghanistan, Ferghana Valley and Northern Caucasus); vulnerable border, expansion of drug trade, conflicting interests of leading powers and religious extremism.

After the Soviet period, the region was perceived as mostly unstable and fragile. Significantly, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) have been facing differences arising out of border and water conflicts. Critical security issue which could have had a negative impact on the regional security, have not transformed into serious conflicts. Yes, it is a fact, however, that Central Asia continues to face serious long-term security challenges. Along with traditional security risks, it has encountered a completely new set of challenges in the changed security paradigm which is still developing. In all five republics, there is very sluggish progress of economic and political reforms. This has caused in a build-up of many unresolved problems. The problem of corruption is aggravated by the illegal narcotics trade. The other security dilemmas have been chiefly the threat of religious extremism, ethnic issues, small arms proliferations, sharing of water resources and environment problems (Roy 2009: 90-91).

The region of Central Asia is caught in the whirlpool of security challenges and threats that may appear episodic but are determinative. The biggest threat to regional stability comes from Afghanistan in the activities of radical extremists and drug traffickers. Islamic radicalism and appearances of separatism and extremism using terrorist methods add to the instability in Central Asia. Increasing rivalry among major powers has also appeared in the region for accessing petroleum resources, which have been viewed by these powers as

alternative to the instable West Asian region. These actors are not only combining their position but also increasing their presence in the region through complex modes of relationships that promote collaboration as well act as a trigger for competition. A kind of polarisation of relations among Russia, China and US has been happening in the region (The Hindu, 2007). The strategic competition is compounded by the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. As militant Islamists permeate from across the Afghan border into Tajikistan, regional stability is coming under severe challenge. The result is a state of strategic insecurity as a medium-term prospect. Regional security in Central Asia is presently multilevel and unstructured and often contradictory. The ongoing struggle for spheres of influence through competing projects like Russia's "Eurasian Space" project, America's "Greater Middle East Initiative", China's "Assimilation" project, and the EU's "Integration" project and last but not least the potential entanglement of the region in the "World Islamic Caliphate" project (Bhadrakumar, 2009) are challenging the regional security in Central Asia.

Aggravation of Inter-Ethnic Relations in Central Asia

Soon after the declaration of Independence, this issue of ethnic identity began to shape the image of the Central Asian region. At the same time, it is too early to tell about mass nationalism or mass political Islam. Currently each republic has to face its own combination of possibilities in order to move forward or regress to the past. Often, ethnic divisions within and between the Central Asian republics were perceived as the potential source of conflict throughout the region. During Soviet period, all citizens were combined under the banner of a new historical community the Soviet people. But Instantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, ethnic harmony were completely fragmented on the one hand and ethnic clashes between mainly Central Asian Muslims began to emerge on the other (Tabyshalieva 2000: 79).

The problem of the potential rise of inter-ethnic conflict in the Central Asian region can be qualified as a challenge to security. A significant potentiality for the rise of an inter-ethnic conflict continues to remain in this region. In the Central Asian conditions of shortage of arable land, unresolved problem of redistribution of power and water resources and sharp

demographic explosions, any ordinary ethnic conflict can easily change into a widespread inter-state confrontation (Dmitriyenko 2004: 88-89).

Central Asia is something of an ethnic tinder-box, with an intermixture of ethnic groups in large numbers in each state. It must be said to the credit of the Central Asian leaders, however, that they have managed to contain these conflicts, keeping their adverse fallout to the minimum level (Kumar, Satish 2000: 47). Ethnic nationalism is a major factor provoking increase in tensions, ethnic polarisation, growth of separatism and irredentism.

Until recently, in 2000 in Kazakhstan, Russians constituted 37 per cent of population, next to the Kazakhs, who were 42 per cent. In Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz, the Russian and the Uzbeks were 52, 22 and 13 per cent respectively. In Tajikistan, while Tajiks were 65 per cent, the Uzbeks constituted 25 per cent, while Russian and Uzbeks were one and 9 per cent respectively. And in Uzbekistan, the most populated state, the Russians and Tajiks constituted 8 and 5 per cent of the population respectively, while Uzbeks were 71 per cent (Kumar, Satish 2000: 47).

The large presence of Russians in Kazakhstan, and their important role in economy and administration of their country, made it necessary for the Kazakh President to be sensitive to their aspirations. The move to shift the capital of Kazakhstan from Almaty to Astana (former Akmola) was meant as much to maintain strategic control over the country as to keep the Russian population happy. The presence of such a large percentage of Russian population in Kazakhstan is an important factor in preventing any tension between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. However, at the same time in Tajikistan, in which Uzbeks constitute 25 per cent of the population, the Uzbek-Tajik conflict keeps occurring in various forms. The Uzbeks are constantly afraid of Tajik designs on Samarkand and Bukhara. Uzbeks, on the other hand, have often been accused by the Tajik government of meddling in the civil war between 1992-97 (Kumar, Satish 2000: 48).

In this regards, the region's ethnic fragmentation can be considered on several levels: between the new states themselves, between Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians) and indigenous people, mostly the traditional, rural sections of the ethnic groups (for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: with indigenous ethnic groups, for example, Tajik and Turkic-

speaking peoples) and within similar ethnic groups. In each of the Central Asian states, there are also internal cleavages within the titular nationality, stemming from regional and clan differences. These take the form of rivalry between north and south (in Kyrgyzstan), between the three Zhuz or Hordes (in Kazakhstan), or between different provinces (in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) (Tabyshalieva 2000: 79).

Scholars of Central Asia continue to anticipate serious ethnic violence within the Ferghana Valley. The sizable ethnic Uzbek and Kyrgyz population in the region present the most significant source of ethnic tension, even after more than two decades after Soviet dissolution. The legacy of Soviets in the geographic political arrangement of the Ferghana Valley guarantees intense multicultural and multi-ethnic contacts. Before the Bolsheviks drew administrative border in Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley was a combined space. Now Ferghana Valley covers portions of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and contains a mosaic of ethnic differentiation. The predominant ethnic strains in Ferghana Valley have occurred between Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations, which are mixed in the area, with some Uzbek villages lying in Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz villages in Uzbekistan (George and Julie 2009: 92).

Ethnic conflicts in Ferghana valley in early 1990s legitimated early scholarly anxieties regarding relation between the ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, symbolised by ethnic violence in Osh in Kyrgyzstan and Uzgen (both in Kyrgyzstan). Apparently a reaction to the rearrangement of economic and land resources between Kyrgyz and Uzbek villages during a period of economic instability, members of each ethnic group acted to punish rumoured crimes in order to expel Uzbeks from the Osh city. A total of 171 people died during violent confrontation during one week (June 4-10, 1990). Thousands others reportedly fell victim to rape and assault (George and Julie 2009: 93).

Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism

Religious extremism and its violent manifestation have been perceived as the most potent single menace to the security and stability of post-Soviet Central Asia. The leadership of independent Central Asian states was steeped in the values of communism, which had been super imposed on an Islamic society with strong traditions of Sufism going back to

medieval times. Due to this, some comment that it was naive on the part of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran to believe that the newly independent Muslim states of Central Asia would be easy targets for induction of their respective brands of Islam(Kumar, Satish 2000: 46).

The revival of Islam in Central Asia originated to some extent in the late 1980s, when President Gorbachev's twin policy of 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost' permitted people in the Soviet Union a measure of religious freedom. Historically, no definite episode can be pointed to as the first introduction of Islam in Central Asia. During the periods of conquest and subjugation that mark the history of the region, Islam spread throughout and became an important social force. The complicated introduction of Islam to the region led to important differences in belief between the various peoples of the Central Asia. The current Muslim population is dominated by Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi branch, intermingled with a variety of Sufi sects and smaller Shi'a minority groups (Trisko 2005: 377).

Ernest Gellner (1992) in his book *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, distinguishes two equivalent, often complementing, forms of Islam: high and low. "High-Islam" is based on the scripture, the holy Koran and Hadith (Muhammadan traditions) and is thus puritan. Here, the Koran and Hadith are unending and remain the eternal source of knowledge and salvation. By contrast, "low Islam" relies heavily on local traditions approved from generation to generation. "High Islam" flourishes in the urban situation where access to literacy and religious literature is possible and clerical class has begun to safeguard scriptural legacies. This class enjoys the exclusive privilege of understanding Islam in response to issues of the day, with reference to the Koran and Hadith. "Low Islam", on the other hand, flourishes among nomadic people whose access to the religious education is seriously reduced by the very nature of their mobile lifestyle and they are unlikely to have the necessary resources to support a permanent clerical class. It was based on existing social relation and practice. "High Islam" has a prescriptive quality as to how best society should conduct itself to meet Koranic goals. This distinction has important political implications. This implication is particularly relevant to Post-Soviet Central Asia. However 'high' and 'low' Islam are distinct but mutually complementary. This complex nature simplified the emergence of a hybrid Islam in Soviet Central Asia (Akbarzadeh 2001: 452).

In initial phase of Soviet disintegration, Islam was the object of both fear and worship for the regional stability in Central Asia. The revival of Muslim religious life in Post-Soviet Central Asia was seen into emergence of two different directions. The first direction was under the control of both the authorities and the official clergy; its visible result was a sharp increase in the number and level of activity of Muslim institutions. In 1990-91, for example, the number of working mosque alone increased about thirty times (from 160 to 5,000) (Lipovsky, 1996).

The building of new mosques and madrasas was financed by Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, who were competing for the support of the Central Asian Muslims. However, such operations were carried out legally, for the most part, and without opposition from authorities. The second and far more radical direction in the Muslim renaissance was shaped by the unofficial Islam since the years of Soviet rule, and this had an evident effect on radicalising their views. During the Soviet rule, Islam throughout Central Asia had been driven underground but even Soviet totalitarianism could not suppress religion entirely. From the very beginning, and especially in Tajikistan and in Ferghana Valley, the unofficial clergy took up the radical positions and were hostile to both the communist leadership and the official clergy, whom they accused of collaboration with the authorities. The radical Muslims started setting up a complex network of underground cells. These cells allowed them very quickly to escape the control of the authorities. Because of the existence of the parallel and highly secret network of organizations, subsequent bans on the fundamentalist activities proved ineffective. Authorities called it as Political Islam that is Islam as the basis director for political action, which is often stigmatized as 'fundamentalism'. Nevertheless 'Wahabi' movement through was strange to the Central Asian brand of Islam and way of life. The negative representation of political Islam was in sharp contrast to the positive image of Islam and Islamic civilization, projected by the state officials. According to Akbarzadeh, the Turkmen leadership has been admittedly more active in demanding Islamic civilization in the region as a national legacy than their Kyrgyz counterparts, but both states share a preoccupation with describing a dichotomy between 'good' and 'bad' version of Islam (Akbarzadeh 2001: 451).

The character of political and militant Islam in Central Asia can be understood with the upsurge of Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan, which served to strengthen the possibility of an Islamic government in the region. In addition, the civil war in Tajikistan had significant implications for regional stability and played into sensitivities about Islamist threat. Discussing security concerns in post-Soviet Central Asia, Menon (1995) in his article "In Shadow of the Bear: Security in post -Soviet Central Asia", claimed that "while militant Islam may emerge as a potent political force, this is by no means a given". This view is also taken by Freedman (1997), who argued that while initially many in Moscow feared that surge of Islamic radicalism would sweep the region, their fears remained unfounded. Thus the potential for radicalism was acknowledged even if these scholars did not believe it would be realised in the near future (Trisko 2005: 378).

In this regard, it may be argued that exclusion or inclusion from the political structure has played a powerful role in radicalising movements. Wahabism, a conservative sect of Islam with roots in Saudi Arabia, started making inroads into Central Asia as early as 1992. The civil war in Tajikistan, which raged for a few years before it was brought under control through a peace agreement in June 1997, had strong sectarian undercurrents. The rise of the Taliban, a strong militant Wahabist movement, in 1994, and its rapid advance northwards, sent danger signals all over. Central Asian leaders started raising their voice against the rising threat of fundamentalism, although Islam Karimov, the President of Uzbekistan, was the most vociferous of them all. Their fears came true when police officers in the eastern Uzbek town of Namangan were murdered in December 1997. The murder was attributed to a Wahabi conspiracy against the state. In February 1998, the Uzbek Foreign Minister accused Pakistan of having taken away 400 Uzbek and trained them in Wahabi madrasas in Pakistan. On 1 May 1998, the Uzbek Parliament passed a law on religion to counter the threat of "aggressive Wahabis", laying down strict rules for registration of religious organizations. On 23 May, Tajikistan's Parliament passed a law outlawing all religious political parties in the country (Kumar, Satish 2000: 46).

However, the activities of the extremists in Dushanbe was of major concern to Uzbek President Karimov. He feared a domino effect. This describes Karimov's decision to send his troops to help the Tajik ex-communists during civil the civil war. In this he had the

support of the leaders of the other Central Asian republics as well as the tacit consent of Moscow. As Taliban were closing in on Mazar-i-sharif in late 1998, there was frantic diplomatic activity between Russia and the Central Asian states on how to ward off the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. The worst ever happened when the city of Tashkent was subjected to bomb explosions at four key locations on the morning of 16 February 1999. President Karimov blamed Islamist extremists from the Hizbollah movement for these explosions. An organization, calling itself the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan(IMU), in a broadcast from Radio Iran in Mashhad, said on 19 March that the government of Uzbekistan must go, for outdoing even the communist regime in oppressing Islam, or it would be removed by force (Kumar, Satish 2000: 47).

The revised emphasis on Arabic in some of the Central Asian states and their liberal attitude towards Islamic education imparted to their people created opportunities for Saudi Arabia to enter the region with an intention to expand the domain of Islam and undermine secularism professed by Central Asian people. The Pak-trained and sponsored *Mujahideen* were sent as 'Allah's volunteers to spread the 'message' of Islam in Central Asia. The Saudi money facilitated Pakistani and Afghan *Mujahideen* to play a role in which *drug mafia* also ushered in at a later stage (Asopa 2003: 40).

The Islamist opposition in Uzbekistan became a serious social, political and military threat to the Karimov regime that had in turn resorted to outright repression in response. Like the other governments in the region, President Karimov made initial attempts to accommodate the Islamist opposition. Concessions included the return of mosques to their previous use and the renaming of government posts to traditional Muslim terms. These measures proved ineffective in placating the opposition. Both secular and religious opposition parties have been restricted by repression and censorship, forcing them to confine their actions largely to the big cities where government pleads that Uzbekistan is facing a dangerous time found board popular support. However, more militant Islamist groups have focused their energies on the countryside, particularly the Fergana Valley. The marginalisation of all opposition groups has important implications for collective mobilisation. The Islamic threat is most strongly felt in Uzbekistan where militants have been able to repeatedly outwit the Uzbek armed forces (Trisko 2005: 380).

In Kazakhstan, Islamists have played a negligible role in challenging the integrity of the political system although they have been active in the social sphere. President Nazarbaev has focused more on maintaining his patronage system and scuttling demands for democratic reform than addressing the Islamist threat. In the mid-1990s, Nazarbaev moved to undercut his domestic opposition through several institutional changes. Islamist groups have not been permitted a role in the political system and are therefore forced to operate outside of that system. The power of Islamist opposition is also constrained by the ethnic composition of the country (Tabyshalieva, 2005).

The government of Kyrgyzstan was seen in the early 1990s as the most liberal regime in the region as then President Akayev promoted a view of the country as a Central Asian 'Switzerland' where democracy and the free market could flourish. His rule followed the same pattern as President Nazarbayev and Karimov with an increasing centralisation of power in the presidency. The Islamist threat was not acknowledged in Kyrgyzstan until 1999 IMU attacks when Kyrgyz troops had to be mobilised after militants seized a number of villages near the Tajik border. Since then, the government has focused on increasing its military capacity. Osh is one of the main centres of the Islamic revival in Kyrgyzstan and was affected by the 1999 and 2000 IMU attacks. The protests originating in this region resulted in the taking over of government buildings, which quickly spread to Bishkek in 2005 (Burkhard, 2006).

The Islamist groups are seen as a more salient challenge to the states in Central Asia as well as the regimes. These groups pose a threat to regime survival in the Central Asian region. In this context, Kazakhstan has faced a low level of threat from Islamist and non-Islamist opposition or perceived as a moderate threat at best. In Kyrgyzstan, a high level of non-Islamist opposition and the sustained, high level of threat in Uzbekistan from 1999 resulted in the marginalisation of all opposition groups and any mobilization by citizens is perceived as a security threat. Initial attempts to accommodate Islamist groups were forestalled in the mid-1990s as the incumbent presidents in Central Asia acted to shore up their support in the context of the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan. Government efforts quickly shifted from accommodation with Islam to repression of Islamic groups as a result of the 1999 attacks by the militant group Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

This attack brought to light the physical security threat posed by Islamist groups (Diamond, 2005).

Islam came to be seen by the new national governments as a parallel power structure contradicting their authority. Islam has been perceived since Soviet times as a threat because it can provide a worldview that can combine the 'intermixture of family, clan, tribal, sub-ethnic, and regional affiliations and loyalties' in a way that nationalism cannot. However, such assertions must be qualified. Ahmed Rashid contends that Islam has played a key role in sustaining clan, regional and ethnic solidarity in Central Asia. The outbreak of inter-ethnic but co-religionist violence in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan in 1990 between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks is evidence that Islam has not been a consistently unifying factor (nor has nationalism). Nevertheless, the power of Islam remains an important regional concern (Rashid, 2001:73).

In this regard, the focus of Islamic revivalism and radical Islam has been the Ferghana Valley, a fertile and densely populated region with deeply religious residents divided between three different republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The valley has traditionally been the centre of Islamist activity and served as the main entry point to the region. Major radical groups which could be considered as precursor to IMU and HT were active in the Valley which have posed threats to regional security in Central Asia. In this respect, the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have been able to harness their security forces for the maintenance of their regimes by emphasising the Islamist threat and turning to outside powers to increase their military capacity. The Islamist threat, while highlighting the inability of Central Asia's armed forces to control their borders and deal with insurgency, has brought increased military assistance to the region in support of both government and opposition groups. The dynamics have become especially important after September 11 and the launch of the Global War on Terror (Trisko 2005: 380-381).

The re-emergence of Taliban and deteriorating condition in Afghanistan pose serious security challenges to the Central Asian States. Afghanistan has always drawn special attention during the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit meetings. The radical Islamist attitudes escalated in response to the US-led operations in Afghanistan and

Iraq. Fundamentalist movements in Afghanistan and Pakistan have exploited this situation to generate support base to carry out jihad and destabilise this region. Instability in Afghanistan spills over to Central Asia as well. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), whose stated goal has been to overthrow Islam Karimov's regime, was weakened in the aftermath of the US war against terror in Afghanistan. Therefore, instability in Afghanistan has serious consequences for entire Central Asian region and particularly for Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. As an immediate neighbour of Afghanistan, Tajikistan has been the victim of undesirable influence of instability in Afghanistan in the past, which led to the bloody civil war for many years. It also experiences the spill over effects of the illegal drug flow (Roy 2009: 94).

Territorial and Border Disputes

The countries of Central Asia and adjoining states such as Russia and China are facing many challenges at present which began emerging after the disintegration of the USSR. The first and foremost among them is the border disputes among the countries of the region. The Soviets under the leadership of Stalin had redrawn borders between republics in the 1920s. It has been argued that ethnic factors were not given consideration for the administrative purposes. The natural borders among the settlements of different groups of people were replaced by administrative ones. The separation of Central Asia into five republics planted the seeds for border dispute and territorial claims. Thus, all the CA states have territorial claims on each other (Hooman 1998: 66). The new state borders of the republics do not resemble with their ethnic borders. Then there are some problems which are emerging from the region itself such as religious extremism, trans-border terrorism, separatism, illegal arms and drugs trafficking etc. These problems have been major concerns for regional security mechanism in Central Asia.

During Soviet period, there were several evidences of people of different nationalities and ethnic groups who lived for decades on either side of the borders of different Central Asian republics. But it did not pose any serious problem since firstly all the republics were part of the Soviet Union and secondly socio-political and economic decisions were taken by the Center in Moscow. These borders and boundaries did not pose any problem for the people and at any rate there were no security threat to republics. But as each of five Central Asia

states became sovereign and independent, border security assumed new dimension. Ensuring territorial integrity has been matter of concern for each of these states. Hence, demarcation and delimitation of borders have become matters of priority as each country is independent and sovereign (Gritsko, 2009).

When Central Asia states achieved independence in 1991, they inherited disputed boundary and territorial issues. There are potential threats in the form of territorial claims, disagreement over borderlines, and the rise of a regional hegemonic state (Hooman 1998: 66). For example, the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border has mixed Turkmen and Uzbek populations, and both countries claim various bordering territories. Similarly, disputes have occurred over oil and gas facilities located in border regions. Uzbekistan has demanded ownership of these facilities, while Turkmenistan has charged Uzbekistan with depriving it of substantial revenues. However, this dispute was settled at a 1995 presidential conference, when Uzbekistan side agreed to share revenues from oil extraction with Turkmenistan. A production sharing agreement was signed for 1995-2015 to develop joint fields on the common border. In 1998 Turkmenistan unilaterally instituted visa requirements for Uzbekistani citizens living in the border areas. Uzbekistan in turn imposed similar regulations (Badykova 2005: 78). Kyrgyzstan protested against its border line and demanded a return of some regions from Uzbekistan. The Tajikistan also demanded that Samarkand and Bukhara be returned by Uzbekistan.

One of the major border disputes relates to Farghana Valley which has been shared by Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan and has the highest population density compared to other parts of these countries. Historically, the valley has long been ethnically heterogeneous and the first attempts to divide the territory in the 1920s led to disagreements and complaints among settlements. Once the countries in the region and their conditional borders were united as 'republics' under the USSR, any further disputes were suspended, but only until the republics became independent nations (Kenshimov, 2006). With the collapse of the Soviet Union a number of analysts forecast a revival of regional territorial disputes and their escalation into conflicts in Central Asia. Although, these prediction did not come true and the unity of territories and their management is intact, the issues are yet to be resolved and from obstacles for regional security. Once the states became

independent, the Central Asian leaders realized that their conditional borders could become a source of unrest. Therefore, they tried to avoid border and territorial disputes and to solve the issues through friendly dialogue and good-neighbourly relations (Sengupta, 2009).

With regards to settlements of border disputes, it must be said to the credit of the Central Asian states, and their big neighbours Russia and China, that they have shown a very positive trend in resolving border disputes through peaceful means. The Soviet Union's long-standing border disputes with China were inherited by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The first meeting of these three states along with Russia and China was held in Shanghai in April 1996 and they agreed upon confidence-building measures in the military field in the border areas. The second meeting of the five states was held in April 1997 and the five agreed upon mutual reduction of forces in border areas. The third meeting was held in July 1998 in Almaty that carried forward the process of confidence-building and consultations on security issues (Kumar, Satish 2000: 44). At present, borders of former Soviet republic are mostly settled.

Trafficking of Narcotics and Arms

Drug trafficking is a main source of non-traditional security threat posing a serious danger to the stability of Central Asian states. The main reason for the expansion of narcotics trade is the continuation of situation in Afghanistan where narcotics trade has become the main source for the survival of the state. Today, 65% of the narcotics produced in neighbouring Afghanistan and going to the world market, pass through the territory of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan. According to the data available with the experts, 20% of the narcotics passing through Central Asia remain in the Countries of this region. Not only narcotic trade is on the increase, the level of drug-addiction is also rising (Dmitriyenko 2004: 86).

The magnitude of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asia, which has increased, seriously complicates the situation in the region where about 30 per cent of drugs get transferred through the northern route of Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. According to the UN, Central Asia has become not only a drug trafficking zone, but a zone of mass consumption of drugs (Dolzhikova 2008: 60).

Central Asia inherited many of the prerequisites for successful cross-border trade activities, both legal and illegal. The strategic location of the Central Asian countries to a larger extent is responsible for a flourishing narcotics trade in this part of world on the one hand and common legacy during Soviet time paved the way on the other. All the countries had been republics of the former Soviet Union, share a common Soviet identity and speak a common language. Most had several ties to the people outside of their own republic, either through kin or by associations (Azamova, 2001).

There is considerable consensus that narcotic trafficking has been a serious and immediate regional security threat. The global community is also worried about the illicit drug trade and its negative implications for the stability and progress of Central Asian states themselves, which in turn may destabilize states and civil society, damaging long-term economic development while compromising the rule of law (Jackson 2005: 41). Over the past one and half decade, the role of Central Asia as a transport point has grown significantly. It has become the chief transit route for narcotics from Afghanistan moving towards Russia, Eastern and the Western Europe. Afghanistan's geographical contiguity with Central Asian States greatly facilitates drug trade through this region. The successful drug trade in the region permits separatist, radical religious and terrorist activities that have already sprung up in Central Asia to become financially self-sufficient (Pirsevedi, 2006).

In the political sphere, the main threat is that the narcotics mafia is not interested in regional and national stability. Huge profits received from the smuggling of narcotics are used for promoting forces that have a destructive influence on the states of the region and beyond. The problem of narcotics is connected with the problem of international terrorism and religious extremism. Funds from the sale of narcotics are one of the main sources of financing the extremist organisations in the Central Asian region. In the economic sphere, the criminalisation of economy may become the main problem. Presently, this is one of the major threats to the economies of several Central Asian countries (Dmitriyenko 2004: 86). There has been a strong link between the drug trade and various factors involved in this process. Local farmers, criminal networks and militant groups are involved in this process to generate funds to achieve their objectives. These groups are not isolated from each other though they operate at different levels.

The Central Asian region from the mid-1990s onward saw a rapid increase of narcotics trafficking. Within several years, this had created huge social and political problems. On the societal level, addiction level grew rapidly, exacerbating an already precarious social institution. More alarmingly, non-state violent actors across the region managed to consolidate their position by financial gain from involvement in the drug trade and other emerging criminal operations - endangering the very survival of several states and weakening of others. In parallel, state institutions in every state of the region and beyond, were affected by criminal infiltration-through corruption or the more serious practice of state capture, the wilful takeover of state institutions by individuals or groups connected to organized crime. By the early 2000s, it had become reasonably clear that the security of the region could not be understood without accounting for the drug trade and organized crime (Cornell 2006: 38-39).

The five newly independent countries of Central Asia have become major drug production and trafficking centres, for which the region is increasingly in the danger of becoming "a new Columbia" (Turbiville 1992: 55). Illegal production and consumption of unprocessed drugs (raw Opium, Cannabis) have long been a part of daily life for centuries in the region. However, the past decade has seen the commercialization and mass proliferation of drug trafficking, as well as money laundering and the corruption that facilitates it.

A rising number of Central Asians are forced into the drug trade due to their failure to find legitimate means of living in their shattered economics. The problem of unemployment paves the way for criminality, causing more social and political instability. Problems like lack of resources, growing corruption among law enforcement agencies etc. facilitate both drug trafficking and organised crime network. The illicit drug trafficking operation in Central Asia endangers not only of local population but also brings about negative implications for law and order, political, social and economic stability of the region. Drugs addiction damages physical, psychological and emotional health of whole sections of society. In this regards, Central Asian leaders have indicated concerns about the effect of narcotics trafficking on the stability and integrity of the region and the potential damage of related criminal activities to long term economic progress (Gordon, 2001).

The growth of the trade across Central Asia and the general increase in the amount of drugs available in the region have facilitated drug addiction and gradually more serious problems in the region as well. From the 1990s, drug addiction became more wide spread in Central Asia. Since independence, the numbers of drug users had steadily grown. Several factors contributed to this, including the breakdown of discipline and public order, the growing presence of criminal groups in society and easier access to drug. After the 9/11 events, the fight against terrorism, extremism and drug trade became the chief concern of internal and external policy of many countries. More often it began to be considered as a major problem since drug trade remains the main factor in the growth of religious extremism and terrorism (Iigushev, 2001). Drug trade is now regarded as one of the important factors risking family life and social stability throughout Central Asia. All the Central Asian governments have expressed serious concern about rapid growth of HIV / AIDS associated with drug injection.

Drug trafficking is a major cause of non-traditional security threat posing a serious danger to the security of Central Asian states. It is clear that Central Asian states were totally unprepared to deal with the threat posed by the proliferation of drugs and has no resources to pay for the massive economic and social costs associated with the problem. There is no shared regional understanding of the problem. Each country instead emphasizes only on its specific aspects. Those involved in the illicit drug trade are interested in destabilizing the region to advance their goals. Drug money has and will support all sort of radical movement and terrorist organizations. The region can potentially become a major "hot spot". It is the high time that the world should pay closer attention to this problem and helped out all these countries before it gets completely out of control. It requires a multi-prolonged approach on part of the state authorities of these states in combat the menace. Civil society can also play a significant role in this direction in raising awareness of the negative consequences of drug addiction (Smith, 2003).

The problems that threaten regional security in the Central Asia region include traditional as well as non-traditional risks and threats like terrorism, drug trade and illegal migration. Currently, Central Asian states which are characterized by a fragile state of stability in the face of many unresolved problems related to regional security are in the process of

continuing their systemic transformation. Potential conflicts linked to ethnicity still exist in several Central Asian states. Besides, there are other factors contributing for conflict situation such as territorial claims, international terrorists (Al-Qaeda, East Turkistan Islamic Movement etc.), dispute over sharing of waters and environmental problems. The differences in domestic and foreign policy of Central Asian countries contribute to the emergence of new controversial issues in interstate relations. For example, cross-border disputes between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, including enclaves in the Ferghana Valley, occur periodically (Dolzhekova 2008: 59).

In addition to significant conflict potential between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan (revolving around border territories, water sharing, and Uzbek Communities that are perceived as a threat in Turkmenistan), narco-trafficking and organized crime are major security concerns (Badykova 2005:76). Inefficient public administration and a combination of other factors like different models of state management (both formal/informal and traditional), contributed to corruption and widening the gulf between rich and poor thus resulting in wide dissatisfaction among the citizens. Against this background, public services are now in a state of underdevelopment, government agencies are becoming more like corporations and their effectiveness is extremely low (Dolzhekova 2008: 55). One of the main problems is the lack of credibility of the authorities in the society. Most of the Central Asian regimes have minimum credibility in the society. Due to the weakness of civil society there is limited participation in the political process as well.

Environment and Water Sharing Issues

Environment and water is taking on special importance in Central Asia. The main concerns emanated from the Semipalatinsk (the main Soviet nuclear test site), Baikanour (the principle Soviet space launch site), other metal mines, a booming hydrocarbons industry, many chemical plants, one of the world's largest aluminium factories and disturbingly high morbidity rates for a range of environmentally-linked maladies. Central Asia has been facing an environmental disaster. However, Kazakhstan's Nevada Semipalatinsk moment had over a million members in 1990 and was effective in closing down Kazakhstan's largest nuclear site. Likewise, with the quickly shrinking Aral Sea, an immense cotton industry,

huge desert, advancing desertification, concerns over potable water, the dying Caspian Caviar trade, despite having one of the world's longest rivers, and the fourth deepest lake in the world, Central Asia's water problems have been complex and compelling (Sievers 2002: 357).

Water is the key to the economic and political stability of Central Asia. It is well known that the reduced inflow of river water from Amu Darya and Syr Darya had caused the Aral Sea to shrink. The shrinking of the Aral Sea has already become an emotional issue. The Aral Sea has shrunk by almost 30% over the past two decades (Sengupta, 2009). Growth of agricultural activity with high water demand related to cotton production, continues to result in excessive water diversion for irrigation purposes from the Amu Darya River. Today, over 55 million people live in Central Asia with about 60 million hectares of land suitable for irrigation but the available water resource permit irrigation of only 10-12 million hectares, and that is already approaching the limit. By 2025, according to demographic estimates, this population may increase to 90 million. In order to meet the needs of the increased population it would be necessary to increase significantly the sowing areas for the production of food crops. In order to provide jobs, new industries and work places will have to be created. Housing and public utilities will have to be enlarged. All this will require increase in the total water supply in the Central Asian Countries (Dmitriyenko 2004:78).

Water problems is governed by the change in the geo-political situation in the Central Asian region where the main river basins have trans-border character and the utilisation of their flow should take place according to a system agreed upon by the countries with common borders. The problem of water supply and joint utilisation of trans-border water resources has been one of the main potential factors of conflict, posing a real threat to the security of the Central Asian States. But it can very quickly take ethno-political colour and become a reason for spreading radical nationalistic feeling. That is why it is essential for each state not only to be extremely careful and constantly coordinate its actions with all other states, but it is also necessary to create authoritative collective bodies for searching solutions and maintaining stability (Dmitriyenko 2004: 85). In this context, it would not

wrong to say that water distribution system could entail a serious destabilising potential to regional security.

Central Asian upstream countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, along the two major rivers of the region Amu Darya and Syr Darya prefer to maximize the use of the water for generating electricity for export and to meet domestic energy demands, especially in the winter. They want to build new dams in order to provide a consistent supply of cheap and clean electricity to their populations as well as to their economies. At the same time, the downstream countries, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, prefer to have maximum access to water for irrigation during the summer months, while also avoiding the floods caused by winter water releases. They fear that new large dams will decrease the amount of water available for irrigation and further strengthen the control over water resources by upstream countries (Krasznai, 2009).

This preference of upstream countries to maximize utilization of water resources lead to fear on the downstream countries and has been significantly challenging the regional security in Central Asian region. However, to manage with these inter-relationships in regional trade, the Central Asian governments have resorted to bilateral and multilateral agreements that regulate the quantities of water and energy (coal, electricity, and gas) that are exchanged between the countries and the values at which they are exchanged (Iskandarova, 1998).

There is a long history of mistrust and tension between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan with respect to water and border issues. Both countries rely on water from the Amu Darya River for extensive agricultural irrigation. This water sharing has been regulated by the bilateral Treaty of 1996, which stipulates that the Amu Darya's water be divided equally between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Afghanistan's prospective utilization of more Amu Darya water to develop agriculture and poppy crop alternatives could also threaten the delicate water balance between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Badykova 2005: 74).

In addition, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in view of the limited reserves of oil and gas on their territory, are vitally interested in exploiting the energy potential formed in the upper reaches of the water resources. At the same time, an overwhelming part of the land suitable

for agriculture is concentrated on the territory of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which objectively determines the interest of these countries in the working of an irrigation regime for the utilisation of the water resources in the region (Dmitriyenko 2004: 84-85).

However in this regards, in February 1992, the Central Asian states signed the agreement “On Cooperation in the Area of Joint Management, Use and Protection of Water Resources of Interstate Sources”, establishing the Interstate Water Resources Coordination Committee (IWRCC) to manage joint cross-border water resources. The Central Asian countries also signed the agreement "On Synergistic Actions Aimed at Solving Problems of the Aral Sea and Aral Area, Environmental Recovery, and Socio-economic Development of the Aral Region", proclaiming the collective responsibility for creating suitable environmental conditions in the Aral area. These rules were later accepted by the heads of states during meeting in 1994 in Nukus (Uzbekistan), in 1995 in Dashouz (Turkmenistan), and in 1997 in Almaty and Tashkent. Experience has also shown, however, the agreement cannot totally resolve tension among upstream and downstream water users. In fact, some have claimed that shortage and scarcity could result in water being used as an instrument of political and economic pressure, and perhaps even military conflicts (Paramonov 2006: 35).

Indeed, Sievers (2002) pointed out water conflicts in Central Asia may work to reduce regional stability in two major ways. First, they may lead to open conflicts among states. Second, they may internally fail states so that such states lose the ability to address non-state threats to stability, such as those presented by terrorist networks, drug cartels, and separatist movements.

Caspian Sea and Resource Conflicts

The Caspian Sea has been one of the richest oil regions of the world. The energy wealth of the Caspian Sea is becoming a cause of the conflict of geo-political and geo-economic interests of many states, oil consumers, as well as large multinational companies and a number of international organizations. The interests of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan clash in the Caspian region since their territories touch the

Caspian Sea. At the same time, Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, Pakistan, India and the Countries of South-East Asia want to profit from the transportation of hydrocarbons. The problem is becoming serious because the legal status of the Caspian Sea remains unresolved, thus complicating the mutual relations of the Caspian states (Sengupta, 2009).

Central Asia region has been a zone where various forces pursued well-aimed policies. After 9/11 events in the US, by carrying out anti-terrorist operations in Afghanistan and making use of complex internal political and economic situations in the countries of the region (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) America was able to strengthen its military and political influence in the region. For Central Asia, any form of confrontation among the external powers, especially a Russia-US confrontation, poses the threat of fragmentation of the region into adversarial camps which in turn presupposes narrowing down of the field of manoeuvring in their external relations, which can have a rather negative effect on their national interest (Dmitriyenko 2004: 83-84). In this respect, Central Asian Security has very much to do with the geo-economic interest of the external powers.

In this regard, another obstacle to regional security in Central Asia is that in the present geopolitical environment, the region has been exposed to the conflicting ideologies, namely, Western democratic movements, Soviet ideological trends (the quasi-democratic), and Islamic ideological tendencies. The US and other European countries want to see liberal democratic states in the region. At the same time, countries like Russia and China have encouraged and supported the existing regime without worrying about the question of democracy. In addition, countries like Saudi Arabia have been supportive of Islamic ideological trends in this region. These conflicting ideological trends add to the existing problems which CARs are facing today (Roy 2009: 94).

