Chapter – 4

CENTRAL ASIAN GEOPOLITICS AND SECURITY ISSUES FOR CENTRAL ASIAN STATES AND CHINA
Introduction

In the last chapter, it has been analysed that various regional and global powers are active in the Central Asian region to enhance their strategic and economic interest. Central Asia's detachment from the former Soviet Union and the new challenges that Central Asian states faces, had given other powers the opportunity to increase their political and economic presence. The competition and cooperation between the different states had a profound impact on redesigning the geopolitics of the Central Asian region. Also, the geopolitical game has made some security speculation for the Central Asian states as well as China. The security threat arising out of the presence of extra-regional powers in Central Asian region for both Central Asia and China will be studied in this chapter. How much this opportunity has been exploited by China vis-a-vis other powers in this strategically important region is also the subject matter of this chapter.

4.1 Central Asian Security Dilemma

After independence in 1991, all the Central Asian states have more or less inherited the communist type government structure. All the ruling elite were previously member of Soviet communist party. It is believed that the political leadership ruling in all the five Central Asian states since 1991 are of authoritarian type. Today, it is clear that the governments of Central Asia have indeed succeeded in adopting many of the structures of western style democracy but they have not succeeded in the significant transition to the spirit and processes of true democracy (Gleason 2001). When the pro-democratic regime changes, termed as ‘colour revolution’, took place in Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, these states were afraid of with the same type of colour revolution in their states. In this matter the ‘Tulip’ revolution in Kyrgyzstan, ‘Andijan’ unrest in Uzbekistan and regime change in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010, are important events to be analysed for our purpose of research. Besides, the fear of Islamic Fundamentalism, more Russian dependency and Chinese dominance are other security speculations for the Central Asian states.

4.1.1 Fear of Regime Changes

There are few regime change events takes place in the Central Asian region in the name of democratic change. They are Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Andijan unrest in Uzbekistan and again political regime change in Kyrgyzstan in 2010. In general it
is believed that these changes are part of democratisation process started after the fall of the communist Soviet Union and triumph of western liberal democracy and backed by western countries. These regime changes have far reaching consequences in the geopolitical setting of Central Asian region.

4.1.1.1 Tulip Revolution (Kyrgyzstan)

The 'Tulip Revolution' refers to the overthrow of President Askar Akayev and his government in the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan after the parliamentary elections, of February 27, 2005 and of March 13, 2005. The revolution sought the end of rule by Akayev and by his family and associates, who in popular opinion had become increasingly corrupt and authoritarian. Following the revolution, Akayev fled the country. On April 4, 2005 he signed his resignation statement in the presence of a Kyrgyz parliamentary delegation in his country's embassy in Moscow, and on April 11, the Kyrgyz parliament ratified his resignation (Cummings 2008: 225). These developments sums up the regime change in Kyrgyzstan in brief.

The reasons behind tulip revolution are manifold and have some background events (Lewis 2008). Protests started prior to the announcement of election results in many western and southern areas, accusing the Akayev's government of rigging the elections. The protests became more assertive as time passed. The opposition appeared to unify to some extent around two main opposition leaders: former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev and former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva (Kulov 2008: 339-345). By March 23, 2005 the protest movement had become widespread, particularly in southern region, and gained momentum in the wake of allegations of massive fraud and manipulations during the elections. On March 24, protests spread to Bishkek, where a large crowd of thousands of people gathered in front of the main government building. When security forces and government intelligence agent began beating a number of young demonstrators in the front ranks, the main crowd behind them closed ranks and a large number of the young swept past the security forces and stormed into the government headquarters. They also occupied the building of the state television (Kulov 2008: 339-345). Thus, the protest by the people had a significant bearing on the change of regime.

After this incident the newly elected parliament named Kurmanbek Bakyiev, as
of captured state buildings. A large number of people were killed on that day which emerged as the most deadly day in independent Uzbekistan's history.

The encounter between Uzbek security forces and demonstrators in Andijan on May 13, 2005 led to a massive loss of life. According to various reports the number of casualties differs from each other. Tashkent maintains that 173 Uzbeks were killed in the clashes while human rights and Muslim activists place the numbers far higher (Daly 2005). The reason behind the encounter is not known exactly, but the catalyst for the clash was the trial of 23 men, which began on February 10, 2005. The 23 defendants were reportedly members of the Akramiya movement, an offshoot of Hizb ut-Tahrir (Daly 2005). They were arrested on 23 June 2004, and charged for organizing a criminal organization, undermining the constitutional basis of the republic of Uzbekistan, preparing or distributing documents that contain a threat to public safety, and setting up, leading, and participating in extremist religious organizations. The uprising in Andijan was sparked by an effort to free the men from a local penal facility where they were being held (Daly 2005).

