Russia's relations with the Trans-Caucasian and Central Asian region currently designated as "Near Abroad" in the lexicon of Russian diplomacy, have a history extending over a millenium. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, this region was a zone of triangular contest between Britain, Russia and China, which had been romanticised as the "Great Game". After the October Revolution of 1917, Central Asia was incorporated into the fold of the Soviet system, and since then, the seven decades of Soviet rule gave Central Asia a strong feeling of security and stability as an integral part of a militarily strong super power.

The sudden demise of the Soviet Union has resulted in the creation of the five independent Central Asian republics - namely, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which have drastically changed the balance of power of the region. Emergence of these newly independent republics has also led to a wide ranging debate, covering such diverse issues as economic changes, ecological imbalances, democratisation and human rights, ethno-nationalism, religious revivalism, terrorism, arms proliferation, territorial integrity, regional stability and most important of all, the defence and security issues.

During the Soviet regime, Central Asia was controlled and shaped to the extent that it has developed a psychological feeling of dependency in the erstwhile Soviet Union and its successor, Russia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the sheer realisation has emerged that the security of Russia and Central Asian states is mutually interdependent. Russia, despite its withdrawal from Central Asia could not ignore its strategic concern, geopolitical links and collective security interests for maintaining stability within the region, and ensured that no regional power supplanted Moscow's preferential status.
In the post-Soviet period, defence and security relations between Russia and Central Asian states have further strengthened through the joint institution of Commonwealth of Independent States and signing of separate bilateral and multi-lateral defence co-operation agreements. The most significant dynamics within the CIS with far-reaching security implications, was the Treaty on Collective Security signed between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Russia and Armenia, at the Tashkent summit on May 15, 1992. The only Central Asian Republic-Turkmenistan was not the signatory of the Treaty.

But in the wake of active Russian foreign policy and newly formulated Russian military doctrine in the 'near abroad' of 1993 aimed at creating 'zones of influence' and declaring the whole of the former Soviet territory as an area of 'vital interest' for Russia, and claiming the right to defend the Russian-speaking population living outside Russia, the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov started exploring other avenues to ensure the stability and security of the Central Asian states. While addressing the 48th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, President Islam Karimov proposed to set-up in Tashkent a permanent United Nations Seminar on issues of 'security and co-operation'.

Subsequently, a seminar on 'Security and Co-operation in Central Asia' was held on September 15, 1995 in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent, which was attended by the delegations representing the United Nations, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) as well as representatives from the permanent member states of the United Nations Security Council, and also from the neighbouring states of Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and India. In this security conference, Islam Karimov, in order to strengthen peace and stability on the regional and global levels,
emphasised the need to work out a mechanism for co-operation principally between international organisations. He emphasised the need for international organisations such as Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, North Atlantic Co-operative Council, Commonwealth of Independent States and the United Nations to take an active interest in ensuring peace and security in Central Asian region.

Furthermore, to eliminate the possibilities of Russian domination of Central Asia, the Central Asian leaders also want to create a security space broader than the post-Soviet security space which would include the UN, OSCE and NATO, and could be designated as the Euro-Central Asian system of security space. Their active participation in the Partnership for Peace programme (PfP) as well as in the North Atlantic Co-operation Council of the NATO, and staging of NATO military exercises on the territory of Central Asia are indicative of their desire to be self-reliant of Russia's strategic security umbrella. On the other hand, the strategic objectives of NATO and Partnership for Peace programme are to involve Central Asian states in the European security structure based on co-operative processes and on mutual consultations in case of threat.

A recognition of the present Russian dominated common Eurasian security system including Central Asia does not mean total absence of desire among some Central Asian and other non-Russian CIS states to reduce their dependence on Russia in security and defence matters. There are signs that some states such as Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova would like to see the Russian influence reduced. Geographic barriers in uniting south Caucasus and Central Asia and division on the basis of religion as well as the economic and military dependence on Russia rule out, at least in the foreseeable future, the forging of an anti-Russian security block.
Efforts to associate the United Nations and the OSCE with the regional Collective Security System are obviously motivated by a desire to weaken Russian dominance. Such efforts may have the indirect support of the western powers but it would be difficult for them to justify before their public the conclusion of a military alliance with the Central Asian States. Western leaders still tend to view Central Asia as an area where Russia has special interest and can be entrusted the task of peace-keeping under broad international supervision. The United Nations and the OSCE did play an important role in the Tajik peace process but it was not designed to supplant Moscow.

The question of continuation of Russian preponderance in the security system of Central Asia in the long term, however, admits of no easy answer. There are several imponderables such as departure from the political scene of the present-day Soviet-era elite, the overwhelming domination of youth in the demographic composition of the Central Asian population, the economic recovery of Russia and the rising influence of Islam. All these factors are likely to pose a serious challenge to the geopolitical realities in Central Asia.

The proposed study entitled 'Central Asian Republics' Quest for Security in the Post-Soviet Period: A Case Study of Changing Pattern of Relationship With Russia' has been organised into six chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the most salient features of Central Asia and its geo-strategic significance. Chapter II discusses historical background of security links between Russia and Central Asia. Chapter III addresses in details the fallout of the dissolution of the Soviet Union for the Central Asian security. It also analyses various compulsions, circumstances for forging new defence and security ties between Central Asian republics and Russia. Chapter IV analyses the evolution of
new collective defence and security relations within the Commonwealth of Independent States, and bilateral security agreements between Russia and Central Asian republics.

Chapter V widens the focus of the rising misgivings among the Central Asian leaders arising out of the new tilt in Russian foreign policy towards new Eurasianism and military doctrine of 1993 treating all former Soviet territories as an area of vital interest for Russia, which has resulted diversification of security relationship of Central Asian States with West, NATO, OSCE and the U.N. The final chapter provides some conclusions, suggesting that moving out of the Russian orbit and integration into the western security structure has also its own pitfalls as it compromises the independent development of the newly independent Central Asian republics. The question of continuation of Russian preponderance in the security system of Central Asian republics in the long term, however, admits of no easy answer.