The issue of extremism and terrorism pose a grave threat to the stability of Central Asia. Reducing Islamic terrorist movements in the region due to the ongoing antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan has drawn serious attention to the Central Asian security. In general, the problem does not lie merely in the existence of radical Islamic groups, but in the possibility of expanding their social and ideological base. A number of structural units of international terrorist organizations, containing the Islamic Party of Turkmenistan, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, East Turkistan Islamic Movement, Jammāt Mujahideen

and Hizb-ut-Tahrir operate in the region. These clandestine groups are particularly active in the territory of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, mostly due to the socio-economic and political instability in these countries (Dolzhikova 2008: 59).

One of the major security challenges in Central Asian region is that, with scarce financial and material resources and old-fashioned armaments and structures inherited from the Soviet Union, Central Asian states have limited defence potential. This was apparent during the IMU incursions into Kyrgyzstan Batken Oblast in 1999-2000. Currently, no real Central Asian regional security systems exists. This reflects deep competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan over regional leadership issues, different perceptions of potential threats, unresolved sensitive security issues (enclaves, demarcation of borders, shared natural resources, etc.) and differing assessments of other countries' security potential. The situation worsened considerably after the 1999-2000 events in Batken, when Uzbekistan planted mines along its borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Many Kyrgyz shepherds and livestock were killed by these mines (Slay 2005: 43).

Political Structure and Challenges to Regional Security

The fault of the regional local actors, at first sight, is one of the main problems to the regional stability in Central Asia. Political structures in Central Asia are still rather weak with battered economies that make the Central Asian states weak both politically and financially. Drug traders prefer to conduct their business in or through weak states and if possible takeover crucial elements of the state apparatus. The drug trade has impacted the regional stability and national cohesion negatively in Central Asia. The current states are weak and the national identities are not strong enough to create effective and solid states. The clans still have important power positions in the region at the expense of the national governments. For the region to integrate into regional organizations, this creates difficulties, because the states are neither strong nor confident enough to engage in regional organizations. The perception is that any limitation of national jurisdiction can initiate the division of the states in the region. It has also proven especially difficult to engage in multilateral cooperation without any external powers such as Russia or China (Swanstrom 2004:41-42).

Economic growth is now being considered as an essential tool for ensuring stability and security to the nation as well as region. At present, one of the most dangerous tendencies in Central Asia is the growth of disintegration processes in the region. Different approaches to the reformation of the economy, differences in perceptions about the paths and degree of integration within the framework of CARs and CIS, setting apart of interests of various states participating in the formation of the regional security system in Central Asia etc., have acted as the strongest factors for the intensification of potential disintegration processes in the region. It may be noted that many intra-and inter-regional unions (e.g. earlier Central Asian Union) were playing mainly the deliberative functions, and were not able to become organisations capable of resisting the disintegrative tendencies and take practical decisions to resolve the differences and contradiction between participating states, particularly in relations to the problems of water utilisation, borders, etc. (Dmitriyenko 2004: 87).

Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have adopted comparatively open and democratic free-market system, while Uzbekistan, not willing to restructuring its political institutions, has a relatively closed economy. Turkmenistan is an extreme case of a totalitarian state which has returned to unlimited tyranny. The then leader of Uzbekistan, Karimov, though talk of need to combat the Islamic threat, facilitate market reforms and 'prepare' the society for democracy. Tajikistan government was unable to control country's situation due to regional and clan-based clashes (Tabyshalieva 2000: 80).

Domestic policies and developments in each of the Central Asian country have the potential to affect indirectly, but strongly, other countries in the region, even if these policies are not intended to do so. An extreme example is the civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s, which caused flows of refugees into Kyrgyzstan and further north, changed the security condition in the region and damaged the region's investment attractiveness and so on. The governments of Central Asia had no capacity to effectively control cross-border movements of people, goods, and capital. The lack of experience of the newly created government structures with very short institutional memories coupled with governance imperfection (corruption, lack of accountability, etc.) produce considerable gaps between policy and implementation. Therefore, domestic policies that create large differences (e.g.,

between internal and export prices, higher taxes than in neighbouring countries, subsidized vs. market prices across the border, etc.) vis-a vis neighbouring countries generate negative outcomes (Slay 2005:43). This condition creates spill over effect on the issues of regional security in the Central Asian countries which shows the extent of challenges to security in the Central Asian Countries.

Recurrent threats of political destabilization superimpose on a whole range of unresolved socio-economic problems. Poor market infrastructure and lack of an effective and stable economic development strategy create low investment attraction of Central Asian economies. In addition to purely domestic factors, there are a number of regional issues, which threaten the security of the region. Various forms of extremism and terrorism, usage of drugs and drug trafficking and illegal migration across Central Asia are already having negative impact on Central Asian's security (Dolzhikova 2008:51).

Socio-economic situation is the main determining factor of internal political stability in Central Asia. This factor is important for regional political stability given that all the Central Asian countries, excepting Kazakhstan, have been going through difficult economic situation. Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan continue to experience serious problems in their economic and social development, which have a direct negative impact on social and political stability in these countries (Dolzhikova 2008: 51-52).

Economic problems remain unresolved to a large extent. In case of Tajikistan, civil war destroyed the entire economic infrastructure. In other cases, it has been lack of resources, complex structure of the economy, and shortage of skilled manpower due to brain drain, poor governance and corruption, which crippled the economic manageability. Agrarian sectors of the economies of the region were unable to reform. Almost all the Central Asian states have serious problems in agriculture, which remains the most sensitive sector of their economies. Since this sector employs too many people, radical reform measures could lead to severe social and economic costs (Kosichenko, 2008).

In each of the countries of the region, a major chunk of population is employed in agriculture, which was originally having a low yield. Rate of unemployment and poverty

in Central Asia remains relatively high due to the low efficiency of agriculture, small crop area, low degree of industrial mechanization, collapse of industrial sector and rapid population growth. There is a problem of weak state control over economies in varying degrees. In some cases, the economy still remains under the influence of elite groups which actually have privatized some assets besides creating obstacles to positive changes in the economy as it could affect their status. The overwhelming majority of these states have not yet completed the reform of their governance system which in turn determines the development of the state and political organisms (Dolzhikova 2008: 52-53).

Thus, relations between the states of the Central Asian region, as they are at present, cannot be called sufficiently efficient. Excessive obsession with independence, unjustified competition and less regard for mutual requirements as well as other factors do not facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation. As a result, the regional economic union has not developed (Dmitriyenko 2004: 89).

Security Strategies of Central Asian States

The CIS framework guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Central Asian states. Not only were Soviet created borders recognised by their CIS neighbours, Central Asian states were protected from outside threats by the CIS security structures. Any change in the borders could be done by mutual consent and not by force or coercion. All the Central Asian states, barring Turkmenistan, entered into a CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) signed originally in May 1992 that also included Russia and Armenia (Patnaik 2016:56).

However, in the early days of independence, the euphoria of nationalism and religious revivalism propelled these new states towards their Islamic neighbours. Though Central Asia states were part of the CIS and its border security architecture, they sought to intensify their relations with the Islamic states. During this period (1991-1996), an open door policy was followed with the hope that an extended cultural neighbourhood would stabilise their independence and lessen their dependence on Russia. Funds started pouring from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey to support religious and cultural instructions. Groups propounding political Islam were finding ideological and material support from the sources in these states. A struggle for mutual influence in the region

began. It was expected by the neighbouring Islamic powers that due to historical, cultural, religious affinities and military, economic weakness, Central Asian states could be brought under their respective influence (Edwards 2003:83-104).

Central Asian states joined the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) and other regional organisations such as ECO (Economic Cooperation Organisation) to strengthen their ties with Islamic countries. However, economic limitations of the member states and tension between them made these organisation ineffective. Early hopes of strengthening economic integration with Islamic neighbours have not materialised. The Islamic powers were interested in spreading their own brand of ideology to obtain hegemony that hardly helped to ensure in security or development in Central Asia. Competing perspectives and limited objectives of Central Asia's southern neighbours (in west Asia as well as in south Asia) were bound to impinge on their capacity to have a strong influence in the Central Asian region (Hunter 2003:134).

In the early years of Central Asian's independence (late 1991 to early 1993), Iran took the lead in encouraging and shaping religious revival in Central Asia. This included sponsored missionary activities, distribution religious books, broadcasting of Iranian television and radio in Central Asia, training of Mullahs in Iranian madrassas and opening of the religious schools and mosques. Iran was reportedly supporting the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) of Tajikistan. The initial fervour however calmed down as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan entered in a big way to this fray, and Iran subsequently became less aggressive in religious proselytising and concentrated more on good diplomatic and economic relations (Herzig 2001:176).

The involvement of Islamic neighbours, especially in Tajikistan, brought Russia right back to Central Asia after initial hesitation. The fear was that religious extremist and instability from Central Asia could affect Russia, where many Muslim nationalists reside. The begging of the Tajik civil war in 1992 and cross-border terrorism support from Iran and Afghanistan to Islamic opposition in Tajikistan led to the stationing of Russia troops on Tajik- Afghan border, which ensured Tajikistan's territorial integrity during and after the civil war (1992-1997) (Patnaik, 2016:57).

The rise of the Taliban and its coming to power in Kabul dramatically changed the security scenario in Central Asia. The region was in danger of being sucked into a world of radical Islam, the foundation of which had been laid in Afghanistan. However, the victory of Taliban also ended the illusion that the secular and the moderate Central Asia can integrate with its Islamic neighbours in a large cultural space for mutual advantages. Some states like Iran changed the course, feeling the heat from the Taliban, while others like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan sided with the Taliban. During this period (1996-2001), Russia was forced to turn its attention to the Central Asia more due to its worries related to insurgency in Chechnya. Moscow sustained the anti-Taliban front (Northern Alliance) with support from the states like Tajikistan, India and Iran. China looked beyond economic opportunities in the region to the issues of regional stability and religious extremism (Patnaik, 2016:58).

Since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, America and Russia increased their presence in the region and Central Asian states were insulated from the external security threats of a traditional nature by strongly engaging with these two military super powers. However, as the United States shrinks its troop presence in Afghanistan to a skeletal level by 2014, the new security dynamic is yet to be clear. But with Russia strongly moving ahead with the Eurasian integration process and the United States looking for some way to remain engaged with the security of the Central Asia, there may be some more rounds of competition between the two global powers. China is pushing for strengthening the SCO, one security mechanism that also meets the Chinese objective of seeing the United States out while not having Russia as the sole power in the region. The security scenario would depend a lot on the relations between Central Asian states themselves and the evolving nature of their relationship with external powers (McDermott 2010:1-3).

There are also new security concerns that overlap and have linkages with traditional security issues. The threats to Central Asian security are both external and internal. Though military security is still relevant, challenges from non-traditional threats seem to be substantial. There is cross linkage between traditional and non-traditional issues. Any issues like water, environment, terrorism and interethnic relations can also become catalysts for conflicts between states or threaten security and stability of Central Asian

states. The non-traditional threats could also facilitate hard power politics in the region. The fear of the escalating danger of terrorism after NATO troops pull out from Afghanistan has led some countries to depend on the security guarantee of Russia by integrating closely with CSTO and extending the leasing of Russian bases. Uzbekistan wants closer attention of Western power by presenting itself as a key point for Northern Distribution Network (NDN). Three Central Asian states have joined SCO, where China plays a leading role along with Russia. The SCO has its own anti-terrorist structure (Patnaik 2016:59).

Central Asian states have been trying to settle their own problems with the help of the external powers. For example, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan would like Russia to help them build major hydroelectric projects. Uzbekistan's attitude to Russia is no less determined by the latter's relations with its neighbours. A proposed Russian base in Osh province in southern Kyrgyzstan and the creation of CSTO Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) were the reasons for Uzbekistan's suspension of membership in all Russia led regional organisations and a revival of interests towards the United States. Earlier, when the West criticised the Uzbek state's actions in Andijan, Tashkent sought Russia's support to ward off international pressure. Each external power is trying to keep away from taking sides in inter-state tensions. Russia, for example has shown reluctance to help Tajikistan in building the Rogun Dam or open a new base in Kyrgyzstan. The smaller states are feeling secure due to non-combative engagement of major powers, but if the interstate disputes escalate and polarise the geopolitics of the region, the major powers may be forced to take sides in the conflicts according to their own priorities and preferences. The proxy wars thus unleashed could further vitiate inter-state relations and damage regional stability (Patnaik 2016: 58-59).

To concluding at the moment, the Central Asian region looks secure, though the vulnerability continues. Smaller states are depending on Russia to moderate the leadership ambitions of some powerful Central Asian states and take care of existing threats like international terrorism. However, Russia's leadership can come into questions if the polarisation deepens and one aggrieved state might move towards Russia's adversaries to address the perceived imbalance. In case the United States succeeds in wooing Uzbekistan back to its fold, countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are likely to seek Russian

protection. That would again unleash a new spiral of strategic competition between external powers.

Bary Buzan's theory, has relevance to the Central Asian security. The region has been the focus of attention of several regional and global powers. The importance of the region is mostly recognised from a strategic point of view. Huge amounts of natural resources such as oil, gas and minerals have attracted outside powers. At the same time, the challenge is not just to balance the interest of external powers, but the internal conflicts that can arise from many unresolved problems within the region. Terrorism, border disputes, ethnic conflicts, poverty and environmental degradation, along with competition for energy and pipeline routes create instability and affect the security of the region of the Central Asian states. These issues today are critical for the stability of the region, since big power games depend on escalation of intra-regional conflicts (Chouhan and Pathania, 2011:87-99).

Summary

The Central Asian states have a shared common legacy which gives them the basis and potential for the appearance of cooperative dynamics in the region as they share common history and substantial cultural commonality. The Central Asian states also share common problems in seeking to distinguished themselves from the legacy of the Soviet economic and the previous political system. However, their reform process differed in pace and content.

While there are many common elements, Central Asian states do have conflictual dynamics as well which appears more deeply entrenched. It is reflected in an increasing diversification and incompatibility of the economic, political and strategic interests; distinct levels of economic development of these states, raw materials supply chain; geopolitical factors such as historically disputed territories, limitation of communication, struggle among Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for the leadership in the region etc. Central Asian states also confront the problems of unequal availability as well as distribution of water resources, existence of numerous zones of environmental disaster, demographic imbalance, and migration problems etc. The potential role of radical Islam is also

significant with regards to the study of cooperative as well conflictual dynamics within the region.

Emergence of Central Asian states after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 made this region strategically significant with regards to regional security. Central Asian states not only suffered low economic development and high potentiality of intra-and inter-state conflicts, but also faced challenges such as terrorism, extremism, separatism, presence of extremely unstable regional environment (Afghanistan, Kashmir, northern Caucasus); porous border, expansion of drug trade, religious extremism, conflicting interests of leading powers and interstate contradictions. However, the terror and drug trafficking activities emanating from Afghanistan appeared as the most potential threat to regional stability.

In such challenging situation in the Central Asian region, rivalry among major powers such as Russia, China and the United States, Iran and Turkey appeared in the region for gaining access to energy resources, which have been viewed by these powers as alternative to the volatile West Asian and Persian Gulf regions. These actors do not only consolidate their position but also tend to increase their presence in the region through complex modes of relationships. These acts do not only promote cooperation but also triggers competition among them as is evident from polarisation of relations among Russia, China and US. This strategic rivalry is compounded by the worsening security situation in Afghanistan.

Apart from these issues, Central Asian states face several challenges such as territorial and border disputes, domestic policy and break down of economic links that existed during Soviet times. Challenges to regional security include aggravation of inter-ethnic relations in Central Asia, rising Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, differences over water-sharing and emergence of conflicting ideologies etc.

Chapter-3

Role of Major Powers in Central Asia States

Introduction

Central Asia has emerged as a geo-strategically significant region since its inception in 1991. Central Asia borders with strategically most important regions of the Eurasian continent. China and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region are situated on its east while on the western front, the Caucasus, Turkey, Europe and Russia are situated. Afghanistan, West Asia and a number of other Islamic states are situated on its southern border.

Alexander von Humboldt introduced the concept of Central Asia as a divergent region of the world in 1843. However, the borders of Central Asia were subject to several definitions for a long time. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the most common definition of Central Asia contains all the five Central Asian successor states which are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. There are many factors which are responsible for their common regional identity. First, these states share not only geographic contiguity and extensive common borders, but also cultural and linguistic similarities as well as a common heritage. Second, their history shows that there has been political unity among them. Third, there have been close economic interaction between them in the past as well (Kembayev 2009: 186-187).

One of the notable Geographers and Geo-politicians, Sir Halford Mackinder, in his Paper on "The Geographical pivot of History" presented in London on January 25, 1904 described Eurasian region of the world as the Heartland. Through Heart land theory, he also established the importance of Central Asia in the world politics. This idea would become the foundation of his contribution to geostrategic discourse. Central Asia's central position due to it's being at the crossroads of Eurasia. For example, former US official Zbigniew Brzezinski was adequately impressed by the shift in the external links of Central Asian States by the autumn 1997 to call for a US strategy to "consolidate and perpetuate the prevailing geopolitical pluralism on the map of Eurasia" in order to shape a new "cooperative trans-Eurasian Security System" in the future (Jonson and Allison 2001: 3).

The newly independent states of Central Asia have diversified political and economic interests such as favourable geographical position, huge stocks of hydrocarbons and other precious minerals which attract the attention of world powers. Due to these factors, after the emergence of new states in Central Asia following Soviet disintegration in 1991, the entire geopolitical, economic and security landscape of Eurasia has changed. Its importance has been growing as an alternate to West Asian energy and the vast Eurasian landmass is attractive with regards to security, energy and strategy. Such important strategic and geopolitical factors have played a significant role in wide deliberations over developing a regional security mechanism for the Central Asian region. Today it has immense geopolitical significance in international relations. Territories of the region represent a zone in-between the East and the West. This has resulted in making external powers such as Russia, China and United States, Turkey and Iran attracted towards the Central Asian region. In this regard, regional security is a factor in attempts at Central Asian integration. The role of major external powers like Russia, China and the US and their influence need to be evaluated from the perspective of traditional security of Central Asia (Olcott and Garnett, 1999).

Some external powers interested in Central Asian states are regarded regional as powers insofar as they engage in the region. The policies of Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and the United States in Central Asia are discussed in the geopolitical scenario. The new relations evolving between these powers and Central Asian states can be characterised as resulting from historical and cultural affinities, economic interests, security concerns and strategic interests. The historical and cultural affinities are reflected, for example, in Turkey's role in all Central Asian states except Tajikistan, Iran's role in Tajikistan, the Russian role in Kazakhstan and also in other countries based on Soviet legacy throughout Central Asia. The economic interests, are based in the form of trade, investments and the exploitation of energy resources (for example Iran's evolving economic and transit trade cooperation with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan; China's growing trade with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; Turkish and US investments in the regional economies overall and the energy interests of all the regional powers). Security concerns depend on the degree to which the security of the external powers is directly linked to the Central Asian region. Russia, China and Iran share borders with Central Asian states, which creates a direct strategic interest in the

region. These interests also stem from the visions of the regional powers about their role in Central Asia. The strategic interests of external powers may combine goals such as maintaining the status quo, denying the strategic access of other powers or increasing their own influence in Central Asia (Jonson and Allison 2001:14-15).

Russia and Regional Security in Central Asia

The Soviet break-up led to the information of modern nation-states in Central Asia for the first time in history. The process of formation of modern nation and creation of statehood in the region is far from complete. The administrative borders between Central Asian states during Soviet period had swept away the somewhat pre-modern boundaries formed on the basis of kingdom-based identity of native population. They automatically turned into the state borders following Soviet disintegration. However, disagreements along these borders contain huge potential for future national conflicts between newly formed Central Asian states. It must be emphasised here that Central Asian republics were virtually thrown out of the Soviet Union as a result of the bitter power struggle between Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and his arch-rival Russian President Boris Yelstin (Mohanty 2014:73).

Central Asia has always been of particular significance to Russia by virtue of its strategic geographical situation and its wealth of natural resources. Only when Moscow had stable positions in the region was it able to exert much influence in the development of a favourable balance of forces and interests in Eurasia. It is apparent that the achievement of these strategic objectives is directly connected to a push for multilateral cooperation among Russia and the countries of Central Asia in the security sphere. The central aim of this cooperation would be the formation of an effective security system in the post-Soviet space and its Central Asian sector. Strengthening regional security with the active participation of Moscow is also vitally important for all the countries of Central Asia (Paramonov and Stolpovski, 2008).

The Central Asian Republics had no significant degree of enthusiasm for independence. They might have been unhappy about the role of USSR. They had no willingness for independence because of deep economic dependency on Moscow and the enormous problems of managing resources and development. Leaders were more concerned about

issues like eruption of nationalism, ethnic conflict and their escalation. There were also concerns about the military/security situation as the Central Asian republics did not have a worthwhile military of their own (Hooman 1998: 27).

Many scholars in the mid-90s thought that Russia was back to play a role and influence in that region it had lost after the Soviet Union broke up and the Central Asian republics became independent states. Russia's return to the region was during second half of the 1990s after years of rapid though involuntary disengagement. It was losing influence in the economic, political, cultural and security spheres, while it still continued to be the strongest external power in Central Asia and a key player with regard to security in the region. Its position as a 'security guarantor' in Central Asia was diluted as other external actors became more engaged (Jonson, 1998). After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian experts exaggerated the significance of factors which would induce Central Asia to maintain close cooperation with Russia. Most analysts believed that geographic location, common history, interdependent production systems, infrastructure and institutions, and old dependences on Russian financial subsidies and on the Russian market would guarantee a continued interest in the region for extensive cooperation with Russia. They also believed that shared identity and common values, derived from a long history of cohabitation, continues even after the break-up of the Soviet Union. These assumptions are said to be overstated (Jonson and Allison, 2001).

Russia observed with concern as states on its southern border were new independently-minded states. They were instigated to cooperate and shift their direction away from Russia. Uzbekistan became the most keen to enter into cooperation with USA. Turkmenistan restricts its military cooperation with Russia on the ground of its status, recognised by the UN General Assembly, of 'permanent neutrally'. As Russia saw its influence in Central Asia weakening, it feared that it would be displaced by the engagement of external powers in the region. Realising its loosening influence over Central Asian region, which Russia viewed it as its own 'backyard', Russia struggled to find a policy to counter its detachment from the region (Jonson 2001: 95).

The major security concerns of Russia from the Central Asian region were also non-military security threats emanating from to terrorism, religious extremism, drug-

trafficking, flow of weapons, and refugees from south bound for Europe. Russia was also facing challenges to maintain its own security and territorial integrity as well as protection of Russian minorities in Central Asia which were affecting Russia's stability. The Taliban and AI Qaeda in Afghanistan also presented long-term political, security and economic challenges to Russia. Strong linkage between Chechen insurgents and AI Qaeda/Taliban forces, with motives other than religion to gain control over oil resources as well worried Russia. As a result, Russia was more consistent about opposing the Taliban than the Americans.

Russia and Central Asia Security Cooperation

In the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet Union Russia signed bilateral agreements with Central Asian states on security cooperation. In May 1992 a joint defence organisation was created when the Treaty of Collective of Security was signed in Tashkent. To Russia such a treaty was important in order to ensure that close military and security relations would continue between new states on former Soviet territory, which would guarantee Russia a leading position in the future. The treaty was mainly concerned with external threats and the signatories also committed themselves to refrain from the use of force against one another. All the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan became signatories (Duvnov, 1999).

Russia's interest in Central Asia can also be seen in the strategic and security sphere. The stability of Central Asian states, which function as a buffer for Russia, is one main security concern. Russia's first military doctrine released in May 1992, indicated at the threat to Russian security based on local and regional conflicts and wars erupting along Russia's borders. In this regards, a declaration on CIS Collective Peacekeeping Force in Tajikistan was signed September 1993 between Russia and three Central Asian states (Jonson 2001: 99-100).

It would be worth noting that after the outbreak of civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, Russia had kept military presence along the Afghan border there. The crisis in Tajikistan was characterized as an external threat emanating from war ridden Afghanistan. Subsequently, Russia has become more conscious of the importance of Central Asia to its own security.

Resultantly, Russia started seeking security related cooperation through bilateral and multilateral arrangements. Multilateral cooperation is seen primarily within the framework of such organisations as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Matveeva, 2009).

Central Asian region remains important to Russia because of its strategic geographical position and its wealth of natural resources. Russia could exert much influence in the development of a favourable balance of forces and interests in Eurasia only when it had stable positions in the region. So Russia's main aim has been to cooperate in the evolution and formation of an effective security system in the region. Similarly strengthening regional security with Russia's active involvement is also vitally important for all the countries of Central Asia region (Stsenarii, 1996).

Despite regional organizations, bilateral engagements are the basis of Russia's Central Asia policy, both in the security as well as economic spheres. Bilateral agreements linked the Central Asian states to Russia, though some scholar have pointed out that this web of relations has been slowly undermined. Security relationships between Russia and Central Asian states can also be seen in marked ups and downs which have determined their foreign policy measures in order to protect their national interests. On the other hand, Russian foreign policy has also been determined by external power diplomacy and alternative engagements by Central Asian countries (Mesbahi, 1997).

It would be appropriate to deliberate upon Russia's bilateral engagement with each country of the Central Asian region. Uzbekistan is the most populous and militarily powerful state in the region. In early 1990s, Uzbekistan appeared to be Russia's closest military ally. However, military cooperation reduced due to the course of events in Tajik civil war during the period of 1992-1997. Uzbekistan's denial to renew its participation in the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty in February 1999 was regarded as disagreement with 'Russia's military activity in certain states of the CIS'. At the same time, Uzbekistan became a member of GUUAM grouping (composed of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) (Jonson 2001: 105). This changed policy moves were seen by Russian strategic analysts as an evolving anti-Russian military bloc on former Soviet territory.

Russia was encouraged to seek cooperation with Central Asian countries given that these nations remain a potential sources of power for the future as well as are strategically significant. The framework for cooperation initiated in May 1998 between Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, with the purpose of preventing the spread of aggressive fundamentalism and extremism in the region may be viewed as an effort to find a new basis for cooperation with Uzbekistan as well as Tajikistan (Jonson 2001: 105). In October 1998 the Heads of the three states also signed a declaration on mutual assistance including a clause on military assistance in the event of aggression (Golotyuk, 1998). In July 1999 further documents on cooperation were signed calling for regular trilateral contacts to counter 'aggressive religious and other extremists, terrorist, criminal border infiltrators and drug and arms traffickers' (Sodruzbestvo, 1999).

Turkmenistan never joined the Treaty of Collective Security and there is no Russian military presence on Turkmen territory. Since Turkmenistan has been given "permanent neutrality" status by the United Nations, it has limited military co-operation with Russia. But Turkmenistan received Russian assistance to build up its national army after the break-up of the Soviet Union. Similarly, Russian border guards continued to patrol the Turkmen-Afghan border until the end of 1999. In May 1999, the Turkmen side unilaterally announced its decision to end of Russia-Turkmenistan treaty guarding the on border. Like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan is a member of NATO Partner for Peace (PfP) programme. It regards cooperation with the PfP as consistent with its neutral status and in May 1999 signed an agreement for a programme of further cooperation with the PfP (Georgiev, 1999).

Kazakhstan is of particular strategic importance to Russia as the two states share a border of more than 6500 km long which lacks proper demarcation and border control. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are continuing close military cooperation with Russia and stress the importance of this cooperation for their national defence. They participate in the CIS Common Air Defence system and since May 1996 air defence units have been operating jointly. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have declared that the Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion (Centrasbat) can be only used in a conflict if a UN mandate exists. There used to be Russian border troops along the Kazakh-Chinese border, but they were gradually being replaced by national Kazakh border troops (Obozrenie, 1999).

Kyrgyzstan continues its military cooperation with Russia and Central Asia states. It gives great importance to cooperation with the PFP. A small contingent of Russian military forces is still present in the country related to Kyrgyzstan's participation in the CIS Common Air Defence system. In January 1999 a Kyrgyz national border service was set up and national border troops gradually replaced Russian border guards until they left Kyrgyzstan in the end of 1999. Russian assistance was limited therefore to the training of Kyrgyz border guards. However, the 1999 incursion of terrorists onto its territory clearly demonstrated Kyrgyzstan's vulnerability (Kiyampur, 1998).

Russian cooperation with Tajikistan strengthened during late 1990s. The most volatile of all the Central Asian states torn by civil war and with a regime that would have fallen several years ago without Russian support, Tajikistan became Russia's major ally in the region. Russia intervened in the civil war and in 1993 the Russian 201st motorized Rifle Division, already deployed in Tajikistan, was recognised into a 'peacekeeping force'. The peace agreement signed in June 1997 by the conflicting parties, the regime of president Rakhmonov and UTO. It changed the prospects for a future Russian military presence in Tajikistan. The withdraw of Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Kazakh peacekeeping units from Tajikistan in 1998 changed the character of the so-called CIS Collective Peace keeping troops, and in June 2000 the CIS mandate formally ended. Therefore, to guarantee a future Russian military presence in Tajikistan a treaty was agreed on in April 1999 between the two countries by which the 201st Division will be reorganised into a Russian military base (Olimova, 1999).

Central Asia appeared pivotal to the renewed interest of Russia in the 'near abroad'. When Putin became prime minister in 1999, Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia became more pro-active than at any time previously (Cummings, 2001). As a president, he first went to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in May 2000, while describing Russia-Uzbek relations as a 'strategic partnership' (Jonson 2001). Tajikistan become even more dependent on Russia under Putin. In June 2000, Tajikistan's President Rahmanov confirmed that a Russo-Tajik treaty had been signed, giving Russia the right to establish military bases in Tajikistan. In addition, Putin has placed the Caspian at the heart of

Russia's pragmatic interests. In July 2000 a joint company composed of LUK oil, Gazprom and Yukos was created to develop Caspian Sea resources (Cummings, 2001).

Russia's Pro-activeness in Central Asia

The 9/11 terrorist attack on US cities in no small way contributed to shaping President Putin's foreign policy towards Central Asia. Russia was not confident that it could stop the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism emanating from Afghanistan to Central Asia. That is why it extended full support to the US in the aftermath of 9/11. Putin's show of solidarity with positive actions, included increased direct humanitarian and military presence in Central Asia. Putin gave the nod for the US to use military bases in Central Asia as a platform for war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, after serious thinking and a lot of home work (Kaushik, 2012).

The Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov and defence minister Sergei Ivanov were earlier on record, between September 17 and 23, 2001, for their total opposition to US military presence in Central Asia in the fight against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Defence minister Sergei Ivanov in one of his statements said that he could not imagine US military presence in Central Asia even in his worst dream. But subsequently, other arguments weighed heavily in favour of supporting US military presence in Central Asia. President Putin in his address to the nation on September 25, 2001 declared Russia's support to US military presence in Central Asia. Primarily two arguments changed Moscow's policy towards US military presence in Central Asia. First, since Russian did not have the capability to prevent the expansion of Islamic fundamentalism from Taliban-led Afghanistan into Central Asia from where it could have penetrated to Russian territory, Moscow thought it prudent to break the backbone of the Taliban regime with US military might. Second, Russia, fighting its own war against Chechen separatists backed by Islamic fundamentalists from Afghanistan, was subjected to severe criticism by Western countries, particularly by the US for violations of human rights there. Moscow sincerely believed that by allowing US military presence in Central Asia, it could win US sympathy in its war against Chechen extremists. It is also a fact that guided by these arguments, Moscow persuaded the Central Asian leaders, particularly the President of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to permit US presence on their territories. However, Moscow's expectations were belied, when the US,

after gaining a military foothold in Central Asia, did not stop criticising Russia on the issue of human rights violations in Chechnya (Zvyagelskaya, 2009).

US built its military base at Manas, Kyrgyzstan and started using the former Soviet base at Khanabad on Uzbek territory after modernising it. As time passed by, Moscow realised that the US had no intention of ending its military presence in Central Asia. Rather it appeared that the US is trying to consolidate and strengthen its military presence in Central Asia by using the war against terrorism as a pretext. Members of Russian strategic community slowly came to realise that US military presence in Central Asia has security implications for Moscow. Russia along with other members of SCO asked the US to determine the deadline for pulling out its forces, and closing its military bases in Central Asia during the SCO summit at Astana held in July 2005 (Sencerman, 2018).

US secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, paid a visit to Bishkek during her Central Asia tour and procured a public statement from Kyrgyz leadership for keeping US military presence in that country. Rice said, apparently in a statement not to hurt Russian sentiments, which “we want that Kyrgyz leadership maintained good relations with all countries, including Russia and US, should not choose between two”. However, Rice’s statement smacked of hollow diplomatic gesture at a time when conflict of interests between the two powers in Central Asia was quite evident. In the connection, the statement made by former Kyrgyz army chief deserves attention. The former army chief said “though cold war is over geopolitical fight for influence in Central Asia is quite evident and Kyrgyzstan must give priority to Russia in this fight” (Gazetta, 2005).

Russia’s defence and security cooperation with Uzbekistan has received a strong impetus over last few years, particularly in the aftermath of the Andijan events, of 2005 used by the West to destabilise Karimov’s regime in Uzbekistan. He rushed to Moscow which immediately extended diplomatic support to Tashkent in conditions of its international isolation. President Karimov met with president Putin and defence minister Sergei Ivanov during the crucial visit. Moscow, keen to regain its foothold in Uzbekistan, assured much needed support to president Karimov, who called for establishing military ally-like relations with Russia. Though Moscow was far from getting back its hold over its old military base at Khanabad, both countries agreed on joint military exercise, enhancing

defence cooperation with the prospect of Uzbek membership in CSTO. Karimov made his second visit to Moscow in November 2005. The outcome of the visit was agreement on bolstering military cooperation on June 2005. The agreement was hailed as an “alliance treaty” by president Karimov (Paramonov and Alexey, 2013).

Recently certain changes have been noticed in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy priorities. After building a robust strategic partnership in security and economic cooperation with Moscow, Tashkent seems to be attempting improvement of relations with the West, allegedly at the cost of Moscow. Uzbekistan’s major oil deal with Malaysia was yet another indication that Tashkent was changing its foreign policy priorities and trying to pursue multi-vector foreign policy. Moscow’s reaction so far has been calm (Lo, 2015).

In short, after being on the backfoot fingers in terms of losing its influence in Central Asia in the aftermath of Soviet disintegration in the 1990s, Moscow finally woke up to realise the geopolitical, strategic and economic significance of Central Asia. It looks to regain its foothold in the region by all possible means. Russia’s booming economy bolstered by high oil price until recently significantly contributed to Russia’s confidence. This has made Russia assert itself in international affairs and take steps for defending its national interest in vital regions of the world, including in Central Asia. In coming years, Russia would increasingly reassert itself in Central Asia and build up a stronger presence in the region. The CSTO, Eurasian Economic Union and SCO are the three significant regional organisations through which Moscow is trying to strengthen its military presence and strategic influence in Central Asia. Therefore, Russian foreign policy towards Central Asia remains a top priority which was clear from the statement devoted to foreign policy in Russian President’s annual addresses to the nation in 2008 (People’s Daily, 2008).

China and Regional Security in Central Asia

After the end of the Cold War, with the return of geo-politics back on the agenda, Eurasia turned into a competition ground for influence and one of the potential players is China. In order to benefit from the power vacuum in the region, it wisely calibrated its steps. Besides bilateral relations with Russia cantering around a discourse on multi-polarity, China, by turning to Central Asia for the first time since the Mongol dynasty and the Great Silk Road,

sought to fulfil its 'Grand Strategy' that consists of three main objectives-economic development, security and superpower status. For these ends, it referred to the ethos of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence that emphasize sovereignty, the diversity of political systems, non-interference, equality and mutual benefits (Yahuda 2001:276).Therefore, the relations particularly with the Central Asian States and Russia was established and still constitute a significant part of China's global objectives, both in terms of politics and economics.

The significance of Central Asia in the eyes of China generally followed from its new security conceptualizations. During the Cold War, China remained within the 'zero-sum perception' of its security relations with the external world. However, China's security concept appears more pragmatic and accommodative to the outside world since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, the period of 1982-1991 was an exceptional time with its best security environment for China, due to the détente between the two superpowers and Moscow's approach to Beijing for reconciliation. In this period, one can distinguish several implications of revising the inherited security concept of China. Economic and technological issues started to achieve great importance from the perspective of Chinese leadership that necessitated an adaptation to international rules. In addition, China started to take part in discussions on multilateral security regimes, to cooperate with neighbouring states on transnational security problems (such as negotiations on border disputes with the Soviet Union) suggesting a departure from its isolationist conception due to its understanding of multilateralism (Baiyi 2001: 176)

Since the disintegration of Soviet Union and creation of new republics of Central Asia, China has played a very constructive role in this region. China was one of the first nations to identify the newly independent states of Central Asia and established diplomatic relations with them in early 1992. Since then China has had many security initiatives with regards to Central Asia such as negotiating territorial questions, the ongoing separatist movement in Xinjiang Province, reduction in the level of military presence in border region, as well as economic issues. With bilateral as well as multilateral cooperation with Central Asian states, China has been able to meet many of these concerns. Regarding border dispute settlement, it would be pertinent to note that China directly shares its borders

with three Central Asian countries, namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Because of regular consultations on these issues, border problems have been sorted out. However, in recent years China's main concern from this region has been the emergence of separatism, religious extremism, terrorism and their negative influence on its Xinjiang Province (Nazemroaya, 2009).