The uprising held at Andijan was violent in nature. The Uzbekistan government blamed that the militants were violent and tried to capture government buildings. There was no option other then force to suppress the uprising. According to reports shortly before midnight on May 12, 2005, armed men attacked a traffic police post, killing four on duty officers and seizing sub-machine guns, grenades and pistols from the post’s weapons depot. Four duty officers were killed and their weapons taken. At 1.30 am the ‘gunmen’ attacked a unit of the defence ministry, located on the road in the 34th military district. They took a Zil-130 truck, and used it to break into a prison and free almost all the 600 prisoners there” (Megoran 2008: 18). The assailants then moved on and attacked a military base also. Duly armed, insurgents then moved in the Andijan prison and attacked and free some prisoners including the 23 defendants. The militants did not stop here and then moved to attack the buildings of the National Security Council and the regional administration and police department (Daly 2005 and Megoran 2008). Government officials from Tashkent reached Andijan and tried to negotiate a peaceful end to the crisis. Uzbek Interior Minister Zakir Almatov stated that during negotiations the protesters refused to dilute their demands, one of which was the release of Akram Yuldashev (Daly 2005).
The reason behind the Andijan violence has many interpretations. While, Uzbekistan officials maintained that both Uzbek and foreign militants had carefully planned events in Andijan to provoke a harsh government response that would radicalize the population to confront and possibly overthrow the government. On the other hand, western governments and human rights organizations deplored the loss of life and calls for an international investigation. The Uzbekistan government rejected the demand on the grounds that an investigation of an internal terrorist incident would compromise national sovereignty (Daly 2005).

Uzbekistan interpretation of the Andijan violence received support from a number of sources. On May 16, 2005 Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov spoke of the Andijan unrest as a "Taliban-like provocation." Eight days later, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Kong Quan expressed firm support for Tashkent’s crackdown on the three forces of separatism, terrorism, and extremism (Daly 2005). In May 2005, Uzbek President Islam Karimov underlined his positive appreciation of the Chinese authorities by visiting Beijing immediately after the suppression of the armed uprising in Andijan (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009: 64). Tashkent also received support from western academics. Professor Shirin Akiner of the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies travelled to Andijan, where over two days she interviewed nearly 40 people, from madrassa students to hospital workers, morgue employees and graveyard wardens. Her conclusions, first aired in the Uzbek media, were that the government’s official statistic of 173 dead was largely accurate. On June 7, 2005, Akiner subsequently released an expanded report on her investigation, reaching the same conclusions (Akiner 2005).

Whatever be the reason behind the Andijan unrest, one message was clear for all the Central Asian states that the militants in the Central Asian region have the potentials to destabilize the existing regimes.

4.1.1.3 Political Changes in Kyrgyzstan (April 6-7, 2010)
On April 6-7, 2010 in violent protests the people of Kyrgyzstan forced the President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to leave the office and fled from the country (BBC News 2010c). Initially, he claimed the revolution unconstitutional and himself the President but
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consequently submitted his resignation. The opposition leaders formed a new interim government led by former foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva. The reasons behind the protest and political change were widespread corruption, nepotism, rising price of utility goods, to privatise energy resources, and ban on media and opposition politicians (Djumataeva 2010). These were reasons for which the Tulip revolution has taken place and the president Bakiyev has come to the power. But the situation doesn’t change and he had faced the same fate. Examples of the Bakiev’s authoritarian rules are many. He appointed his second son, Maksim, as chief of the newly created Agency for Investment and Economic Development. This agency accumulated most of the money coming into the Kyrgyzstan economy. Bakiev’s eldest son, Marat, and several brothers were appointed to high government posts. Also, three independent newspapers were shut down, and RFE/RL’s (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty) radio and television programs were banned from local stations (Djumataeva 2010).

There are some other reasons pointed out for popular revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Like some fingerprints indicate to Russian involvement also. It is believed that Moscow was disappointed with Bakiev’s government. President Bakiev didn’t keep his word reportedly given to Russia about closing down the US air base in Manas, as well as for misusing first part of a $2 billion loan (Djumataeva 2010). Though Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin rejected all claims that the Moscow played a role in the popular unrest in Kyrgyzstan, it was the first to express its support for the new interim government in Kyrgyzstan.