China has multiple long-term objectives with respect to the development of its security concept. Firstly, China desires secure its foreign policy environment at a time when Chinese government focused on sustaining economic development and political stability. Secondly, China wishes to promote economic exchange that assists China's economic development. Thirdly, China wants to calm regional fears and reassure Asian neighbours about how China will use its rising power and influence. Lastly, China aims to boost its regional and international power and influence. In this context, stability, which also constitutes the basic logic of the Shanghai Five and later the SCO for its members and especially its initiator China, stands at a crucial point. At this point, understanding the shift in China's strategic thinking and its implementations, its strategic interests, objectives and problems in Central Asia would be beneficial to comprehend the role of Central Asia for China's peaceful rise (Robert, 2004).

China considered the Central Asian states in the context of Eurasia. In the eyes of China, they have a linkage role, not only in a geographical sense, but also in the political and cultural sense. Therefore, Central Asia can be considered a bridge between East and West. If there were turbulence around that bridge, the future of political and economic cooperation in the whole Eurasian continent would be seriously affected. Political and economic cooperation with Central Asian states is therefore very important for China (Xing 2001: 234).

Secondly, China considered its relations with the Central Asian states mainly with respect to the stability and development of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Beijing's economic and geo-political strategy in Central Asia is directed, to a large extent, by its goals in Xinjiang. China clearly perceived and still perceives a growing problem of instability coming from the ethnic disputes within the Central Asian states. Besides, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Central Asian states alarmed the security concerns

of the Chinese government. Thus, security and regional stability were closely linked for China as its national security rests on the mutual convergence between China and its neighbour's security interests due to the significance of Xinjiang. This was also related with the notion that a stable security environment would enable China in consolidating its modernization efforts to strengthen its territorial integrity and national sovereignty (Xing 2001:234-235).

However, given the 3000 km long borders with three Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it was not unexpected that China and the newly independent states had border disputes. In this respect, as early as 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev had initiated a gradual rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union. At that time, there were several unsettled issues between the Soviet Union and China and one of them was the border question. An agreement of 1991 resolved the issue of the eastern part of the borders, but the question of the western part of the borders was left unresolved. In the post-Soviet era, in February 1992, in Minsk, a decision was reached to set up a joint group with representatives from Russia and the three Central Asian countries and parties agreed to negotiate on the border areas in accordance with the general principles of the 1991 agreement. In April 1994, China and Kazakhstan had managed to sign an agreement concerning their joint 1700 km-long border. In September 1997 and July 1998 additional agreements were signed which resolved the Chinese-Kazakh border problems. Largely, on July 1996, China and Kyrgyzstan solved the issue of Chinese-Kyrgyz border (Allison and Jonson 2001:153).

Another major strategic concern of China, is China's growing economic momentum, which is affected by energy constraints that led the country to a search and diversification of resources. This has added to the economic and geo-political importance of Central Asian resources to China, which gives impetus to its modernization. In other words, Beijing's interest in Central Asia is motivated to a large extent by its need for energy resources (where) China's economy is booming but its domestic oil and mining industries cannot keep pace with demand. Considering its goals, expanding production, investment and pipelines are among China's priorities. China would like to be a major operator/co-operator in front-line projects, especially in development activities, pipeline construction and

technical services, as well as a major partner in other projects that match its interests. Therefore, although China was absent and weakened by internal decline when the Great Game for hegemony over Inner Asia unfolded in the late 19th century, with the socio-economic development of recent decades, it has transformed itself and grown as a major power in the world where a new and revised Great Game unfolds, especially in Central Asia (Xu 1999:51-52).

China has a border of about 3000 km long with three Central Asian states i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In this respect, China started bilateral consultations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in first half of 1992 (Tajikistan dropped out from the negotiating process since it was facing civil war) with regard to the line of the borders and the disputed territories. According to Patnaik (2000), border disputes are unlikely to create any security crisis in the near future between Central Asian and China. Thus the border question is an important part of the relations between China, Russia and these three states. In 1992, parties agreed to negotiate on the border areas in accordance with the general principles of the 1991 Sino-Soviet agreement (Xing 2001: 154).

Other than border security and stability, China's main concern from the Central Asian states was nuclear arsenal of Kazakhstan in the initial years of their independence. However, by 1995, Kazakhstan announced that it had either handed over all its warheads to Russia and was a nuclear free state (Stobdon 2004: 346).

China's bilateral relations with Central Asian states with regards to regional security have been strategically significant. In this respect, Kyrgyzstan and China security relation is one of the most important concerns since Soviet dissolution. Due to sharing of border, they have structural links of instability in the Eurasian continent. That is why the state of relations between Kyrgyzstan and China is mostly defined at the level of stability, security and development. With this respect, the initial period of the relationship was marked by the visit of Askar Akaev, the President of Kyrgyz Republic, to People's Republic of China in May 1992 and the reciprocal visit of his counterpart Li Peng to Kyrgyzstan in April 1994. These visits confirmed aspirations of the two states to maintain harmonious relations, non-usage of force in any form against each other (Karabaeva 2004: 361). In 1996, China took initiative to address joint border issues with Central Asia. However, at the same time,

China also signed a bilateral agreement with Kyrgyzstan to resolve the border issue in 1996 (Stobdan 2004: 348).

Military cooperation is one of the most important aspects of the Kyrgyz-Chinese cooperation. The 1999 illegal invasion by the terrorist groups into the southern territory of the Kyrgyz Republic was evidence of the danger and instability in the region. Kyrgyz military troops were supported by the CIS countries and China and thus managed to restore order and inviolability of the state border. Realising the threat of rising religious fundamentalism, both nations initiated a negotiation and confirmed their intent to act against any form of separatism and not allow any separatist activity of any organization directed against the other side on their territory (Karabaeva 2004: 362-63).

With regards to China and Tajikistan relationship, it is based on the principle of peace and tolerance. Starting with the establishment of diplomatic relations on January 4, 1992, all the subsequent inter-state declarations reflect the respect of sovereignty equal status as well as the commitment of both countries to solve their problems. For Tajikistan and China, fight against religious extremism is a common challenge, but for China, Taiwan issue is also a problem. With the result, Tajikistan confirmed that it recognizes the Government of PRC as a single rightful Government of China (Assadoullaev 2004: 370-372). China played a positive role in stabilising the situation in Tajikistan during the critical decade of the 1990s in order to protect itself from becoming a weak formation under the impact of diverse political forces.

Uzbekistan-China relations are historical, dating back to centuries, which can be traced to the times of Great Silk Route. After collapse of Soviet Union, Uzbekistan has been pronounced as a 'central state' by many experts. Due to economic consideration both countries came closer in initial phase. China became one of the first countries of the world which accepted the independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan in December 27, 1991 and diplomatic relations between both countries were established in 1992. Since 1992, there have been high-level exchange visit of them President of Uzbekistan, I. Karimov, to Beijing during March 1992, October 1992 and in November 1999. Similarly, visits of the Chinese Premier, Li Peng in April 1994 and the Chinese President, in July 1996 to Uzbekistan. These visits were very significant for the development of the political

dialogue, which helped in mutual cooperation and establishment of trust between the leaders of two countries. After Uzbekistan joined the SCO in 2001, security issues in Central Asia and problems in the struggle with terrorism and extremism, have been the dominating features of relation between both countries (Kadirov 2004: 380-82).

Similarly, the security relation between Kazakhstan and China has been growing up gradually in the positive direction. The relations were strengthened since Kazakhstan is an emerging regional power because of its economic progress as well as moderate governing policies. A new era of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China began, which progressed from 'Development Cooperation' to 'Diplomatic Relations' to 'Strategic Partnership'. Through the framework of SCO, Kazakhstan is actively engaged with China in combating "three evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism to ensure stability and territorial integrity (Laruell and Balci 2010:1-8).

China's relations with Turkmenistan are not as close as with other countries in Central Asia since it adheres to neutrality in foreign relations and Ashgabat abstains from joining any regional organization. It does not even belong to SCO. Nevertheless, China does have normal, friendly relations with Ashgabat. Turkmenistan has rich reserves of natural gas. It is also the only route from Central Asia to West Asia, the Middle East, and Europe (via Iran), making Turkmenistan very important in terms of energy and transportation links. Hence China seeks to develop good relations with Turkmenistan, especially with regard to trade and energy. The two countries have engaged in some cooperation in the energy field. In 2000, CNPC and the Oil Ministry of Turkmenistan signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in the oil and natural gas sectors (Zhao 2007: 178-179).

After 9/11 terror attacks, China's security concerns have been focused on mainly International terrorism, Islamic extremism and drug trafficking etc. It is of strategic significance that from 2001 onwards, China's fight against above mentioned threats was linked to the US presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan. In 1996, Shanghai five was the one of the most important organizations regarding regional security, in which China was a leading member. With the membership of Uzbekistan in Shanghai five, it was known as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2001. The SCO also signed a Convention on Fight against Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism (Anand, 2013).

USA and Regional Security in Central Asia

Conventionally, mostly neighbours ought to or should have interests at stake in the security of a region. But, today the world has been knit in a complex web which has resulted in the creation of what is called “the penetrated society”. There is interference in the politics, stability and security of any region by the powers that have the capability to do so in the spite of being separated by distance. The Central Asian region today is clearly an important one for geopolitical and geo-economic reasons despite larger or more volatile Asian countries increasingly important resources, location and allegiances. The region faced threats internally such as border disputes, ethnic tensions and political upheavals. Hence, since mid-1990s for the development of bilateral relations between the US and the Central Asian republics has not been accompanied by the region wide policy aimed at reducing security agenda of the Central Asian republic has undergone a transformation. That is why the region assumes great importance for the US (Bhadauria, 2014).

Central Asia represents a new frontier for the policy of the United States. Since the Central Asian states became independent, American economic, political and military interests there have steadily grown. Until 1994 US interests were restricted to economic and political pursuits; military interests were nowhere in sight. However, that has all changed. The USA now deploys all its instruments of to establish itself as a major player in Central Asia and across the entire Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Still, despite its enormous power, it remains an open question whether the US policy can realise those interests and make the United States a ‘core state’ in the region (Lieven, 1999-2000).

Since the emergence of newly independent Central Asia republics, the United States has been playing a prominent role in improving regional security in this region. The United States has constantly expressed its preference for the region's economic, political and military improvement that could only be served by a sustained or even greatly enhanced American role. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, US policy concentrated on nuclear security, orchestrating the transfer of nuclear material remaining on Kazakh territory. But at that time broader American geo-strategic or security concerns in the region was less clear. Focus was mainly given to energy interest. Until 1994, US interests were limited to economic and political pursuit. The military interests were not involved (Blank 2001: 127).

The United States allowed Russia to deal with instability in Central Asia, which became evident when the US refrained itself from active involvement in negotiating the end of Tajik civil war (1992-1997). The United States did not respond to Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan as well.

US interests in Central Asia

The region has great energy potential and strategically important for the US which has had varied and at times competing interests here. US interests in Central Asia can be summarised in three categories like security, energy and democracy. The deepening American political, economic and security role across the region included the setting up of United States military facilities in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan after the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. The consequent war on the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan dramatically expanded American involvement and interests in the region (Warikoo 2008:333).

The US also increased its influence, especially after 2001 anti-Taliban war. Its economic and strategic interests found synergy after September 11 bombing. American troops were stationed in a region that is on the border of two potential global adversaries– Russia and China. It was also embedded in a region that included Caspian states where its energy interests and investments could be backed up by force, if necessary. By becoming the major economic and security player in the region, it could hope to marginalise Russia and other potential competitors in the region (Joshi 2007:144-45).

In the mid-1990s, intense US effort went into support for energy interests in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector. However the United States had clear disagreements with Russia over preferred pipeline route. Over time the US began to take more action in support of its security goals in the region. The importance shifted towards bolstering stronger and more independent states in Central Asia. With the active support of the United States. A security arrangement was established known as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). With the membership of Uzbekistan in April 1999, GUAM were known as GUUAM. Security challenges posed by the rise of Taliban, AI Qaeda and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), during the period of 1998-2001, brought new urgency to

address it. The United States since 2001 has concentrated on the issues of countering terrorism, preventing Islamic extremism, enhancing border controls, and fighting narcotics trafficking etc. and willing to address these with a regional security mechanism in the region (Collins and Wohlfarth 2004: 44).

The access to the Central Asia's energy resources is usually at the top of the list of West's concerns, followed by security concern centred on the protection of NATO engagement in Afghanistan, and in the case of Europe concern about drug trade and migration. Beyond this, EU and US support for democratic norms and liberal market principles are grounded in the belief that they will bring long term economic benefits and stability in the region (Feigenbaum, 2007). As commentators pointed out after the 9/11 attack, there had been a consensus among the most American policymakers that the US should pursue objectives in Central Asia, such as democratisation, the creation of the free market, trade and investments, integration with the West and the devolvement of responsible security policy (Oliker and Shlapak, 2005).

Daniel Fried, then American Assistant Secretary of the state for European and Eurasian Affairs, once testified to Congress in 2005 that security, energy and regional economic cooperation, as well as freedom through reform, are the objectives of the American foreign policy in Central Asia (DISAM, 2006:99-105). In another open declaration of US geopolitical interests in the region, the US state department on December 15, 2009 stated, "the region is at the fulcrum of the key security, economic and political interests...any examination of US policy towards Central Asia must start with the conflicts in Afghanistan and Pakistan.... We have begun to establish high level mechanisms with each country in Central Asia" (Singh, 2009).

American Security Cooperation with Central Asian States

After collapse of the Soviet Union, the US policy focused on nuclear security, arranging the transfer of nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan to Russia and safeguarding the nuclear material remaining on Kazakh territory. Once that pressing issue was addressed, the US broader geo-strategic or security concerns in the region became less clear and policy drifted towards a focus on energy interests and consequently, the Caspian states. The absence of

active US participation in negotiating the Tajik of Afghan civil wars in the early 1990s to mid-1990s and the lack of a concrete US response to Taliban's sweep across Afghanistan revealed Washington's willingness to let Russia deal with instability in the non-energy states of Central Asia (Macfarlane, 1999).

In 1993 the State Department created a provisional structure to deal with Russia and other former Soviet states (a de-facto bureau), thereby consolidating policy formulation toward Central Asia and the rest of the Soviet Union in a single, separate bureaucratic structure. Goldgeier and McFaul, in their book (2003), *Power and Purpose*, pointed out, that the passage of the Freedom Support Act in 1992 and the Cooperative Threat Reduction program in 1991 which was known as Nunn-Lugar legislation provided funding under a common financing mechanism to support the development as well as independence of the former Soviet states in order to help these new states secure and eliminate weapons of mass destruction and components left over from the Soviet Union on their territories (Rumer 2007: 22).

However, during 1994-95, main goal of the United States was to dismantle Russia's monopoly over energy resources. US concern was to bring US model of liberal markets and democratic governance (Blank 2001: 130). As a result, in February 1995, the United States decided to support a pipeline running through Georgia to Turkey from Azerbaijan. The United States developed interest in depriving Russia of its privileged position in Central Asia in order to eliminate its monopoly over the oil transportation from Central Asia to international markets in Europe and elsewhere. At the same time, United States did not want to create a situation, which might facilitate China's entry in the political space vacated by Russia in Central Asia. On the other hand, Russia also perceived the US as a counter-balance to China's expansionist policies towards Central Asia. China viewed the United States as a counter-balance to Russia's ambitions in Central Asia. Thus, they needed to checkmate each other that helped the interest of the United States (Sherwood 2000:4-5).

According to Rumer (2007), the United States promoted reforms which laid heavy emphasis on market institutions and democratic governance. These reforms were the product of two factors: the continuing resonance of James Baker's five principles for recognizing the recently independent states of the former Soviet Union (including the

prominence of democratic values) and simultaneously, the widespread belief in the U.S. policy community in Fukuyama's "End of History" that declared the final victory of liberalism over socialism/communism.

The results of United States' policy in promoting economic and political reform varied greatly across Central Asia, depending on each country's domestic situations. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan embarked on ambitious political and economic reforms programs, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan delayed it and Tajikistan descended into civil war. In addition to political and economic reform, the United States also implemented a new foreign policy orientation toward this region. This effort too reflected a general American preference for familiar structures and principles. Thus, the United States encouraged Central Asia to start and progress relations with the Euro Atlantic security institutions such as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (Rumer 2007: 26-27).

The United States government issued the single most important official statement on its Central Asia policy in July 1997. The statement referred to the upcoming regional exercise that would bring together Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, American, Turkish, and Russian troops in a joint exercise to "practice together their skills in minesweeping and distributing humanitarian aid". But that declaration did not contain a single reference to the Taliban at the very time that this new radical regime in Afghanistan was consolidating its power on the southern borders of Central Asia. But when it came to sufficiently anchor America's engagement in Central Asia, security cooperation and assistance programs did not provide a compelling rationale to warrant a sustained, long-term commitment to the region. Central Asia proved to be among the least enthusiastic regional Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme of NATO (Dutta, 2007: 144). Kazakhstan had already signed the NPT as a non-nuclear state in 1994, with all nuclear weapons being withdrawn from its territory by May 1995.

The 9/11 attacks transformed the US policy in the region into an all-consuming war on terror that drove a greatly extended involvement in Central Asia. Shortly after 9/11, 2001 attacks, the US government started talks with all five Central Asian states to register their cooperation in the war on terror and specifically in its operation against Al-Qaeda and the

Taliban in Afghanistan. On October 7, 2001, the United States and Uzbekistan signed an agreement following tough negotiations between the Department of Defence (DoD) as well as CENTCOM, and the Uzbek military and security services. The US agreed to a "long-term commitment to advance security and regional stability" in the Central Asia. After 9/11, the United States wanted to have military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The president of both nations quickly offered rights to their bases, despite their countries' membership in the CIS (Nichol, 2005).

However, according to US Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report (2005), some experts argue that the establishment of U.S. military bases in Central Asia aggravated the strategic imbalance within the region, with the states viewing Uzbekistan as gaining military power from its U.S. ties. United States somewhat addressed such concerns by emphasising its "non-permanent" basing arrangements and by strengthening military ties with most of the regional states. Nonetheless, concerns about Uzbekistan's power have contributed to Tajikistan's countervailing ties with Russia, Turkmenistan's ties with Iran and Kyrgyzstan's and Kazakhstan's ties with Russia and China. Besides being stymied by tensions among the states, regional cooperation problems are potentially overstated by the formation of extra-regional cooperation groups such as the CSTO, PfP, and the SCO. Each group reflects the diverging interests of Russia, the United States, and China, although the fact that each group stresses anti-terrorism would seem to provide motivation for cooperation (Dhaka 2005:146).

All of the Central Asian states were faced with the challenge of creating military and border forces. They have had problems with military financing and training but continue to depend on training and equipment ties with Russia. But after September 11, 2001, the states have profited from enhanced U.S. military training and equipment aid. Some observers noted that the United States tried to restrict the SCO activities after September 11, 2001, but such efforts were ineffective. China and Russia have looked to move slowly in bolstering the SCO, since some of the reasons for creating it aimed at countering terrorism and limit U.S. influence especially as the United States moved militarily into the region after September 11, 2001. Though raising concerns about how long the United States will sustain a military

presence in the region, some Chinese officials even acknowledged that United States' anti-terrorism efforts have enlarged stability along China's borders (Uddin and Sarkar 2003:96).

American's Regional Security Perspective

As the presence of the NATO led international Security Assistance force (ISAF) drew to an end in Afghanistan, the spotlight increasingly shifted to the regional powers and their role in building and ensuring the future stability of the greater central Asian region. In this regard, Afghanistan's northern neighbours – the five formerly Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – as well as China to the north east are increasingly regarded as vital players. The Central Asian states, together with Russia and the Baltic states, were part of the essential Northern Distribution Network (NDN) through which non-lethal equipment such as food, clothing, construction materials and fuel were transported to the coalition forces in Afghanistan by avoiding the Pakistan route (Schmitz, 2010).

Fighting the war against terrorism in Afghanistan was the priority of the US which has now entered its decisive phase. Many observers of the Central Asian scene felt that the military presence especially that of the US has a long-term agenda as well to control the energy sources of the Central Asian region. This objective in their view would continue. US security experts on the region argued that the United States should primarily seek to encourage regional demilitarisation. They opposed providing formal security guarantees to regional states and urged the pull out of USA bases once Taliban threat has abated and AL Qaeda largely routed from Afghanistan. Some analysts warned that increased US engagement in the region was unlikely to soon turn the countries into free market democracies and risked linking the United States to the regimes in the eyes of the local populations. This might exacerbate anti-American Islamic extremism, place US personnel in danger and antagonise China and Russia (Goodhand, 2002).

The strategic importance of the Central Asia for Washington, Moscow and Beijing varies with each power's perception of its strategic interests. Washington focuses primarily on Central Asia as an important theatre in the war on terrorism. Additionally, it is viewed as a theatre where America might counter a revived Russia and China or a place to blunt any

extension of Iranian influence. Moscow and Beijing view the region as a vital locale for defending critical domestic interests. This asymmetry of interests is a major factor in the competition among states for influence in the region (Banerjee, 1992).

The US could not pledge unlimited resource, being separated by great distance. It could have only little leverage in the region, although its constructive engagement was then welcomed by most Central Asians. The US could provide access to trade, capital and technology. Rather than leading with its own short-term interests in security, access Central Asian energy and democracy building which ran the risks of appearing intrusive and self-serving. It would have helped if the US was to lead with their commitment to the shared long-term goal of a stable, integrated and prosperous Central Asia (Sengupta, 2005:157-158).

Within the region, Russia and China are the major contenders for the leadership role. China is the fastest growing power in the world and sees itself as a candidate for the position of a super power. China looks at recent America policies, especially the attempts in the Central Asia aimed at contentment of China. On the other hand, Russia has to live with the fact that there is rise of a major power in its neighbourhood and the growth of that power's influence is at the cost of its interests. In the light of the growing interests of these two powers in Central Asia, the US would have to play a delicate balancing role (Kaushik 2007:24).

The challenges of post-2014 Central Asia emanates from the fact that NATO forces were completely withdrawn from Afghanistan, leaving in ill-equipped country in afghan hands and some limited U.S. special force. Central Asia's socio-economic and political problems make it prone to turmoil and vulnerable to extremist organisations, both foreign and domestically generated. Any further deterioration of the security situation in the AF-PAK region would not be good news for Central Asia. Many insurgents affiliated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) fighting in Afghanistan come from Central Asia and could eventually turn their attention to their home countries. The IMU and the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) are reported to have close links. Considering that each Central Asian country shares extensive borders with several equally crisis-prone

neighbours, security disintegration in one could have swift and disastrous consequences for the rest (Raman, 2015).

Similarly, trouble in Xinjiang would be destabilising for its Central Asian neighbours. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in particular, with their porous borders, poorly equipped and trained forces, would be vulnerable if the Central Asian Islamists went home to continue the jihad. Likewise, an unstable Central Asia could potentially turn quickly into a safe haven for armed extremist groups seeking to continue their fight in Xinjiang. So, it could turn into a vicious circle which could spell trouble in the region. Although Uzbekistan has strongest military in Central Asia, it also apprehends IMU expansion into Central Asia. With an aging, unpopular president until 2016 and weakening state capacity, it seemed only a matter of time before its security begins to show cracks. Turkmenistan appears less vulnerable but is not at all immune from potential destabilisation, if faced by a dedicated and potent militant force (Zenn, 2016).

After analyses it appears certain that no single power can control Central Asia. The US could not become the single dominant power in that region, nor is there any reason why it should attempt to achieve such a status. Pluralism of security mechanism is a necessity in view of the reality of geopolitics in the region. The US-Russia-China relationship is going to be one of the determinants for the stability and security of the region. American policy has shifted over time and its priorities have not been as clearly stated as the regional powers might have perceived. It is not surprising that there is uncertainty as to the intent and success of American programmes. US officials have routinely expressed preferences for the region's economic, political and military development that would only be served by a continued or even greatly enhanced role. The US is seen in some quarters as a major stabilising factor in the region's security due to its dominant position and its general reputation as a "benign hegemonic entity" in comparison to other powers. At the same time, there is a big question mark on how long the US would be willing to extend its unequivocal commitment.

Iran and Regional Security in Central Asia

Right from the eighteenth century till the present times, Iran's neighbour in the north has been a source of continuous security concern. In this period, Iran witnessed not only the ascendance of Russia as a major European power, culminating in its becoming a super power, but also saw the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. Iran, being the weaker side, often played the classical game of power-balancing by relying on anti-Russian European states. Neither the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, nor the Islamic revolution of the 1979 changed the nature of this asymmetry; both relations, in fact, complicated this power relationship by adding an ideological dimension to it (Sayed Kazem, 1994: 147). The breakdown of the Soviet Union has brought a new phase in the relationship between the newly independent Central Asian countries and Iran. After a long time the situation has changed in favour of Iran and it now enjoys more power in the region than earlier.

Iran's policies towards the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia is largely determined by two sets of considerations. The first deals with security and political considerations while the second deals with cultural and economic considerations. As regards the security and political considerations, Iran has dealt with a volatile security environment from the north since 1991. Almost overnight, the number of its neighbours has increased from one to three on land and from one to four on the Caspian Sea, a situation experienced by no other country within the former Soviet Union (Kharazi, 1992).

Iran is closer to the trouble spots of the intense ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus than any other country. Seen in this continuum, the unstable and fluid political situation in the Central Asian States has brought the security dimension in Iran's relationship with the newly independent Central Asian republic to the forefront. Various issues that are the source of instability in the Central Asian countries are nation building, rapid social and economic transformation, ethnic diversity, border disputes and continuing instability which may invite foreign intervention in the region as well as an influx of new refugees into Iran (Ruiz, 1992).

Iran is also concerned because of military issues. At the time of independence of central Asian states questions regarding the borders of the new republics, and future of CIS army

were to be addressed. Changing geopolitical situation after the end of Cold War in the world also added new security issues for Iran. As the West searched for a new enemy after the Cold War, there was much talk of Iran as a major threat to regional stability and the need for its Containment (Morrett, 1992).

Iran's policy towards the newly independent countries was also shaped by cultural and economic considerations. There are deep historical ties between Iran and Central Asia. For centuries, Central Asia, as a part of greater Khorasan, was one of the two pillars of the Islamic Civilizations, the other being Baghdad (Frye, 1965). Great Iranian philosophers like Farabi, Avicenna and Rudaki were born in the areas which are now part of Central Asia. Islam is a common cultural denominator between Iran, Central Asia and the Caucasus. The latter two regions served as a training ground for many Iranian advocates of social democracy during the constitutional revolution of 1905-11 (Bayat 1991:36). Economic considerations also influence Iran's policy decisions towards Central Asia. These five countries are an important market for Iranian made consumer goods. Being landlocked republics, the Central Asian countries look to Iran as a natural gateway to the seas. Iran's well-developed oil industry can provide technical assistance to these republics.

Iran's policy with respect to the Central Asian countries is based on three pillars: the first is security in the Persian Gulf and cooperation with the northern neighbours (Stephen, 1992). The second factor that determines Iran's policy is the changing domestic situation in these republics and the new international events. Thirdly, Iran gives Russia central importance in making its policy towards Central Asia. Iran is fully aware of Russia's actual and potential power in the CIS, and is careful not to pursue policies that could jeopardize its relationship with Moscow (Garsoian, 1993).

Iran, however has certain limitations because of which the Central Asian Countries do not look to Iran with complete confidence. Iran is not capable to undertake large scale investments in mega energy projects to meet the needs of Central Asia. Iran and Turkey are strong competitors on the basis of historical and cultural ties with Central Asia. Moreover, they have different views on economic integration with Central Asia. Both Istanbul and Tehran are suspicious of each other's activities (Ertan and LeonardIran, 2001). Iran accuses Turkey of spreading its influence under the garb of "Pan- Turkism". Turkey

also views Tehran's linkage with radical Islamic groups with suspicion. Turkey has formed the Black Sea Common market whereas Iran is promoting the Caspian Sea Council. Iran's problems are compounded because it is isolated from the international community. United States and its non-regional allies are hostile to Iran. Russia also gets perturbed by Iran's moves to compete with Russia in the affairs related with Central Asia (Bigdeli, 1999). Iran does so in spite of the fact that Russia is one of the main trading partners and military suppliers of Iran. Under these circumstances, Iran is careful however, not to disturb such a relationship.

A significant strategic rationale also exists for Iran to develop diplomatic relations with the region. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, the United States improved its military existence in the region dramatically. With bases in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and significant numbers of U.S. troops in Iraq, Iran found itself diplomatically isolated and nearly surrounded by U.S. armed forces. Antagonistic relations between the United States and Iran created a motivation for Tehran to foster close ties with its neighbours in Central Asia in order to guarantee its security and economic interests (IRNA, 2005). Because stability in Afghanistan is serious for the security of the region, Iran's leadership has stressed that a continued international presence in Afghanistan is necessary under United Nations (UN) supervision. The states of Central Asia view Iran as a critical actor in Afghanistan and key to economic growth and trade in the region, but also have deep concerns regarding Iran's developing nuclear capacity and regional ambitions.

Stability in Afghanistan is a key interest of Iran and it informs Iran's policy toward Central Asia. During the early 1990s, Iran and the Central Asian states shared a common interest in fighting Pashtun fundamentalist domination of Afghanistan. The fundamentalist Sunni Pashtuns were known for their harassment of the Shia minorities of Afghanistan, leading Iran to lend its support to the Shia Hazara faction and the Persian-speaking Tajiks (Rashid, 2000:200).

After the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 1996, the regional security condition quickly worsened. The 1998 murder of nine Iranian diplomats by the Taliban created anger in Iran, bringing Iran and Afghanistan close to war, when Iran placed 270,000 troops on the border with Afghanistan in a threat to attack. Although tensions did not intensify into

conflict, relations between the ruling Taliban and Iran remained extremely hostile. In an effort to challenge the Taliban, Iran sent weapons through Tajikistan to the Northern Alliance forces in Afghanistan beginning in the mid-1990s. Iran, Tajikistan, India, and Russia shared a similar goal of assisting Alliance commander Ahmad Shah Massoud during that time and they played complementary roles in combating the Taliban. However, Pakistan also became the focus of Iranian ire: The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) was well known to have been supporting the Taliban and Pakistani militants had been involved in the murder of the Iranian diplomats in 1998 (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1999).

Turkey and Regional Security in Central Asia

In the initial years, the Central Asian countries were looking to the neighbouring states having historical, cultural, religious and ethnic affinity with them so that they could break free from total dependence on Russia. Some Islamic States in turn hoped to take advantage of the geopolitical vacuum and spread their influence in the region. These countries include Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Islam being the common denominator, the Muslim states were considered to be the natural partners of Central Asia (Anderson, 1997).

The emergence of independent states in Central Asia after the disintegration of the USSR gave Turkey a golden opportunity to influence these countries in political, economic and security issues. When President Gorbachev of USSR launched his radical and far reaching reforms in 1985, none expected that the political conditions in Central Asia would change so drastically so as to enable Turkey to emerge as a potential key player in the region. Within 6-7 years of Gorbachev's historic far reaching policies the USSR disintegrated and Turkey found itself in a new set of circumstances that gave it an opportunity to reassert its significance for the West in the Post-Cold War period (Aydin, 1996).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey suddenly become involved in Central Asia. Turkish officials have tended to recognise Central Asia as encompassing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Uzbek populated territory in northern Afghanistan and Xinjiang in western China which is inhabited by large numbers of Turkic Uighurs. Emphasizing the prominence of so-called common ethnic, linguistic,

cultural and religious ties, policy makers in Ankara have concentrated on the four mainly Turkic states in Central Asia and less attention to largely Farsi-speaking Tajikistan, in spite of the substantial Uzbek minority there (Jonson and Allison, 2001).

Turkey's potential as an important player in Central Asia stemmed mainly from the common ethnic, linguistic and religious ties with the Turks in Central Asia. Nearly 50 million Turkic people who lived in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and constituted 85 per cent of former Soviet Union's Muslim Population (Akiner, 1987). However, the collapse of Soviet Union marked a major shift in Turkey's policy towards the former Soviet Muslim republics. It now began to establish links with the Turkish republics. Thus, for example, when he went to Moscow in March 1991 to sign a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with Gorbachev, then Turkish President Turgut Ozal visited Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Ukraine (Winrow, 1992).

Turkey is interested in Central Asian Countries because of regional security issues. Turkey is apprehensive about the violent conflicts and instability near its southern and western border in the conditions of the new international disorder that has replaced the relatively stable and predictable condition of the Cold War. Currently, Turkey faces many crisis situations close to its borders. In the south, it is confronted with an unstable situation in Iraq, where although Saddam Hussein has been deposed stability has been elusive. The Kurds are always in a rebellious mood. Turkey's association with North Atlantic Treaty Organization is also a concern for Moscow (Ahrari, 1994).

Turkish policy towards Central Asia has an emphasis on Turkey's security interests. Turkey's security means economic and energy aspects as well as military and defence perspectives. The impact of developments in Central Asia on Turkey's ties with this region will be crucial from a broader perspective, taking into account the interests of other states like China, Iran, Russia and the USA. The significance of Turkey's membership of NATO is also playing very vital role in the perspective of regional peace and security (Howard, 1998).

Turkey is not in a position to address many of the security concerns of the Central Asian states. Their leaders are primarily concerned with internal security issues, particularly the

threats posed by religious radicalism and tribalism or separatism. The Central Asian states were at first sensitive to Russian concerns. In August 1994 the Kazakh Defence Minister Sagadat Nurmagambetov stated that the agreement he had just signed with Turkey was only a preliminary one dealing primarily with cooperation in arms production. He added that it did not conflict with similar agreements Kazakhstan had concluded with Russia. Developing links with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (pfp) programme, the Kazakhs by 1996 were eager to promote military ties with NATO members and were less inclined to take Russian anxieties into account (Jonson and Allison, 2001).

Turkey has concluded agreements with the Central Asian Turkic states to cooperate against organised crime, arms smuggling, terrorism and separatism. Turkish officials are especially keen for the Central Asian states to clamp down on the activities of elements sympathetic to the Kurdish guerrilla group, the PKK (Kurdish Workers Party). Visiting Bishkek in April 1998 to sign a joint Declaration on security issues with Kyrgyz authorities, then the Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz said that he had discussed the Kyrgyz Government's 'soft stance' on the PKK. Turkey has not signed military and security agreements with 'non-Turkic' Tajikistan. Then the President Demirel only paid his first visit to Tajikistan in September 1995. Turkey played no role in attempting to resolve the civil war in Tajikistan (Jonson and Allison, 2001).

Problems with the Turkish model

Iran's regional rival in West Asia and to some extent in Eurasia is Turkey. While Iran tries to use its Persian identity to draw close countries like Tajikistan and Afghanistan, Turkey uses its own brand of identity to gain advantage over others in the Turkish speaking Central Asian states. Turkey seemed to have an advantage over other powers in Central Asia in the beginning of the 1990s. The 'Turkish Model' appeared as an attractive potential instrument to fill the geopolitical vacuum in Central Asia. With more than 60 million ethnic Turkish peoples living in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia, there was talk even of the twenty-first century becoming a 'Turkic Model'. During the 1990s, there was also speculation that Turkey would offer a role model for nation-building throughout Central Asia (Patnaik, 2016:134).

However, the Central Asian response to the ‘Turkish Model’ has been complex. The initial Central Asian enthusiasm for the Turkish connection underwent change as the Central Asian states became more aware of the problems within Turkey and its model of devolvement. An excessive emphasis on commonalities between the Turks and the Turkic peoples was regarded with caution in a situation where national identities were being emphasised. Similarly, projection of Turkey as the link that could connect Central Asia to the rest of the world was questioned (Sengupta, 2012).

In pursuit of its geopolitical influence, Turkey used its cultural out-reach to the region. In 1992, Turkish TV started broadcasting in Central Asia; thousands of students from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan went to study in Turkish higher educational establishments. Turkish universities were opened in Central Asia with faculty from Turkey. Ankara’s technical and humanitarian aid to the Central Asian republics had already reached \$1.2 billion by 2005 (Mirzaev, 2005).

After nearly two and half decades of independence, Turkey was nowhere near playing an influential role in Central Asia, though it has strong trade, economic and cultural ties with the region. But there have been changes in Turkey’s political orientation that is reflected in its region policy. Since its refusal to open a northern front against Iraq in 2003, Turkey has been seeking to change its Eurasia policy that had earlier remained geopolitically and geo-culturally complementary to NATO and the US policies in the region (Mesbahi 2010:135).

Turkey has now become a more pragmatic power in the Central Asian region. Ankara soon realised that Russian cultural impact is difficult to replace in Central Asia by any other external power. Central Asian states were in favour of reviving their culture, religion and identity on the basis of indigenous efforts and not through some outside agency. Thus, Iran and Turkey both found it difficult to use identity as an instrument of their geopolitics. Therefore, Turkey’s transformation in the recent years from a secular country to a moderate Islamic state has ramifications for its policy in Eurasia, especially in the Central Asian region. Turkey’s geopolitical and security interests coincided comfortably with a new geo-cultural orientation that fitted well within the emerging anti-American critical Islamic discourse in the region; geo-culture and geopolitics became commensurate. The ideational

transformation of Turkey became the significant factor in the formulation anew of geopolitical environment (Patnaik, 2016:136).

Instead of ‘bandwagoning’ with the United States in its Central Asian policy, Turkey was looking for ‘strategic depth’ in Eurasia, West Asia and the Balkans. Turkey considers these regions as its special zone of interest, security and responsibility. Eurasia, with its Turkic and Islamic ethnicity and culture is the main space within this strategic depth. Turkey’s focuses shifted to Eurasia as a response to Russia’s policy of Eurasian integration that attracts the Turkish speaking countries of Central Asia as well as the need to distance itself from the US policy towards the Muslim world. Turkey today does not wish to be seen as an American ally in West Asia and in the boarder Islamic world, where anti-American is on the rise. Turkey is willing to project its soft power in Eurasia but not as a US surrogate. Its role in Western policy of containment of Russia is non-existent or at best ambiguous (Mesbahi, 2010: 136).

Though Mesbahi argues that in the long run Turkey could become a balancer and provide greater bargaining power to Central Asian states vis-à-vis Russia and China, the use of the Islamic card is not going to propel Turkey’s soft power in the Eurasian region. The secular Central Asian states are quite weary of the Islamic influence from the outside that could destabilise the region. The perception that Turkey is favourably disposed towards some radical opposition in Syria and Iraq are not going to promote its cause in the Central Asian region, especially at a time when militant jihadi groups are seen as the biggest security threats to the Central Asian region. While the rhetorical significance of a common Turkic affinity is maintained, all Central Asian states are also emphatic that they are building a multinational state where every religion and nationality is equal. Most states, barring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, have not adopted the Latin alphabet and the Russian language enjoys official status in some case.

Summary

In this background of the state of affairs in the Central Asian region, this study analysed the role of Russia, China and the United States, Iran and Turkey. With regards to Russian role, in the initial phase after the Soviet disintegration, Central Asia considered Russia as

a 'Security Guarantor', since this region was a part of Soviet security system. For Russia, the Central Asian region remained significant because of its strategic geographical position and its wealth of natural resources. The Taliban and AI Qaeda in Afghanistan also posed long-term political, security and economic challenges to Russia. Strong linkage among Chechen rebels and AI Qaeda/ Taliban forces alarmed Russia. Russia also feared that instability in Central Asia might spread into Muslim populated regions of Russia. So Russia cooperated with Central Asia with the aim of forming and evolving an effective security system in the region. Similarly Russia's participation in evolution of effective regional security architecture is also vitally important for countries of Central Asia region.

China's role has been very significant in the Central Asian region as it has played a very constructive role since the disintegration of Soviet Union and independence of new republics of Central Asia. China was one of the first and foremost nations to recognise the newly independent states of Central Asia and established very good diplomatic relations with them in early 1992. The emergence of separatism, religious extremism, terrorism and their negative influence on its Xinjiang Province have been China's main concern with regard to this region. It would be worth noting that through the framework of SCO, China is actively engaged with Central Asia in combating "three evil forces" of 'terrorism, separatism and extremism' to ensure its own stability and territorial integrity.

In 1996, Shanghai five was the one of the most important regional security mechanism, in which China was a leading member. With the membership of Uzbekistan in Shanghai five, it came to be known as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2001. The SCO also signed an 'Agreement on Fight against Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism'. However, since 9/11 terror attacks, China's security concerns have been mainly focused on International terrorism, Islamic extremism and drug trafficking etc.

The United States has been playing a prominent role in improving regional security in this region since the emergence of newly independent Central Asian republics. It has constantly stressed upon American role for Central Asian region's economic, political and military progress. However, the United States allowed Russia to deal with instability in Central Asia which became evident when the US refrained itself from active involvement in negotiating the end of Tajik civil war (1992-1997). The United States did not respond to

Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan as well. China and Russia have appeared to move slowly in bolstering the SCO, since some of the reasons for forming it aimed at countering terrorism and limit the U.S. presence. This move became slower and less relevant when the United States placed its military troops in the region after September 11, 2001. Subsequently, however, not only the US troops left Central Asian region, but its influence weakened as it decided to leave Afghanistan.

For Iran, relation with the only Central Asian country with which it shares a border, Turkmenistan, have had direct security relevance. Iran's cultural links with Tajikistan account for its interest in helping broker a peace agreement to the conflict in that country. Iran shared the security concern of the most Central Asian states about the destabilizing nature of Afghanistan under the domination of the Taliban leadership. Iran has refined the trade, economic and energy relations with its northern neighbours and has projected the image of itself as an influential Caspian state. As the same time, it has been cautious not project any threatening political ambitions in the region.

The importance of the Turkey's relations with Central Asian should not be exaggerated. Turkey have more regionally and culturally demarcated interests in post-Soviet Central Asia. In the early 1990s Turkish politicians were attracted to the romantic image of a pan-Turkic commonwealth of nations, an embracing of the 'Turkic' people of Central Asia. But in practice, and despite continued meetings about the Turkic Union, Turkey lacked the economic resources to prove a pole of attraction for the Central Asian leaders. Its links have been closer with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in the western part of the region, driven by economic and energy links, and have been less with Uzbekistan, which has resisted Turkish patronage.

This study demonstrates that emergence of regional security architecture in Central Asian region is an expanding phenomenon and is likely continue in the twenty-first century. In this process, apart from socio- economic and political situation within the region, the role played by the Russia, China and the United States may be of critical significance which will determine the success or the failure of such initiatives.

Chapter-4

India's Strategic and Security Concerns in Central Asia

Introduction

The last decade of the twentieth century presented a major strategic challenge so far, the Central Asian region was concerned from the Indian point of view. With collapse of the former USSR and subsequently Russian retreat from the region, the regional balance was altered. India's position in a region that was identified by its strategic thinkers as "India's extended strategic neighbourhood" faced many challenges (McDonald and Wimbush, 1999). The emergence of a number of regional players and the potential for the local conflicts also significantly changed the strategic environment for India. Along with this was the fact that much of the Central Asian borders were fluid, having been demarcated out of the political considerations rather than any ethnic contiguity. The possibility of demographic changes and the proliferation of the non-state actors was also a distinct possibility. The fact that Afghanistan and the parts of the Central Asian region were emerging as significant opium producers also made India vulnerable to opium trade. The consequent proliferation of small arms is also a destabilising factor. As far as India is concerned, Afghanistan instability, terrorism, illicit drug trade and extremism have been identified as areas of concern (Komissina, 2003).

With long tradition of linkages with Central Asia, India's interest in that region is abiding. Both India and five Central Asian states of Central Asia realise their mutual interest and the importance of one another because of the pre-eminence of a consciousness marked by history, heritage, friendship and mutual interest. In the contemporary times, India's major concerns include terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, energy security and new export markets. During the past few decades, the biggest threat to India's and Central Asian security and regional stability has originated from Afghanistan manifested in the activities of radical extremists and drug traffickers. India and Central Asia share borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan respectively and have common threats with potential to formulate common approaches and strengthen future ties. Its prospects are fluid and subject to with other powerful actors in the region (Pandey, 2012). India has strong relations with

Central Asia ever since it established diplomatic relations with these countries in 1991-92. Apart from historical connections, India does not want that Pakistan should develop an anti-India coalition with these states in the disputes over Kashmiri. It also wants to ensure continued contact with long standing commercial and military supplies and to provide new opportunities to Indian business. India's rising profile in Central Asia has not received the attentions it deserves although Central Asia has long become a part of South Asia's border security calculus. Now there is a strategic uncertainty involving Afghanistan which calls for seriously engaging Russia, US, China, India, Iran and Central Asia on issues of regional security. Immediate attention to security threats emanating from the region seems urgent (Sahgal and Anand, 2010:56).

Basically, India's sphere of geo-political and strategic interests widened considerably when the five states of Central Asia unexpectedly gained independence in 1991. Located in the centre of Eurasia, flanking major and regional powers, and possessing enormous wealth of raw materials including energy sources, the Central Asian region has witnessed intense rivalry for control and influence. The geographical contiguity of Central Asia to India has led the latter to consider the region as part of its extended neighbourhood. It implies that the developments in the Central Asian region have a crucial bearing on India's national interests. Earlier, Indian concerns emanating from Central Asia were taken care of by close and friendly ties with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union ensured that the Central Asian region was stable and secure and that India did not face any challenge from there. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the earlier arrangement disappeared. Central Asia lay exposed to penetration from all sides, complicating India's interests (Joshi, 2005).

Peace and stability in Central Asia is crucial for India's security concern. For these reasons linked to geography, India's strategic apprehensions are tied up with the security and political stability in the Central Asian region. Any geopolitical change in the region has its effect on several countries in the neighbourhood, including India. As an emerging power, India is obviously interested in any changes in and around the Central Asian region, which could have implications for its own security. Central Asia security is interconnected to peace in Afghanistan and Indian subcontinent. India's role in regional security issues in Central Asia include helping the anti-Taliban movement, cooperation with the SCO,

dynamics of internal and external conditioning, tackling the spreading of Islamic extremism and stabilising Afghanistan. India with all seriousness perceives the changes happening in Central Asia and tries to deal with all the states in a friendly and cooperative manner (Patnaik, 2005).

Victory of the Taliban in almost the whole of Afghanistan in the mid-1990s brought Central Asia under pressure from internal and external fundamentalist forces. The common threat of terrorism made India realise that Central Asia is important to its own security and chose to co-operate closely with Central Asian States. It supported financial assistance to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Shah Masood. India apparently supplied the United Front with high attitude warfare equipment, worth about US 8-10 million Dollars between 1999 and 2001, and sent defence advisers as well as helicopter technicians. India has recently shown a positive attitude towards joining Eurasian integration mechanisms like the Eurasian Economic Union. It is a participant in Conference on Interaction & Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA). It has focused on non-traditional security challenges which would create sufficient goodwill among the member states (Patnaik, 2013).

Regional security issues are very important for the Central Asia and so is India's desire for peace and stability in its neighbourhood. Therefore, the Indian leaders, scholars, intellectuals have supported steps to improve relations through bilateral treaties, dialogues, conferences etc. In his Opening Remarks, then Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the press conference in Almaty June 05, 2002 had said that Kazakhstan had set up a Joint Working Group against international terrorism. A Memorandum of Understanding on Military and Technical Cooperation was also signed on 4th June of the same year. He participated in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). This conference was aimed at "spreading the message of peace, security and regional cooperation" (MEA, India, 2002). Indian Foreign Secretary's presentation at IFRI (French Institute for International Relations), Paris 17 December, 2002 had talked about "menace of international terrorism and stabilisation of Afghanistan" (MEA, India, 2002). Then External Affairs Minister Shri Yashwant Sinha's keynote address at the Third India-Central Asia Conference in Tashkent on November 06, 2003 had also focused on

“international peace and security” (MEA, India, 2003). Address by then Shri E Ahamed, Hon’ble Minister of State at the Release of the Book *“India-Tajikistan Cooperation: Perspectives and Prospects”* on January 17, 2007 highlighted areas of “mutual cooperation that include combating international terrorism and drug trafficking” (MEA, India, 2007).

Indian Prime minister Modi’s visit to the Central Asian states in 2015 proved to be a smart strategic and diplomatic achievement by paving the way to overwhelm predicaments that have so far stymied India’s role in the region. During PM Modi’s visits in Central Asia, many security treaties were signed like cooperation on cyber-security, defence security and counter-terrorism with Uzbekistan and wide-ranging defence Cooperation pact with Kazakhstan. India signed treaties with Turkmenistan for defence cooperation, cross-border threats of terrorism, organised crime, illegal drug-trafficking, reaffirmed commitment for a stable Afghanistan. India also signed agreements with Kyrgyzstan on Defence, security, military, education and training, conduct of joint military exercises, exchange of experience and information, exchange of military instructors. Lastly, defence and security cooperation treaties were signed by PM Modi with Tajikistan (Stobdan, 2015).

India's Evolving Security Interests in Central Asia

The emergence of the CARs as independent and sovereign entities and their strategic significance presented India with new challenges and fresh opportunities to renew age-old linkage with the Central Asian region. Over a decade of interaction with the region, India has developed deep and long-lasting security interests. One of the biggest challenges that arose at the end Cold War and ideological schism was the rise of forces of religious extremism, terrorism, separatism and aggressive nationalism. These are powerful forces and have the capacity to tear nations apart, as happened peacefully in the Soviet social bloc and violently in Yugoslavia. States which are multi-ethnic and pluralist in nature are vulnerable to these forces. One of the present-day challenges faced by India is growing threat of religious extremism and terrorism to its territorial integrity. For more than a decade, India has been combating this danger in its state of Jammu and Kashmir. The militants who receive support, safe sanctuaries and training from across the border have declared jihad against the Indian state. The activities of militants pose a danger to India’s integrity (Joshi, 2005).

Religious extremism and terrorism in Central Asian Republics which created an environment for 'new power game' and resultant major powers' engagement in this region after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on United States of America. Security and stability in Central Asia has enormous significance for India. The security threats for India apart from Pakistan comes from Afghanistan and Central Asia based militant groups engaging India in this strategically important region (Fatima and Adnan, 2015).

India's engagement and role in Central Asia cannot be de-linked from its larger role in Asia. While Central Asia continues to be of great strategic significance to India, its engagement with the region has been more reactive than proactive according to some experts. While Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan stand out to be of security interest for India's Afghanistan-Pakistan policy. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are important for India's relations with China. Tajikistan's significance for India lies in its geostrategic location as it shares a border with Afghanistan and China. It is located in proximity to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) (Baidya, 2013).

Tajikistan is part of an established drug route for Afghan opium to the West. In the past, it was important for India's support to the Northern Alliance; in the future, it can play an important role in maintaining peace along Afghanistan's northern border, as well as to fight jihadis and drug traffickers and to stop the flow of illegal weapons (Bedi, 2002:19). India needs to carefully monitor the activities of jihadi forces from Pakistan operating in Tajikistan, given its proximity to POK and the likely proliferation of this problem into the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Uzbekistan is the only republic which has a common border with all the Central Asian states and Afghanistan. It has been a reliable partner of India, while Kazakhstan cannot be ignored because of its economic potential, especially energy resources. Kyrgyzstan is significant because of its proximity to the Xinjiang province of China and the Wakhan corridor, which is on the tri-junction of China, Tajikistan and POK. This is underscored by mounting evidence that the Central Asian militant group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, remains active in tribal areas in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region. Activities of this groups and Chechen rebels have been reported in POK which provides them sanctuaries. Further radicalisation and militarisation of Islamist movements within CARs

would only deepen the 'strategic conundrum' that India already confronts in Jammu and Kashmir (Roy 2008: 302).

A significant development was the meeting of the 'Joint Working Group' (JWG) on Counter Terrorism between India and Tajikistan, held in January 2006 in Dushanbe and a Second in August 2006 in Delhi. During the January meeting, a protocol was signed on mutual assistance to combat criminal activities (Mutu, Paper Presented in ICWA, Aug 8, 2006). In this respect, India is viewed in the Central Asian region as a reliable partner and a benign power to tackle the major issue of terrorism. Central Asians view India as a route to develop in what they observe as their "southern arc of instability" involving Afghanistan and Pakistan (Stobdan and Santhanam, Indian Express, Nov 28, 2003: 10).

Other than with Pakistan, which always has tried to gain 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan and Central Asia, India enjoys good relationship with other regional key players like Iran and Turkey. Today, the security situation in Afghanistan is the major concern for India. Since, the US and NATO forces have not been able to provide stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan's ethnic linkages provide ample opportunity for Pakistan's Directorate of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to counter any Indian plans in Afghanistan. While Pakistan is in no position to neutralise India's influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it can impede India's infrastructure projects in Afghanistan (Roy 2008: 304).

A key point is that in India and Pakistan relations has been hostage to dispute over Kashmir. Given the intensity and sensitivity of the issue for these two states, it is not surprising that both would try to use their growing links with Central Asia to further their respective interests in the Kashmir cause. As Stephen Blank from the US Army War College argues "New Delhi realizes now that its lack of initiative in Central Asia during 1990s left the field open for Islamabad to mobilize Central Asian support for the Pakistani position on Kashmir. India cannot afford, therefore, not to develop a strategy for Central Asia" (Blua 2002: 226 - 227).

Interestingly, the geostrategic location expresses itself in different ways for each of the Central Asian states. Each state shares boundaries with few other states. But the most strategically located country from India's security point of view is Tajikistan which shares

borders with Afghanistan and China. It is also located in close proximity to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (Woodward, 2003: 226-27). In the past, extremist elements from the Central Asia region have reportedly been found fighting along with jihadis in Kashmir. Although, officially the regimes in Central Asia maintain a balanced position on the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir. There is a tendency to refer to the Kashmir issue both by officials and people remains a common practice according to Woodward. Privately, people in general maintain a nuance for expressing more sympathy to the 'fate and cause of Kashmir people'. References about Kashmir are made not only in religious places but also in academic institutions and universities. Particularly media in the Central Asian countries where it enjoys freedom often put up features on Kashmir in their daily bulletins. Components of JKLF and other militants fighting in Kashmir receive support from local elements. The 'Kashmir solidarity' days are also marked by sufficient media coverage. In the longer run, especially when Central Asians too will have surplus petrodollars, Woodward underlined that India's concerns on terrorism emanating from the region would become critical (Woodward 2003: 228-29).

As India's engagement in Central Asia continues to grow after September 11, it comes into much closer contact with its traditional friend Russia, and its traditional foe, China. Besides India's complex interactions and its growing involvement in Central Asia does not seem to bother Moscow. If anything, Moscow welcomes India that is as a subtle means of building a united regional front against further American entrenchment in the region. Russia perceives India as a reliable partner in the fight against Islamic militancy and terrorism which has affected both countries, i.e. Jammu and Kashmir and Chechnya. Moscow is also not going to allow Central Asia to become a hotbed of Islamic militancy. But at the same time, it is unlikely to tolerate long-term American presence in Central Asian region. American domination of the region's security alignment is also not of long-term interest of India (Ivanov, 2002). It is in these regional circumstances that New Delhi is now getting positive signal from Moscow.

Even though India has recognised the American actions in the region in the wake of post 9/11 events, New Delhi has preferred the path of going alone in safeguarding interests both in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Obviously, India's overriding concerns in the region also

remain security and not strategic ones. Apart from economic and political engagements in Afghanistan, India has quickly formed Joint Working Group (JWG) for countering terrorism with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

India, like other states in the region, would be faced with contradictory situations and dilemma in the medium term. At one level, there will be risk a revival of the Taliban type regimes with enormous consequences to India's security after the American withdrawal from Afghanistan and Central Asia. On the other hand, fear would remain about strategic consequences of American long-term presence in the region, especially when US troops have reached the doorstep of both China and India. In fact, there are visible signs of the Uyghur movement gaining a new twist. Even though the US authorities have designated the East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) a terrorist groups, American rhetoric on Chinas Policy towards Uighurs have become more strident recently (Stobdan 2004: 68-69).

While relating with Central Asia, there is also the aspect of interplay between its external and internal factors. Political divisions between and among the states have hardened due to a variety of reasons (Roy and Johnson, 2001) which has indirect security implications on India and Russia. This is primarily driven by the big nation- small nation syndrome, which makes the regional security far more complex. The security concern of each state is linked to another in such a way that the action of one has consequences for others. The fear of Uzbekistan becoming a regional hegemon has forced other states, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, to look for support from outside, including China. Similarly, an Islamic threat fostered by Pakistan through the Taliban, prompted China getting well entrenched in Central Asian security affairs, thereby impinging on India's interests indirectly (Roy and Johnson, 2001).

Even after the removal of the Taliban from power in Afghanistan, India neither felt completely secure nor comfortable about the reports of renewed attempts to destabilize Afghanistan despite US presence in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. The reported agreement by the Pakistan government with warlords in North Waziristan was meant to spare the area from military activities against AI-Qaeda. There was subsequently and unilaterally scrapped by the local warlords in Waziristan, when the Musharraf government

mounted its search for Taliban hideouts. The Taliban created a safe haven for the terrorist in and around Waziristan, clearly in connivance with then Musharraf regime that had allowed them to consolidate (Patnaik: 2008:147). Such a complex situation demands even greater Indian engagement in the Central Asian region. On 1st April 2007, then president Karzai of Afghanistan alleged in an interview to the New York Times that the Pakistan wanted the Afghan government to fail so that it can use the Taliban to turn Afghanistan into a colony of Pakistan. He squarely blamed Islamabad for the resurgence of the Taliban especially in southern Afghanistan (The Times of India, April 3, 2007: 22).

Finally, India visualized a far more serious problem. Pakistan, India's immediate neighbour and initiator of four wars during the last four decades, was posing itself as the trustworthy friend of the newly independent Central Asian countries only on the basis of commonality of religion. Pakistan had been an active member of USA- Sponsored Defence Pacts and Military Blocs (DPMB). These military alliances, directed against the Soviets had been then denounced by the Soviet Union. The Central Asians, then a part of the Soviet Union, had more or less, shunned Pakistan. Pakistan thought that the demise of the Soviet Union gave it a new opportunity to draw them within its own sphere of influence. India had to prevent such a development because of its continuing adversarial relationship with Pakistan which seldom lost any chance to show its hostility (Gopal 2005: 157-158).

India's Geostrategic Interests in Central Asia

The emergence of predominantly Muslim but, in fact, multi-ethnic and multi-religious CARs has added a new strategic dimension to the geopolitics of the whole of Asia and more so, for the countries located in its immediate neighbourhood. Central Asia lies at the strategic junction between two nuclear powers, Russia and China, and at the interface between Russia and the Islamic world. It shares borders with Afghanistan, which is a major source of spreading religious extremism in the region. India has a vital interest in the security and political stability of this region. Obviously given the Kashmir angle, India cannot be walled off from the political developments which take place in the Central Asian region. Any advance by Islamic extremist groups in the CARs could invigorate similar elements active in Kashmir. For reasons dictated by geography, India's strategic concerns are tied up with the regions bordering its north and northwest. Pakistan in its northwest

continues to be antagonistic towards India. Pakistan is already sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. For India, the Kashmir issue pertains not to four million Muslims living in Kashmir Valley alone, but to the peace and security of 130 million Muslims in India. Therefore, for India the geostrategic importance of CARs is immense. Under no circumstance can India ignore this region (Roy, 2001).

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the independent Central Asian states that emerged have very significant natural resources like oil and gas. India was not very much interested to the Central Asian states during the initial period. But the common threat resulted in a growing convergence of need to devise ways to combat this menace. India, realising that Central Asia held the key to the two major worries -Pakistan's expanding influence over Afghanistan and beyond, and, the threat of a growing belt of fundamentalism sponsoring cross-border terrorism-chose to cooperate closely with the Central Asian states. It provided financial assistance to the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance led by Ahmad Masood that enabled the Alliance to acquire weapons and ammunitions. The diplomatic support was not confined to just maintaining the Embassy of Afghanistan in New Delhi, representing the Rabbani leadership (ousted by Taliban). In all diplomatic forums, India condemned the Taliban and played a crucial role in the campaign against international recognition to the Taliban, which was recognised by only three states till the end. India played host to the families of the anti-Taliban leadership (Patnaik, 2005).

On the other hand, instability in Afghanistan has also adversely influenced peace and security in the region. Most countries in the neighbourhood are convinced that extremists consolidating in Afghanistan under the Taliban will destabilise Central and South Asia. India apprehends that the Taliban's expansion will increase the pressure on Kashmir and extend Pakistan's strategic reach to the gates of Central Asia. Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to have elements that can create destabilisation in the CARs as well as in India. Should the destabilising pattern of local conflicts as manifested in Afghanistan and some of the Central Asian states, especially Tajikistan, were to continue, unabated, the security environment of Southern Asia, already under severe stress, is likely to become more explosive. In the light of the aforementioned, India's long-term strategic interests in forging closer cooperation with the Central Asian states should be obvious (Roy, 2001).

Another point is that the Central Asian region has become an area of immense importance to Europe, US, China, and Iran. The US is trying to undermine Russian and Iranian gains, China has committed billions of dollars for the development of Central Asian oilfields to fulfil its future energy demands. Europe wants to extend its influence by means of NATO expansion eastwards and through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. All these are likely to bring in high-stakes power politics in Central Asia. This obviously has implications and India must consider whether these developments are desirable or not. The question that concerns India is that any external influence in CARs will have serious implications, direct or indirect for the countries of the region. Related to the geostrategic significance CARs is the problem of religious extremism/terrorism or what Central Asian states call political Islam and problem of drugs and arms trafficking (Roy, 2001).

Background of Security Threats & Challenges

A distinct trend in international security scenario in the post-Cold War era is the phenomenal rise of non-traditional threats. The most pervasive challenge to international stability is the one posed by extremist non-state armed groups and by terrorism. With the trend towards globalization and an increasingly interconnected world, these threats and challenges go beyond state systems. The devastating events of September 11, 2001, in the United States, followed by equally shocking attacks in London, Madrid and Delhi, and then the carnage in Mumbai, have starkly underscored terrorism's global reach and its capability to infringe upon a state's sovereignty and integrity. These events have also reminded us of the sheer brutality of terrorism and its ability, as a kind of hydra-headed monster, to inflict large-scale suffering on innocent people (Joshi 2011:73).

Extremism is not a new phenomenon. However, the objectives of extremists heretofore tended to be limited to drawing attention to specific issues and grievances. Moreover, the means at their disposal were limited. The level and scale of violence was, therefore, comparatively low. A radical shift in the nature of extremism occurred during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979-1989. The extremism and terrorism that arose in the wake of this intervention were of a new magnitude, mainly because it was based on religion. The fight against 'godless Communists' generated religious fervour and, in the process, a strong Afghan resistance. The religious overtone of the struggle was sufficient

to generate the Mujahideen movements and incite both Afghans and more faraway Muslims to take up arms against the Soviet forces. The religious fervour of the struggle turned extremism into a dangerous phenomenon with broad reach. The refugee crisis in countries neighbouring Afghanistan provided the opportunity for the creation of a madrassah culture that functioned as an incubator of extremism and terrorism. In fact, many believe that the present day 'gun culture' in the region is a product of this trend. But it has become the aims of the extremists are both political and religious, which is why their movements are called political Islam (Blank, 2006).

Central Asia, and in particular the Caspian region, is richly endowed with energy resources, and the past two decades has seen growing competition over the control of these vital assets. With the rise of extremism and terrorism has come a widespread fear that terrorists could target energy resources, at a time when energy security has become a serious consideration for both developed and developing countries. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, for example, has suggested the formation of a Caspian Anti-Terrorist Center to tackle this threat of terrorism (Nichol, 2004).

The rise of extremism and terrorism in India's neighbourhood and in Central Asia began with the Soviet military intervention of Afghanistan. Although Central Asia was then part of the Soviet Union, interaction between Central Asians working in Afghanistan and the Afghan resistance had a profound impact on the region. In fact, many of these Soviet citizens left Afghanistan convinced of the righteousness of the Mujahideen cause. The withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 signalled the victory of the Mujahideen, but left a legacy of warlordism, a massive refugee population, growing Islamic militancy, and a booming drug economy (Cornell and Spector, 2002).

With the Soviet withdrawal, the security environment of the region under-went a fundamental change, which was to profoundly affect both India and the newly constituted Central Asian states. Pakistan had emerged as a frontline state during the conflict and played a vital role as the primary conduit for massive arms supplies and assistance to the resistance. There was a formidable proliferation of weapons in the region, and the sudden disengagement of the U.S. from Afghanistan left these problems unattended. The overthrow and assassination of the Afghan President Najibullah in 1996 ushered in a new

phase for religious extremism, which reached its peak under the Taliban. During Taliban rule Afghanistan became the epicentre of terrorism. The world witnessed a series of terrorist attacks, particularly the attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the bombing of the USS Cole, which were all traced back to Afghanistan before 2001 attack (Goodhand, 2002).

Pakistan was among only three countries that recognized the Taliban regime. Bordering Afghanistan, its policies followed a strategy initiated by the late Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq, who according to one observer, “passionately worked toward creating a pro-Pakistan Islamic government in Kabul to be followed by the Islamization of Central Asia. In military parlance this was Pakistan’s strategy to secure ‘strategic depth’ in relation to India” (Rashid, 2008). India witnessed a sharp rise in the number of insurgencies and cross-border terrorist incidents in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, the newly independent state of Tajikistan found itself in the midst of a civil war and the opposition received support from different Mujahideen groups and later from the Taliban. In 2002, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden observed that, “during the previous period, with the grace of Allah, we were successful in cooperating with our brothers in Tajikistan in various fields, including training. We were able to train a good number of Tajiks, arm them and then deliver them back to Tajikistan” (Cited in, Scheuer, 2006). Importantly, the Fergana Valley – the bastion of Islam in Central Asia – also saw a rapid rise in religious fervor.

The defeat of the Taliban and the ongoing war on terror has not succeeded in destroying the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan or in stabilizing the country. In fact, some analysts argue that terrorism has received a new lease on life by quickly adapting to the post-9/11 situation. The hub of terrorist activities gradually shifted to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. It is primarily from bases in FATA that terrorists are carrying out their attacks and spreading the insurgency in Afghanistan. In the past few years, the view that Afghanistan is gradually tilting in favor of the religious extremists has gained adherents. This is an ominous portent for the future. The challenges posed by unconventional threats to the stability and security of the region and the significance of those threats for India are serious as it expands its link with Central Asia.

From this perspective, Afghanistan is the critical link, its stability being vital both for India and the Central Asian states (Basu, 2010).

Rise of Security Threats and Challenges

Both India and the Central Asian states have faced substantial problems with insurgencies and cross-border terrorist activities for over a decade. Presently, the problem is most pronounced in India, while the Central Asian states are affected to a lesser but still notable extent. After the end of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1989, military supplies to the Mujahideen ended in 1991 and USAID's humanitarian assistance program came to an end in early 1993. But the forces of religious extremism flourished. The Mujahideen overthrew President Mohammed Najibullah and assumed power in Afghanistan in 1992. Several factors provided sustenance to these forces, the most important among them being the proliferation and availability of arms, especially small arms (Din, 2013).

During the Soviet military intervention, Pakistan was the primary conduit for arms to the Mujahideen. It is estimated that the resistance fighters received arms worth US\$2 billion between 1979 and 1989. This aid was channelled via the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), which coordinated the supply of weapons to the Mujahideen. However, it is known that the ISI appropriated a large portion of the military supplies for its own purposes (Malik and Joseph, 2005:34). In the process, the region was awash in arms, readily available for the extremists and terrorists who remained in the border areas even after the Soviet forces had with-drawn. An additional source of arms supplies was the huge stockpiles of weapons left behind by the retreating Soviet forces, which fell into the hands of the Mujahideen. A major central locale for the production, sale and proliferation of weaponry was Darra Adam Khel in the North West Frontier Province, commonly known as the 'Main Open Arms Bazaar'. Arms production in Darra was regarded as a cottage industry, but gradually became a large industry, free of government control and taxation (Malik and Joseph, 2005:34). The arms bazaar of the NWFP is also renowned for the wide range of weaponry that it has on sale.

Moscow also contributed to the proliferation of arms in the region. Apart from the stockpiles left behind in Afghanistan, Russia supplied arms to the pro-government forces

in Tajikistan in the civil war that began almost immediately following independence. Tajikistan was flooded with small arms during the early part of the civil war. In May 1992 alone, thousands of small arms including AK-47s and Makarov pistols were distributed, while the opposition received support from the Afghan-based Mujahideen groups. Subsequently, the Northern Alliance opposing the Taliban in Afghanistan received additional weaponry from Russia and Uzbekistan (MacFarlane and Torjesen, 2005:10).

The beginning of the War on Terror in October 2001, led to yet another in-flux of arms in the region. Pakistan became a frontline state once again in this war on terror, with a primary role to ensure the security of the supply route through the NWFP to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to provide other logistical support. While the war on terror unfolded over the years, the forces of religious extremism and terrorism have not been weakened, and the surge in their activity made the situation in Afghanistan unstable and insecure. Clearly, the availability of arms is a factor that underpins the insurgency; nevertheless, there has not been a strong effort to reduce the supply of small arms. As two scholars conclude, ‘advocacy on small arms has not been as intense as that on landmines primarily because the small arms campaign aims not at banning the use of weapons, but only in regulating their use, trade and transfer’ (Malik and Joseph, 2005:61-62).

Intertwined with the issue of the proliferation of small arms is the production and trafficking of illicit narcotics, which is a major destabilizing factor and security concern, not only for Afghanistan but for all five Central Asian states. The last decades have seen an exponential increase in the production and trafficking of drugs in and from Afghanistan. In 2007 Afghanistan produced a record 8,200 metric tons of opium, double the total amount of 2005, and accounting for 93 per cent of the world’s entire production of opiates (Hodes and Sedra, 2007: 35). Drug profits are a key source of financing that sustains extremism and terrorism. Linked with drug trafficking is the emergence of criminal groups and networks that oversee the safe passage of drugs through Afghanistan and Central Asia to markets in Europe. The link between criminal groups and terrorism is illustrated by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU, which is both a criminal and terrorist organization, appears primarily concerned with financial gain and successfully used

terrorism in the early 2000s to maintain and secure routes for transporting narcotics (Makarenko, 2000:16). The Taliban initially considered drug trafficking un-Islamic, but later encouraged its production for financial reasons, particularly after 9/11.

Unfortunately, the number of troops available to NATO's ISAF mission and the fear of antagonizing local warlords who might themselves be involved in drug trafficking led to the mission being prohibited from involvement in the interdiction of drugs (Rashid, 2008:325).

The processing of opium into heroin was being carried out in laboratories located inside Afghanistan, since the chemical precursors required for the process were not available in the country. These precursors, primarily acetic anhydride, are provided from Russia via Central Asia. While the production of such substances in the region was known, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that no seizures of acetic anhydride have been reported in Central Asia in recent years (UN Report, 2007).

Several trafficking routes take the drugs from Afghanistan to markets. Among the preferred routes are those through Iran, through the Pakistani port of Karachi, and across Central Asia. The Tajik-Afghan border is porous and poorly guarded but Tajik law enforcement agencies still manage to intercept several tons of opiates each year. Turkmenistan has also emerged as a major export route for Afghan opiates. From these southern Central Asian states, smuggling routes converge on Kazakhstan, which has no less than four main routes through which the drugs reach Russia and Europe (Alam, 2013).

Security Threats and Challenges to India

The security scenario in India's neighbourhood gradually deteriorated during the last decade of the twentieth century. Besides the victory of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia had undergone profound changes. It is now clear that the new situation will be a permanent feature of the region, posing new threats and challenges that affect both India and the Central Asian states (Blank, 2003).

India's geopolitical horizons widened with the independence of the Central Asian states. Although India does not share a direct boundary with any of them, it considered them as

part of its extended neighbourhood, with which it faced common threats emanating from a common source. Afghanistan's provinces had long enjoyed a high level of autonomy but the Soviet intervention changed this dramatically, with extremist and terrorist groups thereafter becoming a constant presence. This did not augur well for the unfolding security environment in the region (Kumar and Prasad, 2012).

The defeat of the Soviet superpower provided a great stimulus to extremism. Many religiously-based terrorist groups had sprung up in the course of the war, and these groups were well-trained, armed and equipped and benefited from a safe haven in the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in the Pakistan occupied part of Kashmir. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces these groups lost their primary target. Some began instead to focus on, or were encouraged to focus on, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, leading to heightened militancy there (Joshi 2011:76).

New Delhi considers Kashmir an integral part of the Indian Union. The Indian government has always maintained that Kashmir is a bilateral issue to be negotiated in a peaceful manner between India and Pakistan. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence for 2006-07, for example, stated that "on the Jammu and Kashmir issue, India is ready to look at options, short of redrawing the boundaries...India has declared its readiness to find a pragmatic solution to resolve the J&K issue" (MoD, 2006-7). Successive Indian governments have upheld this position. During the tenure of the National Democratic Alliance between 1999 and 2004, then Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh stated that "let it also be clearly understood that Jammu & Kashmir is not a global foreign policy issue. It is an issue that has been made contentious by repeated and persistent interference in India's internal affairs by Pakistan. That is why it is and can only be a bilateral matter" (MEA, 2002). While the Pakistani government has sought to internationalize the issue and has sought third-party mediation, the Indian government has preferred bilateral mechanisms. Suffice it to say that Kashmir is the main issue that has prevented the establishment of normal and good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan since the inception of the two countries.

In the early years of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, the activities of extremist and terrorist groups went unnoticed. Numerous religious-based groups and organizations

sprang up in India as well as in Pakistan. Among those deserving mention are Lashkar-e-Taiba (founded in 1990 in the Kunar province of Afghanistan but based in Pakistan); Jaishe-e-Mohammad (founded 2002 in Karachi); Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (founded in 1989); while the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) is a separatist organization with the aim of independence for Kashmir. It has differed with other militant organizations on the question of violence (Swami, 2003). The declared objective of these groups was jihad against the Indian government and the 'liberation Kashmir'. Qari Abdul Wahid, who claimed to lead Lashkar-e-Taiba's operations in Jammu and Kashmir, wrote in the December, 1999, issue of Voice of Islam that the organization would uphold the flag of freedom and Islam through jihad not only in Kashmir but in the whole world (The Hindu, 2009).

With the capture of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Indian security concerns worsened. As the Indian Ministry of Defence put it, "any fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan such as the Taliban could be an insidious threat to our secularism, as well as a potentially destabilizing factor in Kashmir" (MoD, 2001-2). Adding to India's strategic apprehensions was the possibility that Pakistan's search for "strategic depth" vis-à-vis India could succeed, especially after the Central Asian states unexpectedly gained independence in 1991 and a religious-oriented regime came to power in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, India experienced unabated militancy and cross-border terrorism leading to loss of many innocent lives, destruction of property, and disruption of normal life.