Now, the questions arise that is this a true democratic revolution in Kyrgyzstan? Will new government be able to solve the burning economic and social problems and fulfil the dreams and aspirations of people or is it just another change in the political regime? Was it just a people’s uprising, or had Kyrgyzstan become the theatre of power struggle for great powers like Russia and US. The international community has to wait for some time to see these changes and implications of this incident.

It is common among all the current ruling regimes to fear to some extent from the above mentioned political changes especially the Kyrgyzstan revolution in April 2010. These changes can have a domino effect on other countries in Central Asia.
But, the events may have a real effect on other Central Asian states if the uprising is about to bringing real democratic changes in Kyrgyzstan. Najibullah (2010) argued that the five Central Asian states all come under criticism in varying degrees over constraints on political freedoms, government pressure on independent media, and free speech. Nepotism and corruption, two key ingredients behind the Kyrgyzstan unrest, are common complaints across the region.

The anti-government protests in Kyrgyzstan have been portrayed as a wake-up call to other Central Asian leaders. No Central Asian leader has officially recognized the interim government in Bishkek. “When the unrest in Kyrgyzstan began to unfold, Kazakh President Nazarbayev was vocal in predicting that similar events would not take place in Kazakhstan. According to Nazarbayev, people in his oil-rich country are content with their living standards.” Nazarbayev described the situation in Kyrgyzstan as a mere ‘fight for power’ (Najibullah 2010). Other states like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has started taking preventative measure. In an April 24, 2010 address to the nation, Tajikistan President Rahmon instructed all local government heads to have “open doors” every Saturday to meet with people and listen to their opinions, problems, and complaints (Najibullah 2010).

Above examples demonstrates that the current regimes in Central Asian states does not want any political changes in their country. Even, the Central Asian governments have criticized the West’s constant criticisms about democratization, civil society, good governance, and human rights conditions in Central Asian region. And, their anti-western arguments received the support of both Russia and China (Laruelle artd Peyrouse 2009a: 27). They fear that the democratization process taking place in the name of ‘colour revolutions’ can change the geopolitical map of Central Asia and hence their fate of political power. So, the Central Asian states try to go with that power which more or less favoured their regimes. China on the same line facing separatist movement in Xinjiang and needs Central Asian support to control it.

### 4.1.2 US Military Bases in the Central Asian Region After 9/11

To attack the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001, the US had established military bases in the Central Asian states. Initially, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan welcomed America with open arms to establish US military bases to attack the
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Taliban. The US established two bases in Central Asia, one each in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, for its post-war operations in Afghanistan. Karshi-Khanabad Air Base is located in southern Uzbekistan and Manas Air Base is situated just north of Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. The US began leasing both of these Soviet-era military bases during the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. They are used primarily to station soldiers, refuelling jets, and cargo planes. Each airfield houses roughly 1,000 US troops and civilian contractors (Beehner 2006). The United States believed that the bases are necessary for its efforts in Afghanistan and also claims that it does not intend to have a permanent presence in the region.

Now, the views of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the presence of US troops on their soil are analysed. First, Uzbekistan, initially, in 2001 Uzbekistan welcomes its support to US led war against terrorism in Afghanistan. It allows US to station in Karshi-Khanabad Air Base. In exchange for hosting the US military forces, Uzbekistan received a large amount of aid packages and strategic partnership assurances. Uzbekistan receives military aid, training, and equipment from the United States. The Uzbek government receives around $150 million in annual aid packages (Beehner 2006). Further, under the terms of ‘Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework’ with the US in 2002, Uzbekistan receives security assurances against “external threats.” Some Uzbek also believed that the US military plays a stabilizing force in a region prevalent with Islamic extremism.

But, after some time Uzbekistan’s support to US to maintain military bases deteriorated and finally it urged to close it. The relation between Washington and Tashkent goes bitter since May 13, 2005 uprising in Andijan. Subsequently to the Andijan incident, US State Department condemned the Uzbek’s government’s handling of the violent uprising and called on President Karimov to launch an independent investigation. The President of Uzbekistan Karimov, called the Andijan incident a crackdown against Islamic militants and suggested in speeches that the uprising may have been masterminded by US agents. The US responded by withholding $11 million in aid until Uzbekistan agrees to an independent investigation of