A large number of foreign militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and several Arab countries were involved in the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. However, there is so far no evidence to suggest that Uzbeks belonging to the IMU have been involved in militant activity there. Over the years, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands have become the center not only of Pakistani and Afghan extremists, but of Pakistani pan-Islamic groups that are involved in the Kashmir militancy. A dangerous dimension is that terrorist groups operating in Kashmir are trying to link up with radical Islamist groups in other parts of India, with the objective of destabilizing the whole of the country (Bhadrakumar, 2009).

After the fundamental changes that occurred in Afghanistan in 1992, Pakistan hoped that the numerous militant groups that it considered 'strategic assets' could be utilized either

covertly or overtly for fighting in Kashmir. It referred to these as ‘freedom fighters’. At stake was the fundamental conflict between a notion of statehood based on religious exclusiveness and one based on secular democratic values (Kothari 2014:239-245).

The extremist and terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan shifted their base to the FATA region after the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2001. Media reports suggest that these groups had become strong and resilient. They operated freely, crossing the border with impunity and imposing their writ on the people living in the border areas. Developments in the Swat Valley in 2009 was a case in point, though the extremists hold on the region did not last. The confidence, audacity and capability of the extremist groups also posed a serious challenge to Pakistani society as a whole and to Pakistan states writ over the country (Misdaq, 2006).

Security Threats and Challenges to the Central Asian States

While India viewed developments in Afghanistan and Central Asia with concern, Pakistan perceived them as an opportunity. Since the people of Central Asia are predominantly Muslims, Pakistan hoped to spread its religious agenda there, and to use this opportunity to strengthen its quest for strategic depth vis-à-vis India. In this approach, Pakistan had the support of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan also hoped to emerge as a bridge between the landlocked states of Central Asia and the rest of the world, in the process creating a strategically integrated region. To operationalize this goal, the Muslim countries created Economic Cooperation Organization in 1993 devised a Quetta Plan focusing on transportation (Choudhary, 2011). The leadership in the newly independent Central Asian states were highly circumspect about Pakistan’s activities in the region. Being suspicious of political Islam and of Islamabad’s religious agenda, they responded without much enthusiasm to Pakistan’s overtures and looked instead to India for enhanced engagement.

When the Central Asian states gained independence, an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty prevailed. The fratricidal civil war in Afghanistan that began following the Soviet withdrawal had an ominous impact on the newly emerging states. Historically and culturally, Central Asia had centuries old ties with Afghanistan, the Indus valley and India.

These ties were based on transport, trade, religion, ethnic links and historical conquests. In the changed context of 1991, it seemed that the religious factor might become the force to reconnect Central Asia with Afghanistan. Although there was an upsurge of religious revivalism in Central Asia, it did not become the binding factor that was expected in some quarters. The Constitutions of all the five new states proclaimed that the state-building process would be based on secular, democratic ideals, and the five states have proceeded along these lines, seeing political Islam as a leading threat to their statehood (Emadi, 2010).

Islam has flourished in Central Asia for centuries, and the authority of the unofficial clergy there remained powerful even during the Soviet period. In Tajikistan, clandestine Islamic groups had an important underground existence. After 1991, existing groups began to surface, while many new ones were formed. Following the collapse of Communism, mosques were constructed in every town of the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley, while in the Kyrgyz sector their number rose to 1,500; religious schools sprang up across the region. In the ideological vacuum that emerged, people began to observe religious practices and customs with renewed fervor. The search for a new identity led many to look for values that were rooted in religion. Yet in the main, the form of Islam that began to reappear was benevolent and tolerant. This was due to the influence of Sufism, and also to the Soviet legacy of spread of modern education and emancipation of women. Typical organizations in this vein were the Jamaats in Uzbekistan, self-help organizations that focus on social welfare, oppose militancy, and seek a greater role for Islamic values in society (Hoffman, 2006). The international Tablighi Jamaat organization is also active in Central Asia, aiming at strengthening Islamic values.

Extremism was not an integral part of the religious ethos of Central Asia, but it nevertheless emerged due mainly to external support. As Tajik scholar Muzaffar Alimov states, “There was a clear activation in the nineties of foreign religious organizations in the countries of Central Asian region. The period saw a rise in the number of foreign emissaries from Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan and the Gulf countries. They were engaged in propagating different Islamic tenets and Pan-Islamic ideas, which were irrelevant for the people of the region” (Alimov 2007:217).

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE made inroads into Central Asia with their religious agendas. Significant financial flows from Saudi Arabia were available to propagate the ultra-conservative Saudi doctrine of Wahhabism. The result of these activities was a government backlash that soon led even some legitimate cultural groups to be banned. In the succeeding sweep many innocent people, particularly in Uzbekistan, were jailed. In order to avoid persecution, many religious leaders fled to Afghanistan, where they were warmly welcomed and provided with sanctuary. Importantly, once in Afghanistan, these exiles gained vast experience in political and military struggle and established contacts with other Islamic organizations and movements (Brown, 2012).

The eruption of the Tajik Civil War provided an opportunity for foreign groups to further cement their contacts in Tajikistan. The opposition, consisting of both religious and non-religious components, fled to Afghanistan, where they received training, arms, safe havens and financial assistance. Special study camps were set up to impart religious knowledge. It is estimated that nearly 100,000 Tajik opposition members relocated to Afghanistan between 1992 and 1997. Whether or not the Tajik civil war was only a religious driven, the resulting struggle resulted in the loss of 40,000 lives (Alimov, 2007:218).

The rise of the Taliban and their ability to expand their power had a profound impact on Central Asia. The Taliban's rapid advance into northern Afghanistan fuelled apprehensions about a possible 'Greater Afghanistan' that could destabilize, if not break up the newly formed states. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sought the help of Russia in meeting this challenge, but both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan tried to ensure their security by means of a bilateral dialogue with Pakistan. On a visit to Tashkent in October 1996 President Farooq Leghari of Pakistan assured the Uzbek president that "the Taliban had no territorial ambitions beyond Afghanistan's borders, a message which he repeated in Almaty on 28 October, 1996. Nonetheless, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev issued a warning that the Afghan conflict must not be allowed to spread beyond its borders" (Marsden 1998:131-132). The Indian government was also deeply concerned at these developments and welcomed the meeting in October, 1996, at which Russia and the Central Asian states planned their strategy for meeting this danger.

The Taliban's impact on Central Asia was visible in the rising profile of the IMU, with its declared objective of jihad against the Karimov government in Uzbekistan (Rashid, 2002). The IMU received full support from the Taliban in this objective. The Taliban in turn wanted the IMU to create diversionary activity to draw attention from its own struggle with the Northern Alliance. Martha Brill Olcott, a U.S. specialist on Central Asia, said that "... allegations that the IMU was tied to the Al Qaeda network were well documented by materials seized in their camps in northern Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002" (Olcott 2003:140). The IMU carried out several incursions into Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and even attempted to assassinate President Karimov in 1999. During the War on Terror, the IMU fought alongside the Taliban, with one of its factions still based in FATA of Pakistan. Well-known analyst Ahmed Rashid, who visited a madrassah in that region, reported that "... the teachers showed off the special classrooms where hundreds of students from Central Asia were studying Islam with the help of interpreters" (Rashid 2002:247-249).

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), long active in the Middle East, has worked across Central Asia to realize its dream of a new Muslim Caliphate that would destroy existing states and abolish other faiths. There also splinter groups such as Al Bayat (large presence in Tajikistan); Islom Lashkarlari; the Islamic Movement of Central Asia (a successor to the IMU); Akromiya; and Hizb-an-Nusra (Goodson, 2001).

Religious extremism and terrorism may not be the products of economic hardship but they gain legitimacy in environments facing poverty and unemployment. In the opinion of President Karimov, "... the harsh realities encountered during the transition period, such as the objective differences among members of the population and natural distinctions in level of property ownership, have induced parts of the population to adopt a Soviet like mentality and call for a return to an illusory utopian equality, or to launch a pseudo-struggle against luxury and excessiveness – a return in essence to the artificially levelled standards that make society flat, gray and backwardIn these circumstances, ideas such as Islamic Wahhabism have become deceptively popular" (Karimov, 1998:24).

It cannot be denied that foreign religious extremists have successfully used economic incentives to lure people into their work. In a lecture in April 2005, former Uzbek

Ambassador to Iran, Khaydarov, spoke of "... a sense of futility that causes people to turn to religious ideology. Teachers in Uzbekistan, he said, make US \$12 a month, while religious groups pay new members as much as US \$200, mainly with funding from Saudi Arabia" (Khaydarov, 2005). The only solution to this problem is to generate more economic development, which has been underway across Central Asia during the last few years after 2001. This same challenge faces all those who would like to see Afghanistan develop along moderate and productive lines.

Once the War on Terror was launched, the scale of terrorist activities in Central Asia dropped, notable exceptions being the series of blasts in Tashkent in 2004 and the assault on Andijan by Akromiya group in 2005. Religious extremism will continue to flourish across the region as long as Afghanistan-Pakistan based terrorist groups are not destroyed. Improvement in economic conditions and the spread of open, participatory politics would to an extent, according to Laruelle and Axynora, "mitigate people's hardships, and thereby reduce further the likelihood of extremism and terrorism. This in turn will depend on the emergence of new elites and new leaders across the region. It is likely that the future leadership and new elite would be more focused on economic development and growth than their predecessors. Their agenda should be foster the integration of their national economies with the world economy" (Laruelle and Axynova, 2013).

Aware of their landlocked status, current leaders are already paying greater attention to the expansion and diversification of transport corridors. Participatory politics in Central Asia is at a nascent stage, but with the passage of time and new leaders at the helm, democratic cultures and institutions could begin to evolve. An evolutionary approach would make the process of democratization irreversible. A noticeable development that is already contributing to a cultural shift in the region is the growing popularity of the English language. This is already greatly facilitating people-to-people interactions. In the long run, participatory politics, open societies and economic development are likely to do more than anything else to marginalize extremism and terrorism (Ismaillov, 2012).

A great deal will depend on Central Asia's external environment, especially developments in Afghanistan and in the border lands between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Obama Administration then was focusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly the border

areas, and considered this to be the central point for its struggle against terrorism. However, progress in this region could lead to an exodus of extremists and terrorists to Central Asia, a possibility that President Karimov cautioned against. And as was noted earlier, it is Tajikistan that is most vulnerable to this destabilizing possibility (Ismailov, 2012).

Indian and Central Asian States' Response to Security Threats

The Indian government has dealt with this challenge of this mounting threat at various levels. At the domestic level, Indian security forces have been guarding the frontiers with Pakistan. Cross-border terrorism has been contained and the destabilization of J&K has been prevented. At the political level, India has attempted to solve the issue within a democratic and secular framework. Regular elections to the State Assembly take place. The government ready for dialogue with Islamist groups operating in J&K, provided that they accept the Indian Constitution and a composite dialogue with Pakistan was earlier initiated. Focusing on bilateral mechanism, India has expressed its readiness to find pragmatic solutions to all outstanding issues, "short of redrawing the boundaries" (Nadkarn, 2007).

Every time India-Pakistan relations harden, these bilateral mechanisms come under strain and their value is questioned. In the wake of the Mumbai attacks, all bilateral initiatives were stalled. However, reports then suggested that the composite dialogue between India and Pakistan had in fact made substantive progress. Inevitably, a central point in India's diplomacy is to highlight the threat emanating from religious extremism and cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. Combating non-traditional threats and challenges, especially those supported by external forces, is India's uppermost security concern. India has therefore been supportive of initiatives in this area launched by the United Nations. It has supported Security Council Resolution 1373, a milestone resolution aimed at combating terrorism, and it introduced the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which was placed before the UN's General Assembly. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's June, 2009 visit to Yekaterinburg, he elicited support for this initiative (Joshi, 2011:84).

At the regional level, India and the Central Asian states have a common stake in peace and stability in the region. In the early years, the Indian concern was that developments in

Afghanistan could cast their shadow on the new countries of Central Asia, which it perceived as fragile entities engaged in the monumental task of systemic transition for which they lacked experience and expertise. At this nascent stage of their consolidation process the potential for Afghan turmoil to spill over into Central Asia appeared strong, not least because the borders were porous and undefined and because of the vast Central Asian diaspora living in northern Afghanistan. From the Indian perspective, the possibility of a destabilized Central Asia seemed very real (Gopal, 2001).

The Indian government was equally concerned over Pakistan's approach to Central Asia. At the core of India's concerns was the apprehension that Pakistan would seek to acquire 'strategic depth' vis-à-vis India by bringing these states within the fold of Islam. The strategy of seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan was initiated by President Zia-ul Haq of Pakistan even before the Soviet Union collapsed. The break-up of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of Afghanistan's President Najibullah by the mujahedeen gave a powerful impetus to pursue this strategic project with added vigour. Indeed, Pakistani leaders found the prospect of a vast region coming under the sway of their own Islamic values very appealing. However, they seem to have underestimated the degree to which the values of the Central Asian milieu were liberal and moderate, a balance between modernity and tradition. Yet at the time, the potential that the Pakistani push for 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan could strengthen the forces of instability religious extremism in the broader region certainly could not be discounted (Santhanam and Dwivedi, 2004).

Indian apprehensions were not unfounded. Official thinking in New Delhi perceived the beginning of the Tajik civil war and the Taliban's capture of power in Afghanistan as part of Pakistan's larger plan to extend its influence in Central Asia, and to do so under a flag of Islamization. Also lending credence to this conclusion was the widespread talk of a 'Greater Afghanistan', much of it emanating from Islamabad. All this, and the obvious fact that the fragile new states of Central Asia were in no position to defend themselves, led India to welcome the Russian military presence in Central Asia as a guarantor of peace and stability. This fully accorded with India's interests (Sikri, 2007). When the Taliban came to power, India supported the anti-Taliban Afghani forces (mainly Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras from the North) that came together under the Northern Alliance. The Northern

Alliance received backing from Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were also apprehensive of the Taliban but opted for a policy of engagement and negotiations with the Taliban. It was therefore both logical and consistent for India and the Central Asian states to welcome the US-led War on Terror and NATO's military presence in the region (Angira, 2010).

India's lingering concerns over the future of the new Central Asian states were put to rest in 1991-92 when all the five presidents visited India in quick succession. The Central Asian leaders were all keen to develop friendly ties with India sought its experience and assistance in their gigantic task of post-Soviet transformation. Such hopes came to them naturally, given their extensive past contacts with the Indian government and institutions and their sense of long-standing cultural affinity with India itself. Thus, the congruence of interests on the issue of religious extremism and terrorism and shared perceptions of the threat they posed to pluralistic and secular societies became a cementing factor in India's relations with the new states of Central Asia (Sisodia and Bhaskar, 2005).

During his visit to India in 1992, then President Askar Akayev declared in his banquet speech that "Kyrgyzstan is looking to India as an example as it sets about restructuring its economy and socio-political system". Further, he announced that "We categorically reject extremism of any kind. Let there be neither extremism of the Communist type nor that of religious fanatics" (FAC, 1992:114). Echoing this sentiment, Kazakhstan's president Nursultan Nazarbayev said during his 1992 visit to India that, "It was vital for our country to ensure that there would be no overdose of religious indoctrination and that its policies remain secular". India, he declared, could play an important role in this context and he went on to underline the importance of economic cooperation and cultural interaction with India (FAC, 1992:80-81). Undoubtedly, these statements eased India's concerns and allowed the commonality of interests to become a valuable component of India's new ties with the Central Asian states.

On gaining its independence, Turkmenistan opted for a foreign policy based on the principle of "neutrality". However, there existed between India and Turkmenistan an ancient and rich legacy of contacts and affinities. Acknowledging this, the first Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov visited India twice. However, the fact that non-traditional

threats and challenges figured less prominently in Turkmenistan's threat perceptions than in the thinking of the other new governments of Central Asia, limited India's interaction with Turkmenistan in this sphere. However, in all other areas the two countries built and maintained friendly ties (Warikoo, 2011).

India built its relations with the Central Asian states on the basis of their aspiration to become more open and progressive societies, as well as their commitment to secularism and to democracy. Beyond this, India and the Central Asian states share common views on the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. Yet in spite of the many positive factors in its favor, India's engagement with Central Asia was not as vigorous as it ought to have been (Hussain, 2009).

Several factors hampered a more vibrant engagement with Central Asia in the early years. Obviously, the Indian government had not anticipated the break-up of the Soviet Union, with which it had built up cordial and enduring ties over the years. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the Indian government had two major concerns. First, it wanted to restore its ties with Russia and put them on a new basis. This was essential in view of India's substantial cooperation and interdependence with Russia in the area of defence. Second, India wanted to bring its policy towards the new states of Central Asia into a coherent relation with its all-important policy towards South Asia. Stated differently, India endeavoured to embrace ties with these new states in such a way as to reinforce its abiding concerns in South Asia. It was for this reason that India's main focus was on countering Pakistan's attempts to acquire strategic depth in Afghanistan and to do so in such a way as to constrain Pakistan's ongoing militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. In pursuing these goals, India continued to treat diplomatic exchanges as an important policy tool. Also relevant was the fact that India had just launched its own economic reforms, which placed great demands on resources and the government's attention (Stobdan, 2010).

All these factors impinged on Indian policy makers as they moved to open and expand their contacts with the new states of Central Asia. As a consequence, it was simply not possible for India to devote the required attention which the region amply deserved in light of India's deep contacts and affinities there. While other major powers had already established a strong presence in the region and were deeply involved there, particularly in the areas of

extractive industries and transport, India's presence in Central Asia remained minimal and its policy largely reactive (Azhar, 2016).

India and the Central Asian states welcomed the US and Western military presence in Afghanistan as a means of defeating the Taliban, the existence of which posed a serious threat to the integrity and sovereignty of India and the new states of Central Asia. The Central Asian states believed that the threat of religious extremism and terrorism had grown to unmanageable proportions, necessitating an intervention that only the West, particularly the US, could deliver. An insightful local observer pointed out that: "The majority of the public regards the American military presence as a gift from Allah. The reasoning behind this attitude is simple – 'Russia has no money to protect us and people here aren't used protecting themselves' (Post-Soviet Press 2001:17)."

Impelled by such reasoning, the Central Asian states offered access to bases on their territories and military facilities. By the turn of the century, the impact of India's economic reforms were becoming visible and its international profile was rising. The expansion of private entrepreneurship and particularly the growth of information technology, generated the perception that India was a rising power in Asia. This change also led India to broaden the parameters of its foreign policy. For the first time India was willing to look beyond South Asia, and to pay more attention to its entire extended neighbourhood, including Central Asia and Afghanistan, as well as South East Asia. There was also a broadening of Indian strategies on security matters and a new desire to play a more proactive role throughout the region (Zafar, Dijon and Upadhyay 2016:231-244).

New Delhi came to assign a significant role to what it called 'strategic defence dialogues' between India and a number of partnership countries in the area. The intent of these dialogues was to generate a stronger spirit of partnership that would lead to the preparation of a globally-coordinated initiative to fight the menace of "terrorism, arms proliferation, drug trafficking, piracy and other nefarious activities by non-state actors. This shift in India's strategic thinking significantly broadened its areas of concern" (MoD Report, India, 2005-6:6). "India's size, strategic location, trade interests and a security environment that extends from the Persian Gulf in the West to the Straits of Malacca in the East and from Central Asian Republics in the north to near the equator in the south, underpin India's

security response. In view of this strategic spread it is essential for the country to maintain credible land, air, and maritime forces to safeguard its security interests” (MoD Report, India, 2002-3:2).

Together, the shifts of substantially energized Indian policy in Central Asia, made it proactive rather than reactive. At the same time, India’s involvement in post-Taliban Afghanistan also deepened, and became very substantial. In the Indian perspective, the security and stability of Afghanistan is linked with that of Central Asia. Indian engagement with Central Asia ranges from security and strategic diplomatic to the economic and cultural spheres. The Central Asian states have welcomed India’s enhanced interaction with them. Having consolidated their independence, they are now focusing on efforts to build new polities, a project that has progressed everywhere, albeit at very different paces. In the economic sphere, Kazakhstan has made considerable progress, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan proceeding at a slower pace and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan having recently adopted policies that are intensifying the pace of their development (Roy 2013:301-316).

Together, the Central Asian states are all now ready to look southwards. The Declaration of Strategic Partnership between India and Kazakhstan encapsulates a qualitative enhancement of their relations, with India now playing a significant role in the execution of Astana’s multi-vectored foreign policy. India is increasingly perceived as a ‘balancer’, which implies that it can and should play a positive and constructive role in the region, whether it chooses to act independently or in cooperation with the US or Russia, or perhaps with both. More recently, India’s strategic partnership with the US has opened up new opportunities that need to be thoroughly explored in the coming period (Stobdan, 2015).

By the time India was ready to launch its proactive policy in Central Asia, other major powers had already established their presence there. As a result, the space in the region for India appeared limited. However, it is important to stress that the interests of the major powers in Central Asia are increasingly balanced, and not necessarily inimical to one another. This significant change is due as much to the adroit balancing policies of the Central Asian countries themselves as to the actions of the external powers. This further enhances India’s ability to play an active and positive role in the region (Rakhimov 2013: 19-28)

The main challenge facing both India and the Central Asian states has been religious extremism and terrorism, and in all cases this emanates from the same source. In recognition of this reality, India established Joint Working Groups (JWG) on counter-terrorism with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in 2003 and with Kazakhstan in 2004. The aim of each JWG was to review and analyse the regional security scenario, coordinate information, and share experiences. The JWG frameworks also envision the training of paramilitary personnel. Thus, it is appropriate that Russian border guards sought India's help in combating extremism and terrorism on the strategic southern border of the Commonwealth of Independent States. India had also extended help in training the forces of the Northern Alliance (Joshi 2011:90).

A valuable input into Indian policy is the developing of defence cooperation between India and Afghanistan's northern neighbours. Military-Technical Co-operation Agreements have been signed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These agreements provided for the construction of training facilities, the purchase of defence equipment and the regular exchange of high-level military delegations. The possibility of Indian involvement in upgrading and modernizing defence related industries in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was also to be explored (Bisaria, 2013).

While announcing 'infrastructure requirements' of the Military Training College in Dushanbe during a visit to Tajikistan in November, 2003, Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, stated that "We are cooperating well in the field of defense training. We have agreed to institutionalize contact between our armed forces in specialized areas" (The Hindu, 2003). Media reports at the time claimed that India had acquired base facilities at Ayni near Dushanbe, but in the fact the Ayni project was modest in scale. Dispelling reports that India had acquired a strategic toehold in Central Asia, India's then Defence Minister A.K. Antony declared that the air base would not be put to any military or strategic use and emphasized that India would only provide training there to Tajik pilots (The Hindustan Times, 2007). Whether the Ayni base is a minor project for training or an actual military base is a moot point. The challenge of extremism and terrorism was growing in Tajikistan at the time, and Russia was apparently not in a position to provide further security. According to Stephen Blank, a well-known American specialist on Eurasian affairs, writing

in 2005, Stephen Blank stated “Russian weakness in Central Asia compounds India’s immediate and long-term problems there. In the short term, the chaos in Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia over which Russia might once have exerted a strong restraining influence is now free to spread south-wards” (Blank, 2005: 186). For this reason India and the Central Asian states have been coordinating their support to the war on terror, including the initiative at Ayni.

On issues of regional security, a successful scenario will depend largely on a balance of interests among the US, Russia and China. Through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, the US, European Union, and NATO have established a wide-ranging presence in Central Asia. Russia’s great leverage stems from its strong military presence and dominance of the energy sector there, as well as the large presence of migrant workers from Central Asia in Russia itself. Within careful limits the Central Asian states perceive all these external presences as essential. As one official put it, “We need external powers to maintain stability of the region, but do not want one dominant power, whether it is the US, China, or Russia” (FAR Annual Record, 1992).

The Central Asian states have joined a number of multilateral regional groupings. Earlier, it was the Collective Security Treaty of 1992 that provided them with a security umbrella. In 2001 the Shanghai Five evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the agenda of which includes both security and economic issues. Among its structures, the SCO has established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) primarily to deal with unconventional challenges. At present RATS is merely a coordinating center for the exchange of information. Cooperation among its members is weak and the SCO lacks forces of its own with which to deal with threats and challenges. Previously, India was an observer in the SCO but all the Central Asian states strongly backed India’s application for full membership. Today India is a permanent member along with other SCO states and actively participates for playing constructive role. Another regional security arrangement is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian initiative aimed primarily at integrating its member’s defence sectors. At a Moscow summit in February, 2009, the CSTO formed its own Collective Rapid Reaction Force to deal with threats and challenges (Mohanty, 2014:75). It remains to be seen how effective and efficient these

various groupings will be. India is also a member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a Kazakh initiative. Though CICA is a forum for discussion, in the long term it aims at broadening the parameters of security by involving states outside the Central Asian region.

Besides broadening its interests in Central Asia, India has a major stake in the development of an independent, democratic and secular Afghanistan. Indian policy in Afghanistan emphasizes institutional and infrastructure development but also includes a strong element of counter-terrorism. It is fair to say that by now Indian policy in both Central Asia and Afghanistan consists of an integrated effort to counter terrorist forces and develop viable economies that can provide people with livelihoods and thereby undercut popular support for extremism (Pradhan 2016: 9-23)

At the political level, India's secular and democratic credentials have endeared it to the Central Asian states, which feel they have much to gain from India's experience and expertise in building democratic institutions and managing diversity. Visits by heads of state have become a regular feature of this interaction. In January, 2009, "India honoured President Nazarbayev by naming him guest of honour at its annual Republic Day Parade. This highlighted the raising of the India-Kazakhstan relationship to a qualitatively higher level through the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the two governments. Above and beyond such formal relationships, India's influence in the cultural sphere is vast. Its films and music are extremely popular, which underscores an attitude of warmth and friendliness towards India among ordinary Central Asians. This prepares the ground for India to further expand its engagement with the countries of Central Asia" (MEA, India, 2009).

The main economic potential of India's engagement in Central Asia lies in the agrarian sector; including rural development, agro-based industries, and the upgrading of existing infrastructure in these areas. India can take up such projects either independently or in partnership with third countries. In the long run it is certain to be a leading force for developing prosperity in the region as a whole. In order to be effective in this, however, India must have safe and a reliable access to Central Asia. Such connectedness in the field

of transport will give the landlocked Central Asian states access to India itself and to all the ports and economic centers of the South Asia region as a whole (Sharma, 2012).

Modi's Pro-active Security Policy

A six-day integrated tour of Central Asia by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2015 covering all the five states (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) proved not only a symbolic feat for Indian diplomacy but also a smart strategic move. It paved the way for overcoming predicaments that have so far stymied India's outreach to an important region lying in its strategic vicinity. The visit to Central Asia was one of the key features of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy outlook aimed at rebuilding India on its glorious past but with a modern content. Reconnecting with Central Asia formed a critical part of this approach. The visit was also important for widening the strategic perimeter and imagination among Indian people towards the region beyond Pakistan and China (Stobdan, 2015).

India for the first time seemed to have understood the deeper underpinnings of pursuing its overarching interests. It was in this backdrop that the importance of Prime Minister Modi's touching base with Central Asia assumed significance. For he also knew that Uzbekistan is the nerve centre of Central Asia and India cannot wish away the deep cultural contacts with the land of Babur. The energy-rich Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan deserved India's immediate attention. Kyrgyzstan has huge hydropower potential and like Mongolia, it is a democracy. India enjoys historical affinity with Tajikistan besides the country being strategically critical in the context of the Af-Pak region (The Hindustan Times, 2015).

Tej Kadam: India – Kazakhstan Joint Statement

On the invitation of Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Narendra Modi, paid an official visit to Kazakhstan on July 7-8, 2015. President Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Modi noted the strategic partnership established during the State visit of President Nazarbayev to India in January 2009, based on mutually beneficial cooperation in various spheres and a shared desire for regional and international peace and stability.

Prime Minister Modi highly appreciated the initiative of President Nazarbayev on institutionalisation of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which has emerged as an important organisation strengthening peace, stability and security in Asia and noted Kazakhstan's efforts on initiatives like CICA for the security and development in Asia. President Nazarbayev expressed gratitude for India's continued support of CICA's activity and contribution to the Conference. He also appreciated India's active support to various Kazakhstan's international initiatives. "The two Leaders welcomed the signing of an Agreement on defence and military-technical cooperation which would further widen the scope of bilateral defence cooperation including regular exchange of visits, consultations, training of military personnel, military-technical cooperation, joint exercises, special forces exchanges and cooperation in the area of UN Peacekeeping operations" (MEA India, 2015).

Joint Statement between Uzbekistan and India

At the invitation of then President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi paid an official visit to the Republic of Uzbekistan on 6-7 July 2015. The President of Uzbekistan and the Prime Minister of India held friendly, substantive and constructive discussions. They reached understanding on a wide range of issues to further deepen Uzbekistan-India strategic relations, mutually beneficial bilateral cooperation in various fields, as well as international and regional issues of mutual interest.

Uzbekistan and India reaffirmed their interest in "expanding and further strengthening long-term cooperation between India and Uzbekistan, covering diverse sectors such as political ties, security, counter-terrorism, trade and investment, science and technology as well as cultural linkages. Noting that stronger cooperation between India and Uzbekistan contributed to the mutual benefit of the people of both countries and enhanced regional stability and prosperity, the Sides stated the following: Noting the importance of adequate and timely responses to threats and challenges to national as well as regional security, the Sides expressed their intention to strengthen coordination between the law enforcement agencies and special services of the two countries, including under the framework of the Uzbekistan-India Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism. They also agreed to expand cooperation in the fields of defence and cyber-security" (MEA India, 2015).

Joint Statement between Turkmenistan and India

The Prime Minister of Narendra Modi, paid an official visit to Turkmenistan from 10-11 July, 2015 at the invitation of the President of Turkmenistan Mr. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov. During the visit, Narendra Modi held extensive discussions with President of Turkmenistan on bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest. The two Leaders expressed satisfaction at the continued development of bilateral relations based on deep-rooted civilizational, historical and cultural linkages and a shared interest in international as well as regional peace and stability (Stobdan, 2020).

Both leaders noted that the nature and rapid spread of international terrorism in the recent years poses one of the most serious global threats today. The leaders resolved to deepen ongoing cooperation in countering various security threats. They also agreed to step up efforts against cross-border threats such as terrorism, organized crime and illegal drug trafficking. Both leaders welcomed the signing of the Defence Cooperation Agreement during the visit, which would provide “a framework for intensifying bilateral defence and security cooperation through exchanges of high and mid-level visits, training and dialogue between the Ministries of Defence of the two countries and other relevant organizations. It would also enable capacity building and technical cooperation, thus imparting a new momentum to the bilateral partnership in the defence sector” (MEA India, 2015).

Joint Statement between Kyrgyzstan and India

At the invitation of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Almazbek Atambaev, Narendra Modi paid an Official Visit to the Kyrgyz Republic on 11- 12 July 2015. Both leaders exchanged views on strengthening bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest, in warm and friendly atmosphere. “India and Kyrgyzstan both sides expressed grave concern at the rising trend of extremism, radicalism and terrorism in the region and whole world. The Indian side highly appreciated the steps taken by the Kyrgyz Government in counteracting terrorism and in retaining the secular character of Kyrgyz society. The Sides agreed to expeditiously consider signing an agreement on combating international terrorism and other crimes” (MEA India, 2015).

Joint Statement between Tajikistan and India

Narendra Modi paid a State visit to the Republic of Tajikistan from 12 to 13 July 2015 at the invitation of the President Emomali Rahmon. The two leaders noted the rising trend of extremism and terrorism in many parts of the world and in their immediate neighbourhood, posing a threat to India and Tajikistan as well as the region. Both sides further emphasized the need for adoption of the “Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism by the UN General Assembly. The leaders underlined the importance of a stable and secure environment for economic development and prosperity of their countries. They agreed to continue their active engagement and cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, and reaffirmed their determination to act resolutely against organizations and agencies that support terrorism” (MEA India, 2015).

Best Options by India to Connect with Central Asia

The best option for India to reach out to Central Asia would be to follow the ancient land transport routes and their modern equivalents directly across Afghanistan. If this happens, one can expect the same volume and range of cross-cultural interaction that occurred in the past to take place once again. The best option lies through Pakistan and Afghanistan and thence via Uzbekistan or Tajikistan to the West and North. The main transport artery of Afghanistan is the “Garland Highway or Ring Road” that connects Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. The Ring Road has been considerably rehabilitated with assistance from the US, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. India’s Border Road Organization is also involved in the construction of a road linking the Iranian part and the Ring Road. Uzbekistan’s existing transport and communication links are extensive, though they need repair and upgrading. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) identifies Uzbekistan as the only country in the region to have even a small proportion of roads that can be classified as ‘primary or class-I highways’ (ADB Report, 2008). This positions Uzbekistan well as a future transport hub for the region, including Afghanistan, even though major projects underway in all its neighbouring countries will doubtless bring them solidly into the picture as well.

There is an opinion that the main southern transport corridor should follow the routes from Pakistan to Afghanistan via the Khyber and Bolan passes through Peshawar and from Gwadar and Quetta to Kandahar. These much-preferred India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan transport corridors have so far failed to emerge as a workable project, but could do so if the U.S. worked more actively with relevant countries and funders to bring them about (Sharan, 2012).

Several significant imponderables come in the way of this transport corridor, the main one being the continuing troubled relationship between India and Pakistan on the one hand, and acrimonious relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the other hand. Terrorist groups based in Pakistan continue to operate with impunity, posing grave challenges to both India and Afghanistan and preventing progress on these all-important transport corridors. The outrage that took place in Mumbai in November, 2008, and the continuing instability in Afghanistan are only the most recent in a series of fresh impediments that have arisen (Roy, 2002).

For the time being, Pakistan's approach to this important transport corridor is exclusivist. In promoting its Gwadar port as the center for trade and as an outlet to the sea for the states of Central Asia, Pakistan still seeks to exclude India. Meanwhile, the economic price that Pakistan pays for its failure to operationalize the Gwadar route as a major international corridor mounts daily. In the end, it is Pakistan itself that stands to gain most in terms of transit revenues from this route. And whenever the Gwadar port becomes fully functional, the Central Asian states will gain a critically important alternative as they develop their important new southward orientations (Taraporevala, Prasad and Mullen 2014:4).

An equally significant step towards opening Central Asia and Afghanistan towards Pakistan, India, and South Asia will be the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since it will bring significant benefits to all parties involved, and since it is directed against no one, its realization may in the end prove to be less problematic than many think today. But until the projects for roads and pipelines that bring together Pakistan and India are actually realized, India will have no alternative but to pursue the second option, namely, a sea-cum-surface transport route connecting India with Uzbekistan through Iran and Afghanistan. India has rendered partial assistance in building

the Chahbahar port on the Makran coast. The Zaranj-Delaram highway from the Iran-Afghanistan border to Afghanistan's Ring Road is now fully operational, thanks to Indian assistance. This corridor needs to be further developed to create smooth and easy access to Afghanistan and Central Asia via Uzbekistan (Sharma, 2010). The following observation is not only apt but places the transport corridor issue in the right perspective: "...the best way forward is to pursue whatever options make the best sense under the circumstances; if one channel is blocked let trade flow through others. This process will encourage, even force those countries creating the main political blockages to calculate the opportunity cost to themselves of their own perspective." (Starr 2007:31).

Afghanistan is central to the development of all the main options for improving connectivity between Central and South Asia. If Afghanistan is to play its essential role in this grand development, stability and security must be established there. The progress of peace and stability in Afghanistan will inevitably pave the way for Afghanistan to re-emerge as a transport hub. This brings the vital question of the prospects for stability in Afghanistan to the forefront (Parasar, 2012).

Peace and Stability in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's future stability will hinge on its external environment. One of the greatest destabilizing factors is the continuing insurgency led by the Taliban and Al Qaeda. These forces have certainly been weakened, but they have not been destroyed. Inevitably, it is clear that non-traditional threats and challenges involving well-armed insurgents call for conventional military methods, such as those employed by the NATO-led ISAF. However, it is by now equally clear that measures that foster economic development must also be taken. This point is now generally accepted by the US. What is not understood, and what has not been accepted, is that economic development must be pursued simultaneously with conventional warfare and not held off until the conventional campaign of arms has achieved its main goals. This is an extremely challenging task, of course. But any attempt to do the military and economic programs in sequence, holding off the latter until sufficient progress has been made in the former area, was doomed to fail (Blank, 2014).

The fate of the Kejaki dam on the Helmand River provides a laboratory example of how this process can succeed or fail. The Kejaki dam came to symbolize NATO's resistance to the insurgents. The Kejaki dam was designed to provide power to Helmand and neighbouring Kandahar and, significantly, water for the pursuit of normal agriculture. It thus posed a frontal choice between legal agriculture and illicit poppy cultivation. The dam has not been completed, the rationale for the delay in its completion being that the security situation must first be taken as priority in hand. This logic is quite off the mark. The completion of the Kejaki dam, however difficult the process, could provide an impetus to agriculture and create normal livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people. A strong military presence during the process of construction would have gone far towards dispelling fear of the insurgents among the local populace, and encourage the people, particularly the unemployed and youths, to throw in their lot with the reconstruction effort (Cooley, 2014).

The Obama administration had favoured for Afghanistan a policy that combines a heightened military presence, an intensified reconstruction effort, and serious pressure on Pakistan to cease its support for the well-entrenched insurgents based in its tribal areas. The US had also named Richard Holbrook as a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. These steps differed more by degree than by kind from those of the previous administration in Washington. The success of this approach depended on Pakistan's ability to control effectively its volatile border regions and to rid the area of extremist elements. Collaborative efforts between the international community and local elements on the ground needed to be expanded. The scenario that was to be avoided at all cost was to place the insurgents under sufficient pressure to drive them into neighbouring Tajikistan or the Fergana Valley but not enough pressure to destroy them. The mountainous Badakhshan province of Tajikistan could provide a perfect hide-out for the extremists and terrorists and enable them to continue their war to far into the future (Fashko, 2012)

Meanwhile, drug trafficking shows no sign of abating either as an economic reality or as a destabilizing force in the region. Traffickers undermine already fragile new state institutions, undermining the vitals of the governance system. Closely related is the widespread corruption, the tentacles of which have reached the highest levels of

government. The resulting unofficial taxes are massive, and place money in the pockets of warlords, local authorities, and Taliban militants, but not of local farmers, who receive a pittance. Any developmental effort must therefore include a strategy to curtail the drug trafficking that meets 40 to 50 percent of the financial needs of the Taliban alone, not to mention other groups. This issue is intertwined with the urgent need for better border controls and management, especially along Afghanistan's highly porous borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The US and NATO are already focusing on this issue, but success remains elusive (Duarte, 2013: 27-47).

Another critical issue that impinges on the peace and stability of Afghanistan is its border with Pakistan, which the Kabul government does not accept and which at many key points remains undefined. Afghanistan has contested the Durand Line since 1947 and it must now be considered defunct. President Zia-ul Haq's vision of a Pakistani-influenced region extending into Central Asia depended on an undefined border with Afghanistan, so that Pakistan's army could justify any future interference in that country and beyond. After 9/11 many Pakistanis maintained that if President Karzai would only recognize the Durand Line he would sufficiently appease Islamabad to enable it to cut off Pakistan's military support for the Taliban (Rashid, 2008:31). The Taliban and other terrorist elements have taken advantage of this undefined border, operating as a criminal organization to move contraband goods, drugs, and small weapons across it.

Politically, Afghanistan is not stable. The democratic institutions established after 9/11 have yet to evolve into durable structures. Many elements in Afghanistan, including the local warlords, are interested in maintaining a weak state. Added to this is the mounting insurgency that poses a direct threat to Afghanistan's sovereignty. Although presidential elections were held in 2004, President Karzai's influence did not extend far beyond Kabul and he was often dismissively referred to as the 'Mayor of Kabul'. With serious doubts being cast about Karzai's ability to govern the country in an effective manner, it is often suggested that a dialogue should be opened with moderate Taliban and other elements that are willing to work within the Constitutional framework and shun violence. Supporters of this approach hold up the 'Tajik Model' as a successful application of this approach (Das, 2012). The subsequent election with a new president in place has not changed the situation.

The inevitably gives rise to the question of a moderate Taliban. Do there exist elements of the Taliban with which reconciliation is possible? The Tajik model has succeeded because the main opposition group, the Islamic Renaissance Party, was willing to work within the constitutional framework. In the final analysis, democracy and open societies are the best guarantors of social harmony but these can only be instituted through social consensus, not by fiat. A step that might promote this process would be the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran and the return to them of the plots of land they owned before the Soviet intervention. This would widen the basis of democracy as members of this large group who are not committed to jihadism would gain a stake in the new order. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference on 8 February, 2009, then President Karzai announced that, “We will invite all those Taliban who are not part of Al Qaeda, who are not part of terrorist networks, who want to return to their country, who want to live by the constitution of Afghanistan, and who want to live in peace and live a normal life, to come back to their country.” (The Hindustan Times, 2009).

Afghanistan needs investments in the agrarian and industrial sectors, road networks, power transmission, and engineering. The reconstruction effort has addressed some of these issues but an accelerated pace of economic development would hasten the process of tackling such other concerns such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and healthcare (Edwards, 2003). An important step towards improving Afghanistan’s economy would be to restore its traditional position as a hub of transport and trade. Afghanistan long served as the crucial link between South and Central Asia. A revival of that status will be a daunting task but not an impossible one, provided there is the requisite political will. The idea of a ‘Greater Central Asia’ connecting South Asia with Central Asia is worth pursuing as a means of creating vast opportunities for lucrative interactions between the two regions. India’s easiest access to the region would be via Pakistani routes, but troubled relations between the two countries leave India with no choice but to pursue the Iranian option (Dudley, 2013).

India has assisted Iran in building container terminals at Chahbahar port on the Makran coast and has constructed the highway link between Zaranj on the Iranian border and Delaram on the Afghan Ring Road. The Central Asian states are all keen to intensify their

engagement with India and the Indian Ocean region, and Southeast Asia as well. They appreciate the economic importance of the southward direction for their landlocked countries and have grown impatient with the lack of progress on the opening of common routes involving India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thwarted in that direction, they are increasingly looking to the Iranian route, which is scarcely what Pakistan expected would be the outcome of its exclusionist policy (Garibov, 2013).

In this context, there is an acute need for some kind of multilateral grouping that would bring the South and Central Asian states closer together. The concept of a 'Greater Central Asia' that includes India could be the basis of such a grouping. Another possibility is that SAARC could be extended to Central Asia. Now that Afghanistan is a member of SAARC, such a possibility has become very real. In the long run, economic prosperity and political stability is bound to alter positively the geopolitics of the region. Enhanced political and economic interaction through transport and trade could replace extremism and terrorism as the link connecting South Asia with Central Asia. There are no easy solutions to the huge complexities that are involved, but one simple step would be to give priority to long-term economic considerations as opposed to the politics of the short-term (Gupta, 2013).

Summary

Extremism and terrorism are the prime security concerns of all countries in the region, as well as the major powers. The US and NATO forces are battling the insurgents but will require lots of time and tenacity before the adversary can be eliminated. Drug trafficking, smuggling in small weapons, and organized crime are factors that fuel extremism and terrorism. These have to be tackled simultaneously (Hanks, 2010: 3-10). In India's view, Afghanistan and Central Asia are interlinked and must be integral components of its approach to regional security. Traditionally, India enjoyed cordial ties with Afghanistan, and maintained multifaceted interests in Central Asia as well. After 9/11, India has focused on restoring those ties by becoming closely involved in the overall reconstruction effort. India's presence and influence in Afghanistan is substantial. Its goal, very simply, is to help Afghanistan become a sovereign and independent country. Today, India has the capacity to play a constructive role in Central Asia, but the presence there of other major powers acts as a limiting factor. A new possibility that has opened up for India is to work in

cooperation with either the U.S. or Russia or both in order to secure mutual benefits in the region. The challenge of extremism and terrorism continues to loom over the horizon in Central Asia. Tajikistan in particular is highly vulnerable due to its proximity to Pakistan's FATA region, which should be factored into any future strategy to combat terrorism (Jacob 2005:301-314).

Over time, new elites and leaders will emerge in the Central Asian states. The emerging elites are likely to be more focused than their predecessors on economic development and on integrating their countries into the world economy. As a recognized power in the field of science and technology, India can play a major role in the changing economic landscape of Central Asia. With economic progress, opportunities for employment will expand. This in turn will create conditions more favourable to participatory politics and to open systems of information and governance, and less welcoming to some of the dysfunctional activities that are so common there today. The war on terror was expected to enter a decisive phase during the tenure of the Obama administration in Washington. If this combines a determined military presence with a more active promotion of the economy on a regional basis, prospects for both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours would greatly improve (Kaur 2011: 248-274). Yet, by the time Obama completed his presidency, Afghanistan was more unstable.

A big question mark hangs over Pakistan's ability to rein in the numerous extremist and terrorist organizations that flourish on its soil, and also its ability to control the borderlands adjoining Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the many pessimistic predictions, the re-emergence of Afghanistan as a center of trade and transport is still possible, especially if Iran is involved in the evolving strategy. The southward direction for the Central Asian states is essential for strengthening their economic prosperity and for integrating them into the world economy. In the long run, such a prospect holds immense potential as a means of reorienting the geopolitics of the entire region (Kharkongor, 2013). However, Pakistan needs to end its support for terrorism and extremism in the region. The U.S., instead of reining in Pakistan is more focused on Iran, creating further hurdles for India, Afghanistan and Central Asian States to develop connectivity's and economic development in the region.

Chapter-5

India's Approach to Multilateral Regional Security in Central Asia

Introduction

The purpose for any regional organisation is two-fold: that is, generally the acceleration of economic development and the reinforcement of regional security and stability. The role of multilateral regional initiatives on a Central Asian level as primary providers of security has not been very successful so far. It has been observed that such multilateral organisations have been unable to convey hard defence guarantees, create joint military units, negotiate arms reductions or end conflicts of various types, though the region has so far experienced no wars.

However, a correct assessment of multilateral initiatives would have to begin with underlining their significance as comprising of group of states that recognise themselves as sharing some elements of community. They can define their national identity as complementary rather than adversal to their neighbours. Regular meetings and the creation of personal ties encourage good will and may help to defuse crisis. In fact non-traditional security issues like environment, water management, drug smuggling, organise crime, migration and refugee problems have provided more useful areas for regional discourse. In addition there have been attempts at economic cooperation with an understanding that the economic development is conducive to the security of the region (Meirzhan, 2000). It is undeniable that compared to the more successful of regional multilateral efforts, a great deal remains to be achieved in the context of Central Asia. However, prior to any critical evaluation of these efforts it is crucial to keep in mind that in a number of indirect ways both devolvement and stability have been contributed to by these regional processes. Symbolic of these are the numerous agreements that have been made regarding environment degradation (Sengupta 2014:16).

In the post 9/11 scenario it was assumed that in Central Asia there would be an undermining of existing multilateral arrangements with Russia and China in favour either of bilateral agreements or dependence on global organisations. The existing arrangements for regional

security would no longer play any significant role in the efforts to deal with terrorism in the region and that NATO sponsored Partnership for Peace (PfP) would emerge as the most significant security organisation in the region as the transition from regional to global security became the guiding norm. However, what happened was a somewhat different scenario. Rather than bilateralism and multilateralism, the Central Asian states opted for what was termed as a multi-vector policy where choices were open for both bilateral and multilateral agreements, particular depending on issues according to specific security perceptions. Options for bilateral agreements were kept open with all major powers like Russia, China and the United States (Ashimbaev 2003:154).

On the other hand, since 9/11, attempts by regional powers to reinforce multilateralism have been seen to increase. The influx of American troops into the region and the subsequent establishment of US military bases were taken as the signal that the Russian and Chinese position in the region have been irreversibly altered. Within a year these positions had once again changed with Russia focusing on the Collective Security Agreements of the CIS as a means to forging collective security and the emergence of a revitalised SCO (Esnov 2003:154). Most writings on geo-strategic transformations in the Central Asian region in the post 9/11 period, however, stressed on an undermining of multilateral security structures. The transition back to the bilateral format in terms of security arrangements was in fact predicted as the most significant aspects of the transition. However, while older security arrangements remained in place, newer ones were forged to deal with emerging security issues. This is not just a reflection of the presence of Russia, China and United States as parts of various security structures that exist in the region but also a professed policy that states themselves follow. The Central Asian states have been most active in underlining the significance of regional security and cooperation through various multilateral arrangements in the region (Hohr 2004:489).

There are certain areas where there is broad agreement on the requirement of multilateral action. For example, there are have been attempts to explore multilateral options in terms of security and confidence-building in the Central Asian region. The Central Asian states are part of the Commonwealth of Independent (CIS) and as such most of them are signatories to the Collective Security Treaty (CST) now renamed the Collective Security

Treaty Organisation (CSTO). In addition they are also part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Many Asian states are part of the Conference on Confidence Building and Interaction in Asia (CICA), a Central Asian initiative at confidence-building in the region. North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) had explained its presence in the region since the mid-1990s and talked about a “new cooperative trans-Eurasian security system”. The most common comment about regional security arrangements in the immediate post-9/11 scenario was that, given the US presence in the region, multilateral processes initiated by Russia and China would take a back seat (Klare, 2001).

On the issues of the common concerns it is also a fact that the positions of India and Central Asian states are quite similar and they are part of a number of multilateral arrangements in the region. No direct route from India to these countries is available as Pakistan does not permit goods, cargo or people to move through its territory to Afghanistan, let alone to Central Asia beyond it. India has registered significant progress in concluding a multilateral agreement for renovation of Chabahar port, development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and becoming a member of Ashgabat Agreement that is a multimodal transport agreement for transportation of good between Central Asia and Persian Gulf. India’s membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as also the possibility of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) should go a considerable way in bridging gaps in connectivity with Eurasian countries (Sajjanhar, 2016).

Apart from the bilateral cooperation, India has focused on multilateral engagement with the region at two levels. The first is through regional connectivity, with a renewed push for long delayed projects starting with Prime Minister Modi’s visit to Iran, India’s gateway to Central Asia, in 2016. During this visit, both sides signed an agreement to develop Chabahar Port, which has now become commercially operational (Economic Times, 2019). To facilitate transport of goods between India and Central Asia via Iran, “India acceded to the Customs Convention on International Transport of Goods under cover of TIR Carnets in 2017 and joined the Ashgabat Agreements which includes Iran, Oman, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in 2018. While these steps have given a new lease of life to India’s vision for Eurasian connectivity, New Delhi must combine skilful diplomacy with action on the

ground to ensure the continued viability of these projects in the face of US-Iran tensions” (MEA, India, 2019).

The second is through platforms for multilateral cooperation for peace, stability and regional security. Both the Central Asian states and India worked together to support the Northern alliance against the Taliban and are cooperating through organisations like the SCO and CICA, etc. India and the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russian, Belarus, Armenia and the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, set up a Joint Study Group to explore the possibility of a Free Trade Agreement in 2015 (MEA, India, 2015). While the group submitted its feasibility report in 2017, formal negotiations have not yet begun. More importantly, twelve years after it became an observer, India joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a full member in 2017. The change of status from observer to a full member marks an important shift in India’s approach to the region as a whole (TASS, 2019).

India’s engagement with multilateral regional mechanisms in Central Asia (like Northern Alliance and SCO) contributes to security and stability in the wider region including Afghanistan. India’s role in regional security through multilateral organisation started after coming to power of the Taliban government in Afghanistan during the period 1996-2001. India indirectly participated through support to Northern Alliance, which was the main opposition groups to fight against the Taliban. The Afghan Northern Alliance, officially known as the United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, was a united military front that came to formation in late 1996 after the Islamic Emirate Afghanistan (Taliban) took over Kabul. “The United Front was assembled by key former leaders of Afghanistan, particularly former president Burhanuddin Rabbani and Defence Minister Ahmad Shah Massoud. Initially, it included mostly Tajiks, but by 2000, leaders of other ethnic groups joined the Northern Alliance. This included Abdul Rashid Dostum, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Abdul Qadir, Asif Mohseni and others” (BBC News, 11 september, 2001).

The Northern Alliance fought a defensive war against the Taliban government. They received support from Iran, Russia, Turkey, India, Tajikistan and others, while the Taliban were backed by Pakistan. By 2001 the Northern Alliance controlled less than 10% of the country, cornered in the north-east and based in Badakhshan province. The US invaded

Afghanistan, providing support to Northern Alliance troops on the ground in a two-month war against the Taliban, which they won in December 2001. With the Taliban forced out of power, the Northern Alliance was dissolved as its members and parties supported the new Afghan Interim Administration, with some members later becoming part of the Karzai administration (Nojumi, 2002).

India had no urge for placing Indian troops on Afghan soil, says the diplomat who coordinated New Delhi's secret military assistance to Ahmad Shah Massoud, the military commander of the Northern Alliance, who fought the Taliban till his assassination in 2001. For four years, between 1996 and 2000, he left the Tajik capital Dushanbe to take up his new posting, Ambassador Bharath Raj Muthu Kumar coordinated military and medical assistance that India was providing to Massoud and his forces. Short of sending heavy equipment, India provided extensive assistance to the Northern Alliance uniforms, ordnance, mortars, small armaments, refurbished Kalashnikovs seized in Kashmir, combat and winter clothes, packaged food, medicines, and funds through his brother in London, Wali Massoud. Assistance would be delivered circuitously with help of other countries who helped this outreach (The Hindu, 6 June, 2003).

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is one of the most significant multilateral regional organisations related to Central Asia. It is evolving into a strong security and co-operation organisation and participation of India could fill the gaps in the regional security complex. SCO Charter (Article 1) talks about the main goals and tasks of regional security which are to "consolidate multidisciplinary cooperation in the maintenance and strengthening of peace, security and stability in the region and to jointly counteract terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations, to fight against illicit narcotics and arms trafficking and other types of criminal activity of a transnational character, and also illegal migration" (SCO charter, 2006). Fifth SCO Summit in Astana July 5, 2005 the leaders agreed to grant SCO observer status to India. At this summit, SCO member countries signed agreements on fighting the three "evil forces" of terrorism, separatism and extremism. India can check the influence of China factor in Central Asia and play an active role in SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structures (RATS) for fight against the extremist and terrorist groups in the region. "India's imperatives are looming

security concerns such as the spread of terrorism, the Afghan fallout and the growing footprint of ISIS in Central Asia” (Patnaik, 2012).

The SCO began as a minor multilateral institution designed to deal with China’s border issues with Russian and three Central Asian states. It has since evolved into the principal vehicle for China’s relations with Central Asia and a means by which to move beyond economic cooperation into the realms of politics and security (Payne, 2015). India became an observer in 2005 and a full-fledged member of the SCO in 2017. For India, the SCO gives a formal and structured entree into Central Asia, which it sees as part of its extended neighbourhood. New Delhi also expects the SCO to play the central role in stabilizing Central Asia and Afghanistan and ensuring that it does not come under the clutch of extremism of any kind. India has for many years experienced the dangers of terrorism and realizes the effect this has on the country’s social psyche and development. India’s deeper involvement in the region could also help thwart the emergence of a hegemon in the Central Asia – a development which would probably be welcomed by most Central Asian countries. Apart from that, unlike groupings like ASEAN, the SCO is more security focussed, and therein lies its value for India (Ayres, 2018:174).

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia. The key idea of the Conference is based on the priority of joint initiative and mutual beneficial interaction of small and large states (The Astana Times, 2020). Central Asian, especially Kazakh, initiatives to collectively deal with security issues through the CICA has been considered as significant by India. Its vision for security in Asia elaborates on multilateral approaches towards promoting regional security and stability through dialogue, consultation and adoption of decisions. Particularly for the Central Asian states, achieving of the objectives of CICA requires steps for the elaboration and implementation of measures aimed at enhancing cooperation and creating atmosphere of peace, confidence and friendship. All states are encouraged to resolve their disputes peacefully through negotiations in accordance with the principle enshrined in the UN Charter and International law (Laumulin, 2002).

India has been a founding member of CICA right from the beginning. The importance of CICA stems from the fact that it could be a template for an Asian security system. India views CICA as a useful platform for confidence-building measures among member states, which could incrementally help build ‘a cooperative and pluralistic security order in Asia based on mutual trust, understanding, and sovereign equality’ as well as peace and stability in Asia (Chunshan, 2014). At CICA meetings, New Delhi has raised issues of importance to itself such as terrorism, including nuclear terrorism, the global financial crisis, climate change, and the situation in the Middle East – in recognition of the fact that these are transregional and transnational challenges which can only be effectively dealt with multilaterally. CICA’s focus on counterterrorism suits India, which has suffered immensely because of this global disaster. India leads confidence building measures on energy security and transport. Like the SCO, CICA’s focus on security is important for India. India has not so far given much importance to CICA, but it is a body on which it would be worthwhile to focus and ensure that nothing comes on its agenda that is inimical to India’s interests. Perhaps, in the future, the SCO and CICA could coordinate or work collectively, and this is something which would be useful for India (Ayres 2018: 175).

India’s proactive security policy towards the Central Asia in the future needs to be very vibrant given the geopolitical political scenario. Therefore, India is actively formulating its foreign policy to the Central Asian region through various measures such as negotiating an agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union, participating in Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, links with Eurasian through INSTC and Chahbahar route etc.

India’s role with Northern Alliance to Counter Taliban in Afghanistan

Before the American invasion of Afghanistan, India worried and complained about the ruling Taliban regime and Al Qaeda access to Central Asian states, as well as into the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir (backed by Pakistan), which was a clear threat to her security. It was worried about the fall out of a Taliban activities in Jammu and Kashmir where there had been a marked increase in the number of Afghanistan-based militants from different parts of the world. These mercenaries many of whom were settled in Pakistan

occupied Kashmir had joined various Kashmiri militant outfits, creating instability in the valley (The Hindu, 12 July, 2001).

The traditional Indo-Afghan friendship and the people to people interaction among the two countries, have always impacted Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan where Islamabad aims at opposing the Indian influence. Pakistan's quest for 'strategic depth' as well as Islamabad's desire to block Indian access to Central Asia via Afghanistan were major issues in India's strategic thinking. Therefore, India was concerned about the spread of arms and weapons emanating as fall out of the civil war in Afghanistan which had already afflicted Pakistani society to a great extent. Sophisticated weapons like the dreaded AK-47, light machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, plastic bombs, rocket launchers, antitank grenades, etc., were available at an easy price. Cross-border links between arms smugglers in India and Pakistan had also constituted a serious threat to law and order in the country (Chopra 2002: 21-25).

In order to check this destabilising religious extremism and terrorism in the whole region, New Delhi continued its support to the Northern Alliance to counter the Taliban threat. The British based Janes International Security reported on 15 March 2001 that "India was supplying the Northern Alliance with military equipments, advisors and helicopters technicians, and both India and Russia were using military bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan for their operation. There was also speculation about some kind of military action well before September 11, 2001. India and Iran will facilitate US and Russian plans for limited military action against the Taliban if the contemplated tough new economic sanctions don't bend Afghanistan's fundamentalist regime" (Blank, 2004). The terrorist strikes in America and the purported role of the Taliban regime provided just fillip to the United States attack Afghanistan.

India had several reasons for supporting the United Front in Afghanistan. It has always been concerned about security in its northern and north-western border areas. Historically, India has enjoyed warm relations with Afghanistan. Kabul was home to a significant population of Hindus and a smaller community of Sikhs and Afghanistan was also situated on the western trade routes from India and frequently hosted Indian traders, merchants and travellers. New Delhi began to re-engage Afghanistan in its foreign policy with the

February 1989 Soviet withdrawal and the fall of Nazibullah regime in 1992 with which India had enjoyed very good relationship (The Times of India, 24 March, 2005).

New Delhi was also greatly concerned that the Taliban brand of highly radicalized Islam would inflame communal tensions at home. One of India's overriding concerns however has been the repercussion that the Taliban rule over Afghanistan has had on the Kashmir imbroglio. Although the militant activity against in Kashmir had always retained more of a moral dimension that is, a struggle for self-determination - as opposed to being a religious-political campaign, this began to change as the Taliban forces consolidated their hold over Afghanistan (Ganguly 2001: 412-13).

Taliban-ruled Afghanistan began to accommodate many insurgents groups operating in Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. In addition to Osama bin Laden's infamous Al Qaeda network, the Mujahideen-e-Khalq of Iran, the Xinjiang Liberation Front of China, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Hizbul Mujahuddin operating in Jammu and Kashmir all took advantage of Taliban hospitality and the military training they could receive inside Afghanistan. According to Indian sources, "since the summer of 1992 the infiltration of Afghans-foreign nationals from countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia- peaked at around 2000. In May 2000, the United Front Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, claimed that 5,000 Pakistanis were training in Taliban run camps for guerrilla war and terrorism in India-held Kashmir" (Afghanistan Report, Feb, 2002). The United Front, on the other hand, had insisted that it will close all training camps once it defeats the Taliban.

Since the September 11 attack on Washington and New York, India has insisted that Kashmiri militant group such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) are intrinsically linked to the Taliban and al Qaeda. According to Indian journalist Raul Bedi, "the United States provided firm evidence of the existence of around 120 training camps run by the ISI across Pakistan and Afghanistan. Some groups like the LeT are also funded by Bin Laden's Al Qaeda foundation" (Bedi, 2002: 60-61). Bedi also reported that Jaswant Singh, then India's Defense and Foreign Minister, had stated that radio messages from Afghanistan had been intercepted in which Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban's spiritual leader, had ordered all LeT members to return from Pakistan and Kashmir to defend Afghanistan against any

ground invasion by the United States and Allied forces, following the commencement of military operations on October 7, 2001 (Bedi, 2002: 62).

India has also been concerned that the same militants groups seek to spread the jihad they were waging inside Kashmir to other parts of the country. Kashmiri militants groups such as Markhaz-Dawa al-Irshad, Harakat-ul-Mujaddin, and Al-Bader insist that the liberation of Kashmir is but one item on the agenda. The liberation of Hyderabad and Junagadh both significant Indian Muslim cities, should then follow, along with the establishment of two independent Muslim states within India's territorial borders in the north and south (Withington, 2002:40-41). Thus, the terrorism and militant activities in Afghanistan and Central Asian region has greater security implication for India.

Openly linked to India's concern over the Taliban-Kashmir militant alliance is, of course, Pakistan's support for the Taliban. This would provide, Pakistan's military hoped, the much-desired "strategic depth" (Withington, 2002:40). For Islamabad, "this strategic depth meant that Pakistan would have been able to call on the Taliban's military assistance in times of crisis or conflict with India". At the same time, the Taliban represented a useful avenue by which the ISI could outsource its arming and training of pro-Pakistan insurgents for infiltration into Kashmir. India's warm links with Rabbani's government and the United Front's promise to close all Kashmiri militant training camps provided India with ample motives for support. The United Front's anger at Pakistan's funding and support of the Taliban also provided a useful justification for India's assistance. India's warm relations with Iran would then effectively leave Pakistan surrounded on all fronts by governments that are allies of India. (The Hindu, July 9, 2000).

Pakistan's Search for "Strategic Depth"

Central Asia has been historically and culturally close to South Asia. The collapse of Soviet Union created great opportunities for both India and Pakistan to be strong influences in the perspective of natural resources for this region. However, Indo-Pak rivalry and strategic games limited their ability to orient Central Asia towards trade and economic integration with South Asia. The antagonism that stems primarily from their dispute over Kashmiri continues to prevent them from presenting a joint front in accessing Central Asia's

resources. Both India and Pakistan have been too occupied with Kashmir and allowed this issue to influence their Central Asia and Afghan policy. Pakistan, obsessed with the notion of 'Strategic Depth' vis-à-vis India, backed the fundamentalist Taliban introduced greater instability into Central Asia. The Taliban trained and founded terrorist groups took in insurgency in Kashmir to new heights. Cross-border terrorism against India peaked with Kargil incursion in 1999. Two years later relation between the two South Asian states reached boiling point. Afghanistan remained in a civil war situation despite Taliban control over most of the country. India does not have direct land access to Central Asia and has to use sea route to Iran and then enter Central Asian markets though rail and road. Its diplomatic and financial efforts were more focused on strengthening the anti-Taliban forces in order to deny Pakistan any strategic advantage in this region (Patnaik, 2003).

Strategic depth is a term in military literature that broadly refers to the distances between the front lines or battle sectors and the combatants' industrial core areas, capital cities, heartlands, and other key centers of population or military production. The key principles any military commander must consider when dealing with strategic depth are how vulnerable these assets are to a quick, pre-emptive attack or to a methodical offensive and whether a country can withdraw into its own territory, absorb an initial thrust, and allow the subsequent offensive to culminate short of its goal and far from its source of power. In other words, "Strategic Depth" refers to a space (region or country) that proves safety to a country or its army and command structure. Such depth is to be required against an opponent and underlines the need for a territorial base that can be an advantage in a conflict with the enemy. In the context of Pakistan, search for depth, according to Indian strategic expert Raghvan, was to be a 'hedge against of India' (Patnaik, 2003).

The gaining of 'Strategic Depth' in Afghanistan has been a major objective of Pakistan's policy. Islamabad's anxieties about its northern neighbour commenced almost immediately after Independence. The combination of Pashtun ambitions in Pakistan, the uncertain status of the Durand Line, memories of long military campaigns in the North West Frontier Agency and the fierce independence of Afghanistan under King Zahir Shah had made Pakistan anxious. A strong military sense of geo-politics among its largely military rulers also led to the need to gain control over Afghanistan (The Hindu, 8 July, 2001). The notion

of strategic depth emerged even stronger after the socialist revolution in Afghanistan and became an obsession after the Soviet intervention in the country. In the early years of its history, Field Marshal Ayub Khan was credited for having said that the defence of East Pakistan was best obtained in the west. This was attempted to be done by forcing India to concentrate its military deployment against West Pakistan. In later decades, the militancy in Punjab was seen as providing depth to Pakistan from an Indian military offensive through the State. This also applies to forcing a large Indian military presence in Jammu & Kashmir. On the Siachen dispute, arguments were advanced in Pakistan that the Indian occupation of the Saltoro mountain range was part of a Soviet- Indian pincer against Pakistan (Raghavan, 2001).

In Pakistan, the idea of strategic depth was perceived in 1980s by the NDU professor General Mirza Aslam Beg (later Chief of Army Staff working under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1980s). Since then, the Pakistan military establishment has been repeatedly accused of forming a policy that seeks to control Afghanistan, a policy often referred to by the media as 'strategic depth'. This is given as the reason why Pakistan has supported certain factions of the Taliban in Afghanistan. In the years 2014-2015, with Pakistan's domestic operation against militants in full swing, Pakistani military leaders said that they adhered to no such policy (Brown, 2015). According to Richard Olson, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, "Pakistan military's doctrine of 'strategic depth' is a concept in which Pakistan uses Afghanistan as an instrument of strategic security in ongoing tensions with India by attempting to control Afghanistan as a pawn for its own political purposes" (Gul, 2015).

It has been speculated that the Pakistan military's 'strategic depth' policy is both military and non-military in nature. The military version would state that the Pakistan military wishes to use Afghan territory as a "strategic rallying point" where they can, in the event of a successful Indian attack, retreat to and re-group for a counter-attack. The non-military version would be based on the idea that Pakistan can improve relations with other Islamic countries and former Soviet states such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, developing improved economic and cultural ties with them and thus making them into strong allies against India (Aziz, 2010).

The explanation for Pakistan's dilemmas on Afghanistan is to be found in the military leadership's convictions. Strategic depth is a relational concept. Such depth is to be sought as protection against an adversary. Pakistan's search for strategic depth was to be a hedge against India. Neither Afghanistan nor the Central Asian states, nor for that matter Iran, posed a threat to Pakistan. The notion of strategic depth for Pakistan, combined in it a territorial base for terrorism and a proxy war against India, with the alibi of Pakistan not being directly involved. The failure of its policy lay in its inability to see the link between its needs of terrorism against India, and the price to be paid for its strategic depth spawning global terrorism (The Hindu, May, 2003).

According to Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan establishment played an important role in recruiting radical Islamic elements to further its goal of attaining strategic depth. During Benazir Bhutto's leadership in 1993, for the first time the largest group in Pakistan, Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) got formally integrated with state institutions through close link to the army, the Inter -Services Intelligence Agency and the Interior ministry. The JUI was not only handed over the training camps in Afghanistan, its many breakaway factions became the main recruiters of Pakistani and other nationals to fight for the Taliban. Between 1994-99, an estimated 80,000-1,00,000 Pakistanis trained and fought in Afghanistan. The joint venture between the Taliban and JUI, funded by Saudi Wahhabis and supported by Pakistan's ISI, became an ever expanding enterprise, seeking new markets in Central Asia and beyond" he added (Patnaik, 2003).

Pakistan's search for depth in Afghanistan had its ramifications in Central Asia. The continuation of Taliban in power held the key to Pakistan's objective of projecting itself as a major influence in energy rich Central Asia. When most of Central Asia failed to be influenced by the radical ferment sweeping Afghanistan, militants from across the border became active to destabilize the region.

The result of Pakistan's Afghan policy was increasing Islamisation that undermined the movement for "self-determination" in Kashmir and so also Pakistan's bid to invoke international mediation. The longer the jihad in Kashmir goes, less could be the chance to settle the dispute peacefully, he had warned. Running after what has so far proved to be a "mirage" only result in Pakistan becoming the "Strategic Depth" of the Islamic

fundamentalists (Rashid, 2000:91). According to critiques of this policy, like Eqbal Ahmed and Ahmed Rashid, to expect that a devastated, isolated and poor country like Afghanistan would provide depth to Pakistan was mistaken thinking, fought with dangerous consequences for Pakistan itself. Pakistan was a beneficiary of “true strategic depth” during the 1965 war, when Iran allowed Pakistan’s warplanes and ships to use its ports and air bases. Pakistan’s support to Taliban alienated even the traditional ally like Iran. Central Asians were extraditing Pakistanis, accusing them of promoting radical Islam and unrest. One could add that India gained out of the failed strategy by endearing itself to former Pakistan allies in the Afghan Mujaheddin, who came to share power in Kabul after Taliban’s ouster. The post-Taliban governments in Afghanistan have been quite friendly with India (Patnaik, 2003).

India’s Role for Stability and Reconstruction in Afghanistan

According to Patnaik, “The defeat and removal of the Taliban has put on hold Pakistan’s hopes of achieving some strategic advantage over India. The positive development has been the weakening of the destabilising forces that were unleashed since the Taliban takeover, threatening countries such as India, China, Russia and the Central Asian countries. The informal alliance of India and Central Asian countries that had developed in the course of sustaining the United Front (Northern Alliance) contributed substantially to the campaign against international terrorism. Still, an unstable situation in Afghanistan, the need for continued cooperation between India and Central Asia is very critical. Even after the ouster of the Taliban from Afghanistan, India neither feels totally secure or comfortable about the reports of continuing attempts to destabilise Afghanistan, despite US presence in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Indian policy makers believe that Pakistan still continues with its policy of what India’s former secretary described as ‘sustainable terrorism’ and the international community has been unable to address India’s concerns. To insure its own security, India would need to focus on greater involvement in the Central Asian region” (Patnaik, 2005).

India’s national interests lie in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Therefore, India should support all efforts towards improving the security situation and providing good governance. It is only through sustained reconstruction and concerted socio-economic

development that future stability can be assured. India will continue to provide aid and assistance to the government and the people of Afghanistan as it has been consistently doing over the past two decades or so. India seeks a peaceful and stable Afghanistan with a broad-based government that is genuinely independent in formulating its foreign and national security policies, as well as in governing the country in consonance with Afghan customs and traditions. The imposition of the Western model of democracy will not be appropriate as it will not work in Afghanistan's socio-political milieu. India would like to see the elimination of terrorism from Afghanistan and the destruction of all sanctuaries of the Taliban and the Al Qaeda. India supports the integration and strengthening of military and police forces at the national level, rather than their domination by one or more ethnic communities. India would like to encourage Afghanistan's regional neighbours and the international community to further enhance their efforts towards reconstruction and economic development (Kanwal, 2013).

Both Central Asian states and India have a big stake in safeguarding economic reconstruction, inter-ethnic harmony, and stability in Afghanistan. As a sign of significance that India attributes to Afghanistan, New Delhi had converted to grant \$100 million loan it had earlier extended to Karzai government. As Patnaik says, "Ultimately, the stability of the post-Taliban set-up in Afghanistan can improve the security scenario in Central Asia as well as India. India has reportedly renegotiated the use of Farkhor in Tajikistan as a base for assistance to Afghanistan. Earlier it had built a military hospital and an airstrip there to help the Northern Alliance. The hospital was shifted to Kabul after the fall of Taliban. India signed a bilateral agreement during Indian defence minister's visit to Dushanbe in April 2002". According to the agreement, "India will train Tajik defence personnel, service and retrofit Soviet and Russian military equipment and teach English to army and airforce personnel. There are suggestions that the base in Farkhor was a sign of India joining the 'new game' of scramble for Central Asia's oil and gas reserves and India's intention to have a ring of base around Pakistan". However, as Patnaik points out, it is difficult to imagine that India has the financial ability and military strength to think in terms of joining the 'great game' (Patnaik, 2005).

To confront the geographical reality, India has made moves to create infrastructure in Afghanistan which can effectively be utilised as a 'bridge' to Central Asia. India has been a firm supporter of the American 'New Silk Road Initiative', viewing it as a “building block” of India's vision for Afghanistan as a hub linking Central and South Asia through pipelines, trade and transit routes for the common good of the people of our region and the world. This, India believes, could encourage the neighbouring countries to view Afghanistan as an avenue for cooperation and not rivalry (The Economic Times, 7 June, 2012). India has in fact invested substantially in an attempt to realise the transit potential of Afghanistan. India has funded the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, which connects Zaranj on the Iranian border in western Afghanistan to Delaram, which is connected to Afghanistan's main highway linking Kandahar and Herat. In May 2013, India pledged \$100 million towards the development of the Chabahar Port in Iran and has also announced its plan to construct a rail link from the Hajigak iron-ore mines in central Afghanistan to Zahedan, which would then be linked to Chabahar. The development of a trans-Afghan transport corridor has been emphasised as a potential means to overcome the lack of connectivity during high-level exchanges that India has had with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Bhatnagar, 2014).

India and Multilateral Security Cooperation: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is a Eurasian political, economic, and security organisation, the creation of which was announced on 15 June 2001 in Shanghai, China, by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Charter, formally establishing the organisation, was signed in June 2002 and entered into force on 19 September 2003. The original five members, with the exclusion of Uzbekistan, were previously members of the Shanghai Five group, founded on 26 April 1996. Since then, the organisation has expanded its membership to eight states when India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members on 9 June 2017 at a summit in Astana, Kazakhstan (Sata, 2019).

Basically, The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has emerged as an influential regional organisation in the Eurasian space. Established in 2001, the SCO has made considerable progress in terms of coordinating regional efforts to address security

challenges in the region. In the arena of regional economic cooperation the achievements may not have been very impressive. There is considerable desire and attempt on the part of member-states towards greater economic engagement. Though India acquired the SCO observer status in 2005, since then it constructively participated in all SCO summit meetings thus showing its strong willingness to be meaningfully associated with this regional grouping. Russia and Central Asian states were very supportive of India's entry into the SCO as a full member for a long time (Roy 2014:53).

The SCO has certainly emerged as the most important regional grouping in the Eurasian region but multiple conflicting interests intersect at the SCO forum, ranging from regional and global issues to combating terrorism. Central Asia has become a contested region among major powers. The countries of Central Asia initially welcomed the external players, as they badly needed international political and economic contacts. They have of course largely remained within the Russian regional setting and have also undertaken several initiatives of their own for regional integration albeit without much success. Broadly, the regional political elites have tried to maintain a multi-vector foreign policy as a way to balance the interests of major players (Baruah, 2002).

Traditionally, India never featured in the Eurasian geopolitical equilibrium, even though the regional states perceived India's potential to be a countervailing factor for the region. This articulation found pronouncement both within and outside governments of regional states. However, Central Asian states started to view India as a less engaged power, conspicuously lacking a framework or not being able to find itself a place in any of the concentric rings that outside actors had embossed on the region. Yet, from India's perspective, Central Asia formed a critical and paramount strategic component in its thinking both from the Afghanistan-Pakistan angle and from the point of view of China's growing influence (Arunova 2011:21-30).

The fact is that the SCO was originally created to resolve the volatile border issues that China had with the former Soviet republics. However, China never tried to attract India under the SCO format for the simple reason that Beijing and New Delhi had built their bilateral mechanisms to deal with boundary and trade issues. From India's point of view too, joining the China-led outfit would have made no sense if the Sino-Pak strategic nexus

was not going to be altered. Instead, joining the SCO would have provided Pakistan with yet another regional forum for mobilising support for Kashmir with the tacit support of China (Krishan, 2012).

There were various factors for India's lack of interest to join the SCO initially. In the absence of a direct land border with Central Asia, India's ability also to assert in the SCO would have been rather limited. The forum had been used to voice rhetoric against the West, something which New Delhi would have preferred to avoid. Most importantly, "the SCO is a group comprising of communists, autocrats and semi-democrats, who have little respect for human rights. In some cases, lack of respect for ethnic groups and religions would have been at odds with India's basic principles. Among other things, India certainly couldn't have willingly sacrificed its respect for Uyghur nationalism by endorsing China's suppression of minority Uyghurs under the pretext of SCO collaboration" (MEA, India, 2013). However, India's position regarding the SCO changed drastically and it joined the organisation subsequently.

India's Position and Interests

India came to recognize the SCO as one of the remarkable regional forums in the Eurasian space in the post-Cold War era. The high-profile SCO summits drew huge global media attention and its declarations have had profound diplomatic impact for the international balance of power. Sceptics at home though criticised India joining a Chinese-led body as a junior member, New Delhi expressed its intention to be a part of the SCO process since 2005 at the Astana Summit (Stobdan, 2014). Since then India has been enthusiastically participating in all SCO activities as an observer, for it sincerely believed that stakes are high for India in the Eurasian security and economic spheres. Clearly, India's concerns are essentially security-driven, fearing that SCO could possibly be used as a smokescreen by inimical forces including Pakistan to drum up support for anti-India activities. Thus, staying outside cannot be to India's advantage (Stobdan, 2018).

There have been several issues relating to its full membership into SCO. The delay in granting full membership to India and the other observers has been caused by several factors including the lack of criteria, procedures and timeline. The grouping had always

entertained some reservations about the entry of South Asian countries. China in particular has retained its ability to prevent something that it does not approve of either directly or through others. In addition, UN sanctions prevented the SCO from admitting Iran as a member (Kundu, 2009).

It has been very apparent that China being SCO's de facto leader had strongly impacted India's entry. Beijing's argument had been that India and China have several other mechanisms for cooperation. Thus, India need not be a part of SCO. China treated the forum as its domain to pursue its own goals. Despite Russia pushing India's case and China pressing for Pakistan's entry, the SCO rather remained reticent fearing it would get mired into a South Asian conflict. Some cited SAARC's failure as an excuse. Others saw India's proclivity as being towards the East and West rather than Eurasia (The Hindu, 5 April, 2015).

Many commentators still are of the view that a high profile country like India needs to chart its own regional economic course and need not seek membership into an organisation where it will have a lesser political voice and status. Notwithstanding the above points, India took a broader view and decided to seriously engage with the Eurasian region under the SCO auspices particularly with the motive of enhancing common political stability and economic prosperity for the whole region. Besides, India has seen direct potential gains from being a full member of the SCO.

India's Risk factors

First, India saw its entry as essential for protecting its own interests in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the withdrawal of US forces. Although, both SCO and CSTO are unlikely to play more than a "defensive" role, India could provide a value addition in terms of generating a positive political environment for Afghan peace. Even though a power vacuum in Afghanistan is unlikely, the possibility of negative forces inimical to India pursuing their interests through the SCO mechanism remains a worry.

Second, Russia and Pakistan have been increasingly building bridges, the contours of which are not clear yet. This will affect India's interests in Central Asia. Ironically, Pakistan has quite successfully inserted itself into this new alignment. Even Russia's

confidence in Pakistan seems to have increased though it may have an opportunistic aspect. Clearly, the acceptance of Pakistan in Eurasia would grow henceforth. Pakistan has its geographical advantage unless Afghanistan continues to remain a thorn. And, if Pakistan gains more political acceptance in Eurasia, it may use the forum as a smokescreen to cover its support for anti-India activities.

Third, to an extent the SCO has been successful in containing the spread of extremism and terrorism in Central Asia, primarily because of China's constant interests and engagement with these states. The region may become the next hotbed of sectarian conflict. It is potentially the next emerging Muslim region. The existing SCO states constitute a Muslim population of almost 100 million of Sunni/ Salafi variant with affiliation to Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Importantly, Chechnya, the Ferghana Valley and Xinjiang are likely to become the arc of future instability. The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of SCO could play a vital role in observing trends in radical political Islam spreading in the Ferghana Valley and across the Amu Darya into Afghanistan and Pakistan. India therefore needs to understand the emerging trends in the region and this can only be achieved by being in the SCO. India could gain from engagement with the RATS through information on counter-terrorism efforts, regional and international security etc. It seems RATS assists its members, sharing information during conference preparations, summit meetings, VIP visits, public meetings, sports events, etc.(Stobdan, 2018).

Fourth, the SCO membership could give India a new way to build promising bridges with Central Asia, while maintaining its emphasis on reaching out to this region through direct bilateral channels. Fifth, stakes are also high for securing energy and connectivity interests – to invest in oilfields also with an eye to get its way on the pipeline route. The SCO could especially give India more leeway in pursuing its energy interests in multiple fields. It could pave the way for energy projects, including the TAPI which may finally see the light of day. India has invested hugely in developing the Chabahar Port that could provide it access to Central Asian countries. With India becoming a member along with Pakistan, the connectivity and energy corridor projects such as CASA, TAPI, IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline and other projects might finally see the light at the end.

Sixth, participation in other non-conventional security areas such as food security measures, drug-trafficking control, information and cyber security, etc. could be advantageous for India. Finally, India's participation in the SCO's military and counterterror exercises could prove beneficial for Indian armed forces to understand and interact with other militaries, thereby instilling greater confidence at the regional level. Clearly, joining the SCO could also help India get out of the current tight geopolitical spot – wedged between a wall of Pakistani hostility and fear of cooperating with China.

India's attempt at entering SCO as a full member remained elusive for a long time. Some member states such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were firmly supporting India's inclusion into the SCO, but China and others had been pushing for a more "process-bound" entry of new members. But the Dushanbe Summit in 2014 cleared the legal procedural hurdles for admitting new members.

Expectations however, were aroused when the Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2014 had considered that improving India-China relations would be his "historic mission". Xi has articulated China's new "Asian security concept" at the CICA Summit and believed that China would "pro-actively" seek to build a regional framework. Under Xi leadership India figured high in China's calculus (Dong, 2015:59-84).

China's push came in the face of its increased tensions with Vietnam and with US allies, the Philippines and Japan, over its more assertive claims to maritime territory. Another reason has been China's restive Xinjiang province that has been getting more and more critical in recent years. Xi Jinping tried to seek broader regional cooperation to deal with the spread of terrorism. Besides, cooperation with India in Central Asia was viewed as essential from Beijing's point of view. Beijing had also sought to build fresh bridges to prevent India's new leadership teaming up with the US "Asia Pivot" strategy (Economic Times, April, 2018).

From the SCO's point of view, the invitation by Prime Minister Modi to Pakistan's Prime Minister to the swearing-in ceremony of his new government in 2014 had a positive impact for removing the negative factor in Indo-Pak relations that had thus far obstructed the expansion plan.

Similarly, Russia's attempt at rebalancing its strategic interests in Asia was clear in the face of its standoff with the US and the EU on the Ukraine crisis. Strengthening of the CSTO and enlarging the SCO was emphasised at the 2014 Moscow Conference on International Security (Russian Defence Ministry, May 23-24, 2014).

However, unlike Pakistan and Iran, India has waited for the SCO to complete its formal legal procedures for new membership. A formal application was placed in 2014 during the Dushanbe Summit by then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj when all legal hurdles were removed – short of ratifying lengthy 28 page draft documents of the group. India hoped to become a member of SCO at its Ufa Summit on July 9-10, 2015. But a statement came from Moscow prior to the Ufa Summit that accession of India and Pakistan to the SCO was still being examined. It was clear there was a new hitch (Stobdan, 2015). Prime Minister Modi attended the Ufa Summit of the six-nation SCO, after the BRICS Summit. From India's perspective, SCO membership would open a new opportunity to reconnect with Eurasia after a century of disruption. Prime Minister Modi said at the Ufa summit that membership of SCO would be “a natural extension of India's ties with member countries” (Stobdan, 2016). SCO could offer India with some unique opportunities to get constructively engaged with Eurasia to address shared security concerns, especially for combating terrorism and containing threats posed by ISIS and the Taliban.

Earlier, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had attended the BRICS and SCO summits in Yekaterinburg in 2009, albeit as an observer. This time, unless India has been assured of a full membership, Prime Minister would not have agreed to stay back after the BRICS Summit held in July 2014. Earlier, China had welcomed India into the SCO during Prime Minister Modi's Beijing visit. The attempts to join the SCO in 2016 once again proved elusive. The Tashkent Summit held June 23-24 of that year had finally given a go ahead for initiating the process of India's accession to the SCO. This was done after India agreed to sign the base document called the ‘Memorandum of Obligations’ at the Tashkent Summit. With this, the case of India's membership request was sent to the respective parliaments of each member state for ratification (Economic Times, June, 2018).

Having signed the ‘Memorandum of Obligations’, India had to sign over 30 mandatory conventions and draft documents of the SCO over a period of time. No details are available

as to what those additional documents actually contain. But obviously, they probably constitute obligations already undertaken so far by the member states (Russia, China and four Central Asian states) under the SCO framework. It seems those terms of reference cannot be renegotiated – which means India had to study carefully what those obligations mean, for the implications they could entail for its interests (Roy, 2014: 55).

The caveat here was possibly about the clause ‘good neighbourhood’ behaviour that India and Pakistan must agree to undertake before they expect full membership into the SCO. In other words, the onus was on India and Pakistan to adhere to the SCO’s expectations. It appears that SCO was demanding equivalent of a ‘peace treaty’ between the neighbouring countries that would eventually culminate in India (and Pakistan) acceding to the SCO (The Hindu, June, 2018).

This indicated that India’s entry into the SCO was not a done deal. Rather, the matter had been postponed and it was still going to be a long-drawn process with no concrete timeframe for its full entry. According to Rashid Alimov, SCO’s Secretary General, the process could take anywhere between six months to a year. The Russian officials on June 22 revealed that the forthcoming Summit will discuss “possible accession” of India (and Pakistan) during 2017, when SCO was also planning to admit Iran as a full member. Therefore, at Tashkent it was just a step closer to membership. As of 2016 the status was still of an “Acceding Member” and not a full member (The Wire, June 23, 2016).

Clearly, the delay or rather lengthier process of India’s entry into SCO seemed linked to shifting global geopolitics of growing big power rivalries from Eurasia to the ‘Indo-Pacific’. The China-led Eurasian grouping, which is intended both as a counterweight to the US-led global order and a key link in Beijing’s new plans for connectivity, appeared to be unsure of India’s full commitment to the SCO’s *raison d’être* and Charter. The insistence on paperwork appeared to be merely a pretext for China to keep the SCO as its exclusive domain, one in which the inclusion of India was not a priority or even a requirement. Though delaying India’s entry meant doing the same for Pakistan and Iran, Beijing has other windows of opportunity to deal with Islamabad and Tehran (saikia 2015:43-59).

The SCO cited a number of reasons to delay expansion. Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, suggested during the Ufa summit in 2015 that the inclusion of India and Pakistan into the group would change the very character of the SCO. In an interview to the Chinese news agency *Xinhua* in June 2016, President Putin was diplomatic. "The international environment is complicated and multifaceted, and issues are not resolved by the mere fact that countries with different approaches to and views on various international issues join the SCO creates conditions for those issues to be resolved" (Russia and India Report, 25 June, 2016).

India's SCO membership prospects were therefore closely linked to ongoing global rebalancing games and were not unrelated to the deepening of Indo-US military ties, New Delhi's position on the South China Sea and the country's bid to join the coveted NSG club. India's desire to join the Eurasian group comes at a time when New Delhi is more decidedly aligning itself with the US's strategic vision of pivoting to the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region – now no longer a euphemism for a China containment strategy (MEA, India, 2015).

In fact, Indo-US ties only deepened further since Prime Minister Modi attended the Ufa summit in 2015. Any ambiguity that may have existed so far in the Chinese mind stands removed after Modi's visit to Washington in June 2016. Given the range of military and technological cooperation agreements signed, India's bilateral ties with the US are bound to grow to unprecedented levels (Defence News, June, 2016).

The US decision to push for virtual 'ally' status for India and India's willingness to sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) may have slowed the pace of India's entry bid in the SCO; which meant China still wanted to wait and watch India's behaviour and its intentions about seeking membership in the Eurasian body. This also underscored China's negative approach to India's bid for membership in the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) in 2016 (MEA, India, 2016).

On its part, however, India has always argued that the country's growing ties with the US are not meant to target others. In fact, Pakistan's status as a 'major non-NATO ally' never came in the way of China-Pakistan military ties. Similarly, New Delhi's closer ties with

Washington ought not to prevent it from boosting ties with Russia and China, for which India already has multiple avenues for engagement, such as BRICS and the ongoing negotiation for a free-trade agreement with the EAEU (Zeb 2016:51-60).

The SCO has traditionally been welded on the Sino-Russian entente and if the Indo-US entente grows beyond the military sphere to committing themselves to promoting shared values and interests in the Asian region, this could contradict the SCO's aspiration of becoming a counterpoise to Western dominance. Having joined the SCO, India's role in the grouping is not going to be smooth due to different approaches pursued in other areas as well. Even in the case of combating international terrorism, India's position is going to be at odds with that of other SCO members. It could face several contradictory situations. China, for example, by its own assertion stands committed to fight against the "three evils" – terrorism, separatism and religious extremism – through the SCO. However, Beijing's double-speak on terrorism is not going to be liked by India (Youn 2010: 855-865).

China, from India's perspective, cannot be taken as a reliable partner on fighting terrorism. It has used the SCO to fight only those cases of terror that fit with its own definition of terrorism. On the one hand, China described Uyghur activism in Xinjiang as an act of terror and wanted others to support its fight against the East Turkestan Islamic Movement. But on the other hand, it refused to oppose terrorist groups that attack other countries. For example, Beijing has been using Pakistan and its instruments of terror to expand its own geopolitical interests (Sharma 2013:1-3).

In Central Asia, though China tended to avoid a direct face-off with Russia, it adhered to other means including use of Islamic militancy to coerce individual Central Asian governments to come to terms with Beijing, according to some scholars. It was quite clear, suggests Swanstrom, that the Chinese in connivance with Pakistan and the Taliban-fomented Islamic insurgencies, created hotspots such as Batken in 1999 and 2000, which compelled Kyrgyzstan to seek assistance from China. Consequently, China responded through both military and economic aid while inducing the former to resolve difficult border problems on China's terms. The Kyrgyz government faced wide public criticism for signing a secret agreement, surrendering some large territory to China in 1999.

Kyrgyzstan received substantial military aid, as well as deepened its military contacts with China since 2000 (Swanstrom, 2006).

Similarly, Uzbekistan's compulsion to join the China-led SCO came against the background of increasing threats posed by fundamentalist groups like the IMU led by Juma Namangani and Tohir Yuldash. The IMU was supported by the Taliban and in turn by China's ally Pakistan. China, under no circumstances, is expected to use military force against countries where terrorists are bred. Nor, is the China-Pakistan nexus going to change by India joining the SCO. Instead, argues Roy, the SCO will become another forum for Pakistan to mislead the Central Asians on Kashmir (Roy 2012: 645-650).

In the absence of a direct land border with Central Asia, India's ability to assert in the SCO will be rather limited. The forum has often been used to voice rhetoric against the West which would not be liked by India. The SCO as a group – comprising communists, autocrats and semi-democrats – has little respect for human rights, ethnic groups and religions. India certainly cannot afford to confuse the Turkic nationalism such as within the Uyghur issue with that of Islamic fundamentalism. In fact, such double-speak on terrorism may have lately prompted India to up the ante by allowing a group of Uyghur political activists to participate in a gathering in India. India's attempt at needling China came in the wake of China's move to block India's bid to get Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar and Lashkar-e-Taiba commander Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi banned by the UN (Panda, 2013).

The issue surrounding the granting of a visa to Uyghur leader Dolkun Isa in April 2016 was a clear message to Beijing that India too can play around with the definition of terrorism. Therefore, under this conflicting interest on terror, any convergence at SCO could prove problematic. Similarly, China will expect India to be in consonance with the SCO's position on the South China Sea dispute, no matter how difficult that may be. Not doing so would surely be dubbed as an unconstructive role on India's part (The Times of India, June, 2016).

From India's perspective, as the Indian officials explained, that the issue of expansion of the SCO is part of a long-drawn multilateral discussion and it was linked to India's

approach of seeking a “fairly flexible multilateralism” in its “extended neighbourhood.” They believe that signing of the Memorandum of Obligations would lead to a process of more intense engagement with the SCO members on several fronts like anti-terrorism, transport, and culture (MEA, India, 17 June, 2017).

Therefore, the spotlight in Tashkent in 2016 was more about Prime Minister Modi’s bilateral meetings with President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin and Presidents of the other four Central Asian states. Of course, the spotlight was more on Prime Minister Modi seeking China’s support for India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which ultimately remained an elusive effort after Beijing blocked India’s entry into the body. The Prime Minister however said that India looked forward to a fruitful engagement in the SCO. India’s entry into SCO as a full member he said would provide an opportunity to have extended cooperation with member countries in areas of defence, security and counter-terrorism. He said India attached great importance to ties with Central Asia and always sought to expand economic and people-to-people ties with the region (Indian Express, June 24, 2016).

But, does SCO membership actually hold any direct potential gains for India? As explained earlier, the SCO has been about India increasing its political, economic and security stakes in Central Asia. This is why New Delhi keenly pursued formal entry despite critics at home challenging the wisdom of joining a China-led body as a member with a lesser political voice. Entry to the SCO, it was expected, would create new opportunities for India to reconnect with Eurasia after a century of disruption. And it shares security concerns with the region, especially in relation to combating terrorism and containing threats posed by the Islamic State (IS) and the Taliban (The Wire, June 9, 2018).

India could certainly benefit by tapping into the SCO’s existing regional anti-terrorist structure. SCO membership will also provide India an avenue to secure its energy. Proposed once by Iran, the SCO has been debating about forming an “energy club”. But how the SCO will enable the fructification of Indian energy and connectivity projects, including TAPI, is an obvious question. For India, dealing with tricky authoritarian leaders plus the challenge of getting the energy supplies to India has been insurmountable. The issue has never been about the source of energy but about transporting it (Stobdan, 2018).

On the connectivity front, China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have certainly put India in a quandary. Rhetoric aside, a set of projects envisaged under OBOR/CPEC could transform the region north of India into a new economic hub and a zone of joint projects, which would definitely have an impact on India. Russia and Central Asian states have reconciled their own transport connectivity plans with that of OBOR to transform the region into a major hub of the transcontinental transportation network. Afghanistan too supports the CPEC. By joining the SCO, India can think more sharply on how to respond to OBOR and find ways to join both the Russian and Chinese-built transport networks. In fact, India should be consulting Iran, Russia and the Caucasus states to coordinate on the various connectivity projects (Economic Times, 15 July, 2018).

By committing investment to develop the Chabahar Port, India has indicated its seriousness to boost regional connectivity. In fact, the Chabahar announcement and the inauguration of the Salma Dam in Afghanistan also signalled India's strong commitment to the regional integration process. Hopefully, the Chabahar Port will not only provide India access to Central Asian, Caspian, Iranian and Western Siberian gas fields, but will also pave the way for India to tap the vast deposits of high-value rare earth minerals in Central Asia and Afghanistan (MEA, India, may 23, 2018).

While India had expressed its desire to cooperate with the Moscow-led EAEU in 2015, it did not quite approve of Beijing's OBOR idea. Instead, it has expressed its resentment towards China's plans for the US\$ 46 billion economic corridor through Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Here lay the potential problem. Beijing had turned down India's objection in this regard, saying it is a "livelihood project". The differences it seems will only enlarge and for India, navigating the evolving contradictions in SCO may remain less than a smooth one. To exploit the opportunities under the SCO process, India could not have taken a position other than a cooperative one. India therefore joined the SCO in 2017 with a fresh mind and without any ambiguity (India Today, April, 2017).

So far, Prime Minister Modi has not only displayed pragmatism but also clarity, for India realises that any attempt at matching the Russian or Chinese leverages in Eurasia would be unrealistic. India is approaching the SCO for building greater convergence with China and

Russia in Eurasia. Geostrategic relevance apart, India will have to engage with SCO pragmatically. India's foreign policy obviously is directed at promoting trends, which lend to broader economic integration through multilateral institutions of cooperation. In this sense, membership in SCO would complement India's wider objective of promoting an Asian configuration (The Hindu, January, 2017).

Irrespective of how Indo-US relations will shape, understanding with Moscow and Beijing assumes importance for India to realize its broader geopolitical aspirations, including its quest to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. India could use the SCO as a useful means to reboot India's relationship with Russia, which has been losing its vibrancy. India is also unable to help Russia overcome its economic isolation compared to China. As India's engagement with US grows, any prospect of resentment must be avoided. Russia is very upset and unable to digest others overtaking it as a weapons supplier to India. Many in Moscow are complaining, seeking retribution by ending the arms blockade to Pakistan (Dutta, 2017:493-501).

Moscow's pursuit of a divergent foreign policy is evident. Russia has not only pivoted itself towards China but also started to cozy up with Pakistan even though the interactions may be limited at present and this could be linked to Moscow's current isolation over the Ukraine standoff. President Putin has clarified that its proposed arms supply to Pakistan will not impede ties with India. Russia considers Pakistan as an important determinant in Afghanistan and believes that engagement with Pakistan will have a positive influence in the Af-Pak region that would serve India's interests too. As stated, Moscow may be contemplating playing a role in bringing about a serious thaw between the two South Asian states in future under the SCO auspices (Times of India, December 31, 2014).

India, Russia and China are working together in a number of multilateral initiatives such as BRICS and now SCO. India joining the China-led AIIB is another example and the bilateral economic relationship has been growing in the past decade. India and Russia are committed to strengthen the strategic partnership agreements. India intends to sign a free trade agreement with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to boost trade and economic ties with the region that had a GDP of \$2.2 trillion in 2015. This is contrast to India's protracted standoffs with both China and Pakistan, which remain stalemated.

India could also use the atmosphere for cooperation in SCO to turn around India's relationship with China in a big way. Clearly, in the changed environment, China is laying greater emphasis on building a regional framework with India featuring high in it. Beijing sees higher convergence of interests with India on tackling terrorism and cooperating at least in Afghanistan. Both countries also see the benefit of cooperating in energy and mining sectors. In fact, the idea of an India China oil consortium in Central Asia has been already underway (The Hindu, June, 2016).

The SCO grouping intends to promote the spirit of multi-polarity. Given the Chinese financial muscle, disrupting China's expanded energy plans would be difficult. The European Union and Russia have realised this. India should utilise it to mitigate some of its core concerns as well as limit China's rising regional outreach while pursuing a nuanced diplomatic approach. The rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in India's close vicinity is equally a source of serious concern. China's concern in Xinjiang underscores Beijing's fear about the growing threat from extremism including from ISIS. Cooperation with China and Russia would be essential for assuaging this. However, according to Stobdan, India needs to be more watchful about duplicitous moves that Pakistan and China could play in the SCO. Any possibility of the US using Pakistan as its arbitrator of future change in the region should also be checked (Stobdan, 2015).

However, the SCO is likely remain a fragile regional grouping in the foreseeable future. Russia and China are important, but the positions of the Central Asian states fluctuate regularly in line with their interests, even opting for bilateralism with the US. They ably play the external powers off one against the other to extract economic benefits and reinforce political control at home. India needs to build its own leverages with these countries to be an effective member of the SCO. But more importantly, India needs more clarity on SCO so as to avoid the risk of becoming a focal point of criticism by Central Asian States, like it happens in SAARC, of course for different reasons. So long as India was not a full member, expectations from it were less. But once India is in, the countries of the region are going to compare India with China (Panda, 2016).

India's imperatives are the looming security concerns such as the spread of terrorism, the Afghan fallout and the growing footprint of the ISIS in Central Asia. It is fearful that the

SCO could possibly become a forum for inimical forces to drum up anti-India voices. Thus, staying outside the group cannot be to India's advantage. At the same time, India could benefit from SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) and learn from its counter-terror exercises. Being part of the SCO means that opportunities would also be open for India to cooperate in soft-political areas of the region (Hindustan Times, March, 2017).

Ironically, Pakistan seemed already geared up to fully operate in SCO coordination efforts. Already, Russia's confidence in Pakistan seems to have increased after the Inter-Services Intelligence selectively eliminated or handed over Chechen or Central Asian terrorists fomenting trouble in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Consequently, the acceptance of Pakistan in Eurasia as a partner has already advanced.

On countering terrorism, the SCO's key anchor, China, has been siding with Pakistan for protecting terrorists who have targeted India. It needs to be underscored that Russians and Central Asian states often exaggerate terror threats as a ploy to tighten domestic control as well to gain external help and legitimacy. In this regard, the threat from ISIS is a new tool to garner global support. The West has raised eyebrows over crackdowns and the curbing of rights of even children in the name of countering the threat from ISIS. However, India does not take lightly the Central Asian concerns about radicalisation and is ready to cooperate with them (Baruah, 2014).

On Afghanistan, the Central Asian countries have sufficient mechanisms in place under the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) to counter the threats along the Afghanistan-CIS border. Any plan to create a Northern-Alliance-type group for countering the Taliban may not materialise if in future Taliban again gains control of Afghanistan after the US withdrawal (Chandra, 2012). SCO might help India get out of this tight spot since Pakistan has to respect the security concerns of not just India but other powers in the group.

Finally, Indian participation in the Eurasian Great Game is a distant possibility, since it lacks the diplomatic heft or capability to play that Game. However, India cannot afford to be left behind in the strategic Eurasian region where only the SCO has emerged as an important geopolitical pole. Therefore, logic demanded that it was better to be in it rather than out of it.

But, importantly, India's confusion ended after Prime Minister Modi in June 2017 at the Astana Summit reposed full faith in the Grouping and took the membership in a constructive spirit. The Prime Minister spoke about deepening India's association with the SCO as he also fine-tuned India's aspirations in the SCO, especially benefits in economics, connectivity and counter-terrorism cooperation, emphasizing on certain redlines – "respect territorial integrity, unite against terror" (MEA, India, 9 June, 2017).

Therefore, the SCO could certainly become a new frontier for India. As for the potential benefits for India, the practical implications of the SCO are unlikely to be dramatic in the near term but in the longer run the group could create an environment for regional integration that would benefit India.

SCO and Security Challenges

Security issues in Eurasia and means to address these challenges have been the focus of all the SCO summit meetings. The threat of terrorism, drugs, instability in Afghanistan, ethnic conflicts in the region, money laundering and social problems are identified as the major security challenges in the SCO region. The terrorist organisations based in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Chechnya are of major concern to all the SCO member-states. An over-active Taliban because of its links with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) poses a serious challenge to the entire region. The ideology of extremism is growing and has destabilised the Osh region in Kyrgyzstan and is spreading in Tajikistan and Xingjiang in China. The member-states are of the view that terrorism still remains the serious menace in the region and becoming more international in nature (Roy 2014:67).

The approach of the SCO member-states has been that given the size and nature of these challenges multilateral cooperation is the only way to address these threats. It has been argued that an integrated approach is required to deal with these challenges. Speaking during the international conference on SCO in February 2011, "the Secretary General of the SCO highlighted the point that there cannot be any military solution to the Afghan problem. In this context, importance of the United Nation's role was emphasized by the Secretary General. Within the SCO framework, the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure is an

important body which has been at work since 2005” (SCO Conference, Almaty, February 22-23, 2011).

The Astana Summit in 2011 approved of the counter-narcotics strategy and action plan of the SCO member-states for 2011-2016 aimed at strengthening pragmatic interaction and countering the negative impacts of the narcotic threat in the SCO region. Given the changing role of the SCO in dealing with the security challenges in the region it is important to note that in spite of a large consensus among all the member-states to address these serious challenges collectively, there has been a problem of implementation of the SCO agenda because of differences in opinion and varied interests of the member-states (SCO Summit, Astana, 11 June, 2015).

Articulating views on the role and the place of the SCO in guaranteeing regional security, the head of the Kyrgyzstan National Security State Committee stated at Almaty Conference in 2011 that terrorist activities were increasing in Kyrgyzstan, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, therefore SCO needs to pay more attention towards these problems. It was pointed out that it would not be possible to deal with the problems of terrorism unless the root causes of the problem are addressed. It was emphasized that there is a need to build new models of security cooperation among small and big countries within the SCO mechanism to address the challenges of terrorism (SCO Conference, Almaty, February 22-23, 2011).

The Kazakh experts and officials have argued that the SCO needs to address the internal problems first before getting involved in other areas, as this would form the basis for individual countries to tackle threats outside its borders. The SCO does not have any mechanism to handle social, economic and developmental issues in the region. In fact, the SCO did not help Kyrgyzstan during its 2010-2011 crises. The need for greater cooperation among the member-states to address the non-traditional security concerns have been raised repeatedly. In this context it may be argued that the SCO has not given sufficient attention to environmental issues which are critical for the region. These threats demand greater attention and focus within the SCO (SCO Conference, Almaty, February 22-23, 2011).

The success of the SCO in dealing with drug trafficking has been acknowledged by all member-states. There is a general understanding that the SCO can be much more effective in controlling drug trafficking. Despite the fact that the SCO is still very young as an organisation and needs more time to develop and address multifarious challenges confronting the member-states, the member-states are of the view that in the light of US withdrawal from Afghanistan, SCO needs to play a greater role in Afghanistan (SCO Summit, 2012)

From the regional perspective on Afghanistan, an expert from the Centre of Strategic Studies, Tajikistan, has argued in 2012 for establishing a uniform position on Afghanistan especially on account of the impending withdrawal of the US-NATO forces. He was of the view that there was a need to involve Iran, Pakistan, Russia, China and Central Asian Republics to solve the Afghan quagmire. According to him, fresh dialogue with Taliban can prove to be counter-productive and in turn lead to a full-scale civil war. In the current context there is a need to initiate multilateral engagement and interaction within the SCO (Sattorov, SCO Summit, 2012)

India and the SCO's Role in Central Asian Regional Security

Established in 2001, the SCO has come a long way. Though it was set up in 1996, its two permanent institutions were created in 2004. These are the Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure. After 2005, the SCO came to acquire a new geopolitical role in Eurasia. The inclusion of India, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan as observer states and Sri Lanka, Belarus and Turkey as dialogue partners, clearly indicated its expanded engagement well beyond Central Asia into wider Southern and West Asian region. Importantly, during 2005-08, the grouping established its cooperation by signing the Memorandum of Mutual Understanding (MoU) with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEU). It also acquired an observer status in the UN General Assembly, and maintains regular contacts with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These local, regional and international engagements characterise the SCO's increasing significance as a regional organisation (Roy 2014:52).

The Indian viewpoint was articulated by its External Affairs Minister, S. M. Krishna, during the 2012 Summit meeting in Beijing, where he said: “India admires the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and values its contribution over the past decade, to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. As the SCO prepares for the next decade of its journey, we see a welcome process of introspection among members, on the challenges of the next decade and the role of the body in a fast-evolving world, strewn with multiple multilateral bodies, with intersecting agendas” (MEA, India, 2012).

From the regional perspective, since 2006 there has been greater acknowledgement of the SCO’s role in providing peace, security and stability in the region by the Central Asian regimes. In the current context, the SCO is viewed as a “Window of Opportunity” and as an organisation which brings two great powers – Russia and China – together and sets a situation for close cooperation in the areas of security and culture in the region (Djusupov, 2011). The Kazakh Prime Minister Serik Akmetov pointed out during “the SCO Prime Ministers’ meeting in 2012 that the group has become an important stabilizing factor in maintaining security in the region and therefore in future would promote economic cooperation” (The SCO, PMs Meeting, 2012).

The Afghan issue has always remained a basic concern for all the members and observer countries. The SCO method on stabilisation of Afghanistan would help India’s interests since it provides a useful forum to involve China and Pakistan on the issue of regional security. In last few year one would see a change in India’s approach to the SCO (Patnaik, 2013). India’s joining the SCO as an observer helped broaden the cooperation beyond Afghanistan and created multilateral cooperation against terrorism, drugs, human and arms trafficking in Central Asia and other member states. Speaking at the Dushambe Heads of the Council Meeting of the SCO ON 28 August, then India’s Petroleum Minister, Murali Deora, said, “Terrorism is the a major challenging confronting the global community which requires effective, collective measures. The SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent has an important to play check the growth of extremist and terrorist influences in the region. As a country which has been time and again targeted by these radical forces, India believes that its association with RATS would be mutually beneficial” (Patnaik, 2013)

India has been consistently articulating its desire to play much more meaningful and constructive role in the SCO. Its current focus on building stronger partnerships with this region indicates India's increasing interest in the region and the role which it is seeking to play in it. India's inclusion as a full member of the SCO is backed by Russia and the Central Asian countries. In June 2010, Alexander M. Kadakin, the Russian diplomat, stated: "Our position has all along been that we want India as a full-fledged member of the SCO" (Kashani, 2012). India is ready to find a viable solution to build bridges between Central and South Asia. India is willing to play a constructive role in SCO. The SCO as a forum provides a unique opportunity to discuss new areas of economic, security and developmental cooperation (Bisaria, 2012).

However, the flip side of the organisation is that it remains a China dominated body. Despite various challenges, India considers the SCO as a 'diplomatic opportunity' (Besaria, 2013). From India's point of view the SCO is relevant for discussion on and solution to security and counterterrorism issues. The SCO provides India an alternative regional platform to discuss the rapidly changing situation in Afghanistan. During the Tashkent Summit India's External Affairs Minister acknowledged the SCO's positive contribution. He said, "We... believe that the SCO is uniquely fitted to provide positive contribution to the global discourse on Afghanistan" (MEA, India, June 11, 2010).

The 15th Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit was held in Ufa in Russia on 9-10 July 2015. The summit was unique in many ways. Firstly, for the first time in the 15 years of the SCO, it was decided to increase the number of its members. The summit marked the commencement of the official process for Pakistan and India's inclusion in the SCO as a full member. Entry of Pakistan and India in the SCO as full members would be a watershed move for the SCO. Secondly, the summit was held along with BRICS summit under one roof where leaders of 15 countries assembled from various continents. Thirdly, in addition to the expansion of SCO, some other very important decisions were taken at the summit. Some important decisions included: passing of SCO Development Strategy 2025, approval of three years (2016-2018) programme of cooperation to fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism. According to Ufa Declaration, "SCO had an in-depth discussion of the situation in Afghanistan. It was noted that Islamic State (IS) had stepped up its

activities and spread its tentacles to that country, which elevates the security threats on the southern borders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It was decided to immediately work out anti-terrorism plan on Afghan borders. The summit noted that drug money was a major source of funding for radical terrorist groups; therefore, the SCO members had outlined plans to counter the drug threat” (Munir, 2015).

As India is set to play a more active role in the region, it intensified its engagement with the SCO member-states vigorously in three sectors – energy, building transportation and infrastructure linkages with the region, and boosting cooperation in traditional and non-traditional security (Roy, 2012).

India views the SCO as an Asian body and not as a military bloc or a body to counter the West. It considers the SCO a useful organisation and a dialogue platform for the regional countries to discuss economic and security issues. It can be argued that this organisation brings all the Central Asian countries and its neighbours on the same platform where India can interact with all Central Asian countries at the same time (Roy 2014:62).

India Dealing with Regional Security Threats

Terrorism still remains a serious menace in the South and Central Asian region. It is expanding and becoming more international in nature. The current developments in West Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to pose new set of challenges for all the countries in the Eurasian region. The main objective of the SCO is to counter these threats and challenges in the region. Given the size and nature of these challenges multilateral cooperation is the only way to address these threats. An integrated approach is required to deal with these challenges (Stobdan 2014:101).

In this respect, the SCO can provide an effective mechanism for all the regional countries to counter this menace through collective efforts. While fighting terrorism, India, CARs, China and Russia have much to offer to each other. China wants to address the problem of the Eastern Turkistan terror groups, and Russia wants to control the Chechen terror activities within Russia. India wants to control the activities of the extremist groups operating in Jammu and Kashmir region and from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. The Central Asian states want to contain the extremist groups operating in their region. The

Anti-terrorist centre in Tashkent can be an effective mechanism to address these concerns (Roy 2014:152).

India at the bilateral level has been addressing this issue with CARs and Russia. It has expressed its desire to deepen security related cooperation with the SCO in general and with the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure, in particular. The threat originating from the Af-Pak region and growing violence in Afghanistan is an area of concern for India and all the SCO member-states (MEA, India, 2013).

The SCO seems to be giving greater attention to the Afghanistan issue lately. After the US-NATO forces exit, the SCO may have to take more responsibility. In such a situation India as a full member will be able to address its concerns in Afghanistan. India's former External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna, had acknowledged the SCO's role in Afghanistan. He stated that, "the SCO is uniquely fitted to provide positive contributions to the global discourse on Afghanistan. SCO can certainly add a critical regional perspective and play a constructive role in ensuring a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. India is also ready to cooperate fully with the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of the SCO for exchanging information and working out a common strategy for combating terrorism. He also pointed out that India was ready to cooperate fully with the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) of the SCO for exchanging information and working out a common strategy for combating terrorism" (MEA, India, 2010).

In this regard, it is important to note that since its creation RATS has been focused on collective counter terrorist training and has coordinated with member-states specifically over the Winter Asian Games in Astana in 2010 and also during the Beijing Olympics in 2008. The main objective is to establish a mechanism of communication between the SCO member-states in order to facilitate greater coordination between each state's internal security organs. It organises regular meetings of border agencies to discuss effective means to tackle the existing challenges. It had prevented 600 terrorist attacks by 2011, arrested 400 terrorists and extradited more than 100. The RATS aims to establish a collaborative mechanism with other institutions, namely the CIS, UN, OSCE, CAREC and the CSTO. Over 900 anti-terrorist personnel had been trained till 2011. To make the RATS more

effective it had been argued that member-states should sign the RATS protocol (SCO Summit, April 24, 2012).

Drug trafficking and small arms proliferation are two serious threats to be addressed by the regional countries. India, Russia, China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran have a common interest to work together to fight this menace. The Astana Summit in 2011 had approved the counter narcotics strategy and action plan of the SCO member-states for 2011- 2016, aimed at strengthening pragmatic interaction and countering the negative impacts of the narcotic threat in the SCO region, thereby ensuring steady regional development (SCO Meeting, Astana, 2011).

The success of the SCO in dealing with drug trafficking has been acknowledged by all member states. There is a general understanding that the SCO can be much more effective in controlling drug trafficking. In his remarks in 2011, the Deputy Secretary General of the SCO reiterated the commitment of the organisation to counter drug trafficking from Afghanistan. He said, “Countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan will remain the SCO’s top priority in the short and medium term including the period after full withdrawal of foreign troops from that country” (Kanarovskiy, SCO Conference, Vienna, 2012).

India and The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

Kazakhstan’s proposal for convening the CICA was welcomed by a number of Asian States in 1992. During the next seven years, a series of meetings were held among the interested countries to discuss modalities of convening the CICA and draft basic documents. The first meeting of the CICA Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held on 14 September 1999 with participation of 15 Member States. The Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between CICA Member States was adopted at this meeting. On the premise of basic principles of sovereignty, non-use of threat or force, territorial integrity and cooperation for all-round development, “CICA seeks to enhance regional cooperation through multilateral mechanisms. This Asian forum is aimed at providing enhanced cooperation and promotion of stability, security and peace across the continent and beyond. CICA seeks eradication of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Cooperation in environment

and prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are also among its other important objectives” (Zafar, 2019).

For creating a platform to achieve the objective of a cooperative environment in Asia, the first CICA Summit was held in 2002 at Almaty, the former capital city of Kazakhstan. The then Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, had participated in the first summit. Highlighting the unifying factors in Asia, he noted: “All the nations of present-day Asia are, in some way or the other, products of the process of interaction and integration that has gone on in Asia throughout history. Therefore, in our tendency to focus on the conflicts of the day, we should not forget or belittle our shared past.” He termed terrorism a ‘formidable enemy’ and said that “Asian and global security depends crucially on how unitedly, decisively and speedily we counter this menace.” The Almaty Summit also adopted the “Declaration on Eliminating Terrorism and Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations” (MEA, India, 2002).

The then Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Murali Deora, represented India as Prime Minister’s Special Envoy at the second summit in 2006 at Almaty. He stated that CICA can contribute to the development of ‘a cooperative and pluralistic security order in Asia’, which is based on mutual understanding, trust and sovereign equality. He added that “the fight against terrorism needed to be global, comprehensive and sustained and not selective or discriminatory. He urged to redouble the efforts to root out the menace of terrorism and there should be zero tolerance towards it” (MEA, India, 2006).

The then Commerce and Industry Minister of India, Anand Sharma, attended the third Summit at Istanbul in June 2010, as Prime Minister’s Special Envoy. The declaration adopted by the third CICA Summit recognised the Organisation’s role in meeting the challenges faced by the world community, particularly in Asia. Member countries reaffirmed their commitment to develop CICA as a platform for dialogue and to further enhance cooperation. They condemned terrorism and regarded it as the ‘most serious threat’ to international peace and security (MEA, India, 2010).

The fourth summit was held at Shanghai, China, in May 2014. It was organised soon after the parliamentary elections in India in the same year, and was represented by an official

from India's Ministry of External Affairs. It was said that the organisation has joined the ranks of "leading forums in Asia for dialogue on security issues and confidence building. It was mentioned that terrorism poses a serious threat to the security in the region and the commitment to CICA's principles should be manifested in actions on combating terrorism" (MEA, India, June, 2014)

Many CICA members shared concerns over Afghanistan as they are also involved in various ongoing processes to address the problem. About the situation in Afghanistan, present Indian Foreign Minister, Jaishankar, said that India supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned national peace and reconciliation process. The Declaration issued by CICA leaders also echoed similar views saying "peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. India is of the view that the initiatives must include all sections of Afghan society as well as the elected Government of the country" (Dushanbe CICA Summit, 15 June, 2019).

The declaration adopted by the fifth CICA summit at Dushanbe highlighted the concerns raised by India, including terrorism. It expressed 'deep concern on the security threat posed by extremism and terrorism in all forms and manifestations'. It also called upon states to devise a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism by eliminating conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, countering misuse of the internet for terrorist purposes and dismantling terrorist shelters. CICA leaders noted that "promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, prosperity, elimination of poverty and illiteracy, are among the most effective measures to remove the breeding ground of terrorism and extremism" (Dushanbe CICA Summit, 15 June, 2019).

India's Proactive Security Policy in the Future Perspective

In the post-Cold War period, the Central Asian countries have engaged themselves in nation building and consolidation of their statehoods. The pessimistic scenarios, in the early 1990s of Central Asia disintegrating, have not materialised. No state has become a failing or failed state. On the contrary, countries like Kazakhstan have made great strides. At the same time, the Central Asian countries continue to face daunting socio-economic and security problems. The relations among themselves are far from smooth. Issues like

water security, borders, environmental degradation and migration have become acute. Religious extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism continue to pose challenges to Central Asian societies as well as regional stability. The Fergana Valley remains a hot spot of fundamentalism. Central Asian republics face serious threat from illegal drug trade emanating from Afghanistan. Instability in Central Asia can spill over into sensitive regions like Xinjiang (Gupta, 2013).

India's proactive security policy towards the Central Asia in the future is expected to be very vibrant in recent political scenario. Therefore, India is actively engaging and has formulated its foreign policy to the Central Asian region through transportation projects, participation in multilateral forums and seeking to link with Eurasian integration processes.

Eurasian integration and India

Eurasia, especially its Central Asia region, has been commonly referred to as India's 'Extended Neighbourhood' in recent years. India's appearance as a global economic and nuclear power has permitted it to play an active role beyond its immediate neighbourhood, especially in Central Asia and Afghanistan in the last one decade. India has strategic partnership with Russia and Kazakhstan. It had been active in Russian energy sector, including investment in Sakhalin 1 and acquiring Imperial energy. New Delhi now plans to establish 14 flight connections with the five countries to promote regional development hoping that its 'Connect' policy will boost trade with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This policy as Patnaik said, added structure to Delhi's overall strategy for the region, focusing on development of information technology, energy, banking and pharmaceutical industries and security cooperation to address the issues of terrorism and extremism (Patnaik, 2013).

India has traditionally attached great importance to its relations with Central Asia. But, unfortunately, the relationship despite close historical and cultural contacts has not progressed to the desired extent. The key constraint India faces is the lack of direct access to Central Asia. The unstable situation in Afghanistan and a highly problematic India-Pakistan relation have deprived India from the benefit of relations with Central Asia. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline (TAPI) would be a game-changer if it

materializes. However, despite some positive developments like the signing of an inter-governmental agreement, realization of TAPI is still distance away (The Times of India, July, 2013).

The May, 2016 signing of the trilateral agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan has been described as a “game changer”, improving manifold the way India can deal with both Afghanistan and Central Asia in its “extended neighbourhood” without having to deal with its most intractable neighbour, Pakistan. Once the Chabahar port is developed, goods from India will not only travel up to Afghanistan, but beyond, along the yet-to-be developed International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Central Asia (Haider, 2016).

Iran which provides alternative access to Central Asia, is an important but unspoken factor in India-Central Asia relations. However, India-Iran relationship for the last decade or so has not progressed well. Mutual suspicion mars this relationship. “The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) which would pass through Iran, is still underdeveloped and requires huge investment. India has also been slow in realizing the potential of the strategic Chabahar Port in Iran. India will require making substantial investments in Iran to make the INSTC as well as Chabahar Port to provide short and effective access to Central Asia” (Gupta, 2013). This must be top priority in India’s foreign policy. India has proposed to invest US\$100 million in free trade zone in Chabahar. The Chinese are also getting interested in Chabahar and have announced Euro 60 million credit to Iran to upgrade the Port. The significance of Chabahar Port is that it will facilitate a transit route to land-locked Afghanistan. Despite direct road links, Pakistan does not allow transit facility from India to Afghanistan. Therefore, connectivity through the Chabahar Port could become an important route linking India to Afghanistan and Central Asia (Gupta, 2013).

The Silk Road itself has been a network of routes, traversing the region from India to Afghanistan to Central Asia and China. It has carried not only trade, but also ideas. Buddhism, for example, was propagated during Emperor Ashoka’s time along the Silk Road through Kashmir to Afghanistan, and Central Asia, ultimately taking root in China. Reference to the new Silk Road as a metaphor, combining the use of the old land route networks and new networks created by 21st century technologies, enables us to take stock of the challenges and opportunities we face in connecting India with Central Asia.

The major conceptual and physical challenges revolve around the revival of the ancient north-south land routes of the Silk Road. Overcoming these challenges require a stable geopolitical environment, and considerable investments. Afghanistan plays a central role in this context. The main opportunities of the new Silk Road lie in creating new networks independent of the traditional land routes. Two sectors identified by India for more intensified cooperation with Central Asia are health-care and education. India's proposal involves the use of new technologies to create an electronic network connecting Central Asia and India, to deliver telemedicine and tele-education services, on the lines of India's pan-African e-network project which currently connects India to 47 countries in Africa. These would supplement the already functioning satellite and internet based links connecting Central Asia with India (MEA, India, 10 July, 2010).

India and Eurasian integration process

On January 1, 2010 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan launched the Custom Union, which finally came into existence by 2012 after the three members fine-tuned their respective national legislations in accordance with the agreement document. The creation of the Custom Union has changed the situation in Eurasia, since the need goods from non-member states will face tariff and non-tariff barriers. This Customs Union today has been replaced by the Eurasian Economic Union with free movement of goods, labour and capital. It was formed in 1 January 2015, and have three additional members – Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As much as 92 percent of the Custom duties have been taken from Russian roster, which is the highest among the three members and the most extensive in nature. Even Chinese goods that passed through the low tariff states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the member states of the Custom Unions were affected. India and Russia have decided to jointly study the possibility of India joining the EAEU. With the two key transportation links, India has positioned itself well to take advantages of the Eurasian integration process.

The other important effort that India has initiated is to work out a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), an omnibus free trade agreement with the Custom Union. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Russia in December 2011, talks on this were taken forward. According to press report in India, government sources have indicated

that most of the issues relating to CEPA have been sorted out to Russia. For India, according to Sandeep Diskhit, tailoring the CEPA to fit in its Russian's Custom Union with Kazakhstan, by far the largest Central Asian countries, and Belarus will help enlarge the market for India entrepreneurs (Patnaik, 2013). Today, the negotiations are being conducted with the EAEU along the same lines.

Finally, India came up with a "Connect Central Asia policy" (2012), which includes elements such high level visits, strategic partnerships, comprehensive economic engagement, partnership in the development of energy and natural resources. Development of potential in medical field, education, e-networks, land connectivity etc. This policy was declared in 2012. The implementation of the policy needs to be speeded up. This will require allocation of definite resource for the implementation of the policy (MEA, 2012, India). The policy demonstrates India's desire to be more actively engaged with the Central Asian region. With participation in SCO, connectivity projects, negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement with the EAEU and the 'Connect Central Asia' policy, New Delhi has shown its intention to be more active in multilateral forums and mechanisms in Central Asia and the larger Eurasian space.

Chapter - 6

Conclusion

The concept of 'security' is very significant for the nation-states to pursue its national interests in the contemporary period. Redefining 'security' has recently become common. Most such efforts, however, are more concerned with redefining the policy agendas of nation-states than with the concept of security itself. Security can be categorised into two types - traditional and non-traditional security. The traditional concept of security is about the military security with the state as the main referent object. The primary function of the state is to defend the territorial integrity as well as promoting welfare of its subject. But on the other hand, non-traditional security is purely non-military security and comes from within the state where individual is the main referent objects. Securitisation is very crucial for every state from these traditional and non-traditional threats perceptions.

It may be argued that the question of regional security as well as peace and stability in Central Asia is directly related to nation state formation in the region. The process of developing a regional security mechanism in Central Asia is still continuing, In fact, the Central Asian states forge a coherent system in geographical and cultural terms. In security policy terms each nation has its own specific objectives as determined by its own interests, however, their security policies are interrelated. Away from the centralized system of Soviet era, dynamics of civil society and political statehood in Central Asia create several challenges in any endeavour towards a common security orientation.

The quest for developing a regional security mechanism for the Central Asian region had begun after the disintegration of Soviet Union and emergence of independent Central Asian states. But Central Asian States were faced with the scarcity of resources to develop their own regional security mechanism. This situation provided a space for Russia, China and the United States, Iran and Turkey to enhance their influence by providing assistance in the process of developing regional security architecture. However, competition between these five major external powers on the issue of regional security in Central Asian can also be observed.

At theoretical level, with the beginning of cooperative and comprehensive security principles, debate on rethinking of the concept of security was initiated. There are several changes that have taken place in the practice of security cooperation in present global system. In this process, decreasing importance of military alliances and rising position of composite security frameworks at the regional level are the most vital ones. This study employed the concepts of 'regional security complex' and 'security dynamics' aimed at analysing the new scenarios of cooperation with regards to Central Asian regional security. It also analysed the effects of the interaction between external powers on developing a regional security mechanism for the Central Asian region.

The Central Asian states have a shared common legacy which gives them the basis and potential for the appearance of cooperative dynamics in the region as they share common history and substantial cultural commonality. The Central Asian states also share common problems in seeking to distinguished themselves from the legacy of the Soviet economic and the previous political system. However, their reform process differed in pace and content.

While there are many common elements, Central Asian states do have conflictual dynamics as well which appears more deeply entrenched. It is reflected in an increasing diversification and incompatibility of the economic, political and strategic interests; distinct levels of economic development of these states, raw materials supply chain; geopolitical factors such as historically disputed territories, limitation of communication, struggle among Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for the leadership in the region etc. Central Asian states also confront the problems of unequal availability as well as distribution of water resources, existence of numerous zones of environmental disaster, demographic imbalance, and migration problems etc. The potential role of radical Islam is also significant with regards to the study of cooperative as well conflictual dynamics within the region.

Emergence of Central Asian states after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991 made this region strategically significant with regards to regional security. Central Asian states not only suffered low economic development and high potentiality of intra-and inter-state conflicts, but also faced challenges such as terrorism, extremism, separatism, presence of

extremely unstable regional environment (Afghanistan, Kashmir, northern Caucasus); porous border, expansion of drug trade, religious extremism, conflicting interests of leading powers and interstate contradictions. However, the terror and drug trafficking activities emanating from Afghanistan appeared as the most potential threat to regional stability.

This study observed that in such challenging situation in the region, rivalry among major powers such as Russia, China and the United States, Iran and Turkey appeared in the region for gaining access to energy resources, which have been viewed by these powers as alternative to the volatile West Asian and Persian Gulf regions. These actors do not only consolidate their position but also tend to increase their presence in the region through complex modes of relationships. These acts do not only promote cooperation but also triggers competition among them as is evident from polarisation of relations among Russia, China and US. This strategic rivalry is compounded by the worsening security situation in Afghanistan.

Apart from these issues, Central Asian states face several challenges such as territorial and border disputes, domestic policy and break down of economic links that existed during Soviet times. Challenges to regional security include aggravation of inter-ethnic relations in Central Asia, rising Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism, differences over water-sharing and emergence of conflicting ideologies etc.

Islam in its radical form has been viewed by the new state governments as a parallel power structure contradicting their authority. Thus the power of radical Islam remains an important regional concern. The problem of uneven water availability and joint utilisation of trans-border water resources has been another major potential factor of conflict which seriously challenges the security of the Central Asian countries. In this context, water-sharing issue could entail a serious destabilising potential to regional security. This study found that water related conflicts could lead to open conflict between Central Asian states. Similarly, it may weaken these states internally as well. Weakness of political structures in Central Asia is one of the main obstacles to regional stability in Central Asia, as drug traders desire to conduct their business in or through frail states and if possible takeover crucial components of the state apparatus. The drug trade has adversely affected regional

stability in Central Asia, which is a heterogeneous region in terms of ethnicity and language. The main ethnic and linguistic groups in the region are Turks, Persian-speakers, and Russian, as well as small communities of Ukrainians, Germans, and Jews etc. This also poses challenges in terms of evolving social cohesion within and among the Central Asian states.

In this background of the state of affairs in the Central Asian region, this study analysed the role of Russia, China and the United States, Iran and Turkey. With regards to Russian role, in the initial phase after the Soviet disintegration, Central Asia considered Russia as a 'Security Guarantor', since this region was a part of Soviet security system. For Russia, the Central Asian region remained significant because of its strategic geographical position and its wealth of natural resources. The Taliban and AI Qaeda in Afghanistan also posed long-term political, security and economic challenges to Russia. Strong linkage among Chechen rebels and AI Qaeda/ Taliban forces alarmed Russia. Russia also feared that instability in Central Asia might spread into Muslim populated regions of Russia. So Russia cooperated with Central Asia with the aim of forming and evolving an effective security system in the region. Similarly Russia's participation in evolution of effective regional security architecture is also vitally important for countries of Central Asia region.

China's role has been very significant in the Central Asian region as it has played a very constructive role since the disintegration of Soviet Union and independence of new republics of Central Asia. China was one of the first and foremost nations to recognise the newly independent states of Central Asia and established very good diplomatic relations with them in early 1992. The emergence of separatism, religious extremism, terrorism and their negative influence on its Xinjiang Province have been China's main concern with regard to this region. It would be worth noting that through the framework of SCO, China is actively engaged with Central Asia in combating "three evil forces" of 'terrorism, separatism and extremism' to ensure its own stability and territorial integrity.

In 1996, Shanghai five was the one of the most important regional security mechanism, in which China was a leading member. With the membership of Uzbekistan in Shanghai five, it came to be known as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2001. The SCO also signed an 'Agreement on Fight against Terrorism, Extremism and Separatism'.

However, since 9/11 terror attacks, China's security concerns have been mainly focused on International terrorism, Islamic extremism and drug trafficking etc.

The United States has been playing a prominent role in improving regional security in this region since the emergence of newly independent Central Asian republics. It has constantly stressed upon American role for Central Asian region's economic, political and military progress. However, the United States allowed Russia to deal with instability in Central Asia which became evident when the US refrained itself from active involvement in negotiating the end of Tajik civil war (1992-1997). The United States did not respond to Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan as well. China and Russia have appeared to move slowly in bolstering the SCO, since some of the reasons for forming it aimed at countering terrorism and limit the U.S. presence. This move became slower and less relevant when the United States placed its military troops in the region after September 11, 2001. Subsequently, however, not only the US troops left Central Asian region, but its influence weakened as it decided to leave Afghanistan.

For Iran, relation with the only Central Asian country with which it shares a border, Turkmenistan, have had direct security relevance. Iran's cultural links with Tajikistan account for its interest in helping broker a peace agreement to the conflict in that country. Iran shared the security concern of the most Central Asian states about the destabilizing nature of Afghanistan under the domination of the Taliban leadership. Iran has refined the trade, economic and energy relations with its northern neighbours and has projected the image of itself as an influential Caspian state. As the same time, it has been cautious not project any threatening political ambitions in the region.

The importance of the Turkey's relations with Central Asian should not be exaggerated. Turkey have more regionally and culturally demarcated interests in post-Soviet Central Asia. In the early 1990s Turkish politicians were attracted to the romantic image of a pan-Turkic commonwealth of nations, an embracing of the 'Turkic' people of Central Asia. But in practice, and despite continued meetings about the Turkic Union, Turkey lacked the economic resources to prove a pole of attraction for the Central Asian leaders. Its links have been closer with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in the western part of the region,

driven by economic and energy links, and have been less with Uzbekistan, which has resisted Turkish patronage.

This study demonstrates that emergence of regional security architecture in Central Asian region is an expanding phenomenon and is likely continue in the twenty-first century. In this process, apart from socio- economic and political situation within the region, the role played by the Russia, China and the United States may be of critical significance which will determine the success or the failure of such initiatives.

In this regards, the role of regional organisation such as Shanghai Five, CSTO, OSCE, SCO and NATO could be critically very significant. This study demonstrated that Russia, China and the US have been performing their role of proactively engaging with Central Asia countries using these regional organisations. It would be worth mentioning here that SCO's resolve to combat international terrorism, drug-trafficking, separatism and religious extremism reconfirm that faced with an anarchical situation, states are likely to opt for common foreign policy arrangements if that helps to maintain national security.

There are several challenges confronted by Central Asian states for regional cooperation efforts but similarly opportunities also exist which could be harnessed by these countries. It would be natural for organisations such as Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to seek mechanisms for providing credible security solutions. But in this process, geo-political realities need to be taken into consideration.

Great powers are always competitive as they seek more influence over international affairs. This generalisation undoubtedly applies to the key powers and their interests in Central Asia. The US, Russian, and Chinese decision-makers would clearly prefer to have more say over military and economic developments in the region, rather than less. Russia seek to stave off the further decline of its influence in the region, and with a booming economy and robust governmental finances in the decade and half since 2000, many saw opportunities to make up for ground lost to China and the US over recent years. The Chinese policy-makers see their state as a rising power globally and regionally, with an expanding range of interests in Central Asia that demand an enhanced presence. Officials

and analysts in both Moscow and Beijing have voiced an interest in limiting or reducing the US role both regionally and globally, advocating a "multipolar" strategy. For their part, the US has routinely expressed preferences for an enhanced role in the region's economic, political and military developments.

In essence, the great power's interests in the region are competitive when viewed in their most expansive terms. For each of the main external power, however, the most pressing security interests in the region are not ones that can be achieved only at another major power's expense. On the contrary, officials at the highest levels of all the governments concerned place the greatest emphasis on security interests that demand cooperation from the other powers. Notwithstanding the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, trans-national terrorism continues to be the major concern for all. Russia remains bogged down in an increasingly radicalised Chechnya, which imposes hefty financial costs on the government, and drains its military while hampering reforms and generating terror attacks in Moscow and other cities. China is particularly worried about Xinjiang's Uighur separatist movement, which in recent years has taken on radical Islamic overtones. Russian and Chinese officials claim that the Chechen and Uighur movements belong to a trans-national terrorist network with ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The US has classified both movements as terrorist organizations, and has endorsed the Russian and Chinese portrayal of the wider terror networks.

The Central Asian states have a vital strategic interest for their own as well as regional stability. These states among all their neighbours have the most direct interest in the sustained economic development, prosperity and social stability. There have been many cooperation attempts in the region since the end of the Cold War, both among the regional countries and outsiders such as Russia, China and the US. However, these efforts have already given rise to a number of issues that need to be discussed more deeply.

The 9/11 and the following military operation led by the United States in Afghanistan brought extra-regional power US to the Central Asian region more prominently. This brought in a wider geopolitical game in the resource rich region of Central Asia. Thereafter one witnessed a competition among the major powers - Russia, China and the US - guided by their own long term and short term interests to enhance their influence in the Eurasian

region and gain greater control of its energy resources. This brought in geopolitical pressures on the smaller Central Asian States who then tried manoeuvring between the interests of major powers through their "multi-vector" foreign policy. The Central Asian states continue to depend on these powers for security and much needed economic aid.

This study demonstrates the concept of regional security in Central Asia which has evolved with the emergence of challenges before these countries of the region after Soviet disintegration. Major Powers such as Russia, China and United States have been active in the Central Asian region but have not been able to see successful evolution of regional security architecture because of their competing as well as conflicting interests. Due to different interests and world view of Russia, China and the United States, as well as their diverse long term goals and practices, the evolution process of regional security architecture has not gained the desired pace and momentum. However, these major powers have taken various initiatives to make it move forward.

Extremism and terrorism are the prime security concerns of all countries in the region, as well as of the major powers. The US and NATO forces are battling the insurgents but despite lots of time and massive force deployment the Taliban could not be eliminated. Drug trafficking, smuggling in small weapons, and organized crime are factors that fuel extremism and terrorism. These have to be tackled simultaneously.

In the immediate context, Indian concerns are related to the volatile security scenario that is emerging in the neighbourhood. The dangers arising from non-traditional threats pose a serious danger not only to the integrity of India and the Central Asian States, but also to the very existence of secular and open societies. These forces are well entrenched in the common neighbourhood, i.e. the Afghan-Pakistan borderlands. The heinous act of killing innocent people at Mumbai (2008) demonstrates the danger and the barbarism of the attackers. India has formalized its security relations by establishing Joint Working Groups on counterterrorism and has signed defence cooperation agreements with some of the Central Asian States. The compatibility of security interests between India and Kazakhstan was evident when the two countries signed a Declaration of Strategic Partnership in 2009. It now has strategic partnership agreements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. India's policy

towards Central Asia is becoming energized and proactive, unlike in the past, when it was reactive.

In India's view, Afghanistan and Central Asia are interlinked and must be integral components of its approach to regional security. Traditionally, India enjoyed cordial ties with Afghanistan, and maintained multifaceted interests in Central Asia as well. After 9/11, India has focused on restoring those ties by becoming closely involved in the overall reconstruction effort. India's presence and influence in Afghanistan is substantial. Its goal, very simply, is to help Afghanistan become a sovereign and independent country.

Today, India has the capacity to play a constructive role in Central Asia, but the presence there of other major powers acts as a limiting factor. A new possibility that has opened up for India is to work in cooperation with either the U.S. or Russia or both in order to secure mutual benefits in the region. The challenge of extremism and terrorism continues to loom over the horizon in Central Asia. Tajikistan in particular is highly vulnerable due to its proximity to Pakistan's FATA region, which should be factored into any future strategy to combat terrorism.

Over time, new elites and leaders will emerge in the Central Asian states. The emerging elites are likely to be more focused than their predecessors on economic development and on integrating their countries into the world economy. As a recognized power in the field of science and technology, India can play a major role in the changing economic landscape of Central Asia. With economic progress, opportunities for employment will expand. This in turn will create conditions more favourable to participatory politics and to open systems of information and governance, and less welcoming to some of the dysfunctional activities that are so common there today. The war on terror was expected to enter a decisive phase during the tenure of the Obama administration in Washington, which combined a determined military presence with a more active promotion of the economy on a regional basis. This created prospects for development of both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbours. Yet, by the time Obama completed his presidency, Afghanistan was more unstable and the subsequent Trump Administration showed great eagerness to leave Afghanistan.

A big question mark hangs over Pakistan's ability to rein in the numerous extremist and terrorist organizations that flourish on its soil, and also its ability to control the borderlands adjoining Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the many pessimistic predictions, the re-emergence of Afghanistan as a center of trade and transport is still possible, especially if Iran is involved in the evolving strategy. The southward direction for the Central Asian states is essential for strengthening their economic prosperity and for integrating them into the world economy. In the long run, such a prospect holds immense potential as a means of reorienting the geopolitics of the entire region. However, for that to happen, Pakistan needs to end its support for terrorism and extremism in the region. The U.S., instead of reining in Pakistan, is more focused on Iran, creating further hurdles for India, Afghanistan and Central Asian States to develop connectivity and economic interaction in the region.

India's engagement with multilateral regional mechanisms in Central Asia (like Northern Alliance earlier and SCO later) has contributed to security and stability in the wider region including Afghanistan. The role of multilateral regional initiatives on a Central Asian level as primary providers of security has not been rated very high. It has been observed that such multilateral organisations have been unable to convey hard defence guarantees, create joint military units, negotiate arms reductions or enforce the end of overt conflicts. Most writings on geo-strategic transformations in the Central Asian region in the post 9/11 period, however, stressed on an undermining of multilateral security structures. With strong American push into the region, a transition back to the bilateral in terms of security arrangements was in fact predicted as the most significant aspects of the transition. However, within a short period the US influence in Central Asia diminished and their bases were closed by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia again became the dominant security provider for the region and Chinese political and economic push was very strongly felt.

India's engagement in the Central Asia region in the early 1990s lacked much conviction from the perspective of regional security. However, the security related approach that later followed resulted from the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan's search for 'strategic depth' in Afghanistan and beyond. Though support to the Northern Alliance was covert, India linked its own security to that of the Central Asia region.

In order to check the destabilising religious extremism and terrorism in the whole region, New Delhi's secretly provided military assistance to Ahmad Shah Massoud, the military commander of the Northern Alliance, who fought the Taliban and U.S. forces till his assassination in 2001. Short of sending heavy equipment, India provided extensive assistance to the Northern Alliance - uniforms, ordnance, mortars, small armaments, refurbished Kalashnikovs seized in Kashmir, combat and winter clothes, packaged food, medicines, and funds.

India's national interests lie in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Therefore, India should support all efforts towards improving the security situation and providing good governance there. It is only through sustained reconstruction and concerted socio-economic development that future stability of Afghanistan can be assured.

It is argued by an eminent scholar like Patnaik that India's Central Asia policy should have strategic vision to - firstly, ensuring its access to energy resources, secondly, containing and eliminating international terrorism emanating from the region. Thirdly, it is deepening India's involvement in Central Asia and Afghanistan and denying strategic depth to any potential adversary.

One can deduce that Central Asia's security and stability is in the common strategic interests of both India and Central Asian states. This demands that India remain strongly engaged in this region in a mutually complimentary framework with Central Asian countries. The threat from international terrorism and fundamentalism can become significant, even difficult to manage, if Central Asia falls under the sway of such destabilizing forces. The geopolitical stability in Central Asia has not only a direct impact on India economic interests in the region, but also has greater implications for the ongoing separatist movements in Jammu and Kashmir. The containment of international terrorism, therefore, critically depends on closer collaboration between Russia, India, and the Central Asian States.

Given the increasing role and significance of the SCO in the Eurasian region and beyond, India is likely to benefit more in the long-term as a member of this organisation. Therefore, SCO provides the opportunity for India to fulfil its national interest while cautiously

navigating through challenges. SCO will enable India, as an integral part of the Eurasian security grouping, to neutralise centrifugal forces arising from religious extremism and terrorism in the region. The drawdown of Western forces from Afghanistan and the rise of Islamic State (IS) with its stated intention to create a Caliphate have added a new explosive dimension to the region's security landscape.

India has both opportunities and challenges as a full member in the SCO. It is now much easier to watch the developments closely from within as a full member rather than sit on the side-lines. China has vast influence in the SCO and India can counter Chinese moves to dominate the Central Asian region politically and economically. Though China tried and delayed India's entry as full member in this regional organisation, Russia along with the Central Asian countries supported India's full membership in the SCO, knowing the value of Indian participation in this organisation. Finally, India's permanent membership of the SCO from 2016 has facilitated its active engagement in the regional security scenario in Central Asia.

Within the structure and functioning of the SCO, India can contribute in a more effective manner in areas of trade and transportation and enhancing cooperation within the security arena like multilateral cooperation against terrorism, drugs, human and arms trafficking in Central Asia. At this stage it could build new models of security cooperation with SCO member-states to deal with new security challenges in Afghanistan, Central and West Asia.

India's increasing role in the Eurasian region is viewed positively by Russia, Central Asian States and the US. This sets a perfect stage for India to play an active role in the region both at the bilateral level and within the regional groupings in the region. Despite India's full membership of the SCO, it should not compromise on other core strategic issues of national interest. For any meaningful cooperation with the Eurasian region, India will have to carve out a medium to long-term strategy of bilateral engagement supported by enhanced cooperation with the regional Central Asian organisations.

An evolving objective of SCO now appears to increase not just its regional but also its global strategic and economic profile. In this scenario, India, as a new member of SCO, will need to formulate an appropriate Eurasian strategy. This strategy should serve India's

regional interests to ensuring sustainable nation-building through development partnerships, maintaining sovereignty, preventing the region from being a hub of terrorism and extremism. At the same time, it is also in India's interest that this region does not evolve into a geopolitical chessboard of New Great Game rivalries.

(CICA) is an inter-governmental forum for enhancing cooperation towards promoting peace, security and stability in Asia. The key idea of the Conference is based on the priority of the specific security interests, joint initiatives and mutual beneficial interaction of small and large states. The CICA initiative has potential to play a significant role in economic and cultural spheres even if security cooperation is yet to emerge as a priority for cooperation among member countries in the Eurasian region. Asia faces multiple security challenges and it also presents a diverse picture that needs a unique regional framework. India has been associated with the initiative since its inception. Before becoming a full member of the SCO in 2017, CICA has been the only regional multilateral platform shared by India and Central Asian countries. As the global focus is shifting towards Eurasia, the regional initiatives and institutions are gaining new dynamism, which will also lead to increased expectations from people in the region.

In the future, for a proactive regional security policy, India needs to work out an arrangement to overcome barriers to trade in Eurasia. At the same time, Eurasian Economic Union is an opportunity for expanding trade with a much larger region. The first step to access the member states has been taken with the transportation links being created through the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar port. Therefore, India is hoping to advance its political and security interests in the Central Asian region through linking with Eurasian integration processes like Custom Union and EAEU, sign Chabahar treaty, participation in the US promoted New silk Route projects like the TAPI project etc. It also took initiatives by becoming the original founding three members along with Russia and Iran to establish the INSTC. New Delhi has been very involved in improving infrastructure in Afghanistan. India is actively participating in the Central Asian region through what it called the 'Connect Central Asia Policy' that came into effect in 2012. There is extremely good relationship between the both sides in terms of people-people ties

which was boosted by present Prime Minister Modi's visits to Central Asia and many treaties were signed during that visit with the Central Asian countries.

It is also evident from this study that a major hurdle to regional security architecture has been the lack of cooperation among Central Asian states at the regional level. Ethnic differences, border disputes, domestic socio-economic disparities and challenges as well as competition to have leadership and dominance have led to prevalence of these differences among these regional countries. In this process, external influences of major powers have also contributed in slowing down the pace of evolution of regional security architecture. However, this study also demonstrates that attempts have been made to evolve Central Asian Security architecture by not only countries of the region but also by major powers i.e. Russia, China and the United States. It may be expected that despite their complexities, differences and challenges, regional security architecture would evolve further in upcoming future which will play a significant role in regional security and progress of the Central Asian region.

From Indian perspective, regional security is very vital for it to pursue national security interests in the Central Asian region. Therefore, India is actively engaging with the Central Asian countries to fight the security threats and challenges. We have observed that India's strategic worries are tied up with the security and political stability in the Central Asian region. Any geopolitical change in the region has its effect on several states in the neighbourhood, including India. As an evolving power, India is obviously interested in any changes in and around the Central Asian region, which could have implications for its own security. Basically, Central Asia security is linked to peace in Afghanistan and Indian subcontinent. India's role in regional security issues in Central Asia involves countering the resurgence of Taliban, cooperation with SCO to fight against terrorism and extremism, and stabilising Afghanistan. India with all her seriousness looks at the changes happening in Central Asia and tries to deal with all the states in a friendly and cooperative manner. Its participation in multilateral groupings in the Central Asian region has enabled India to play a much bigger role in the future.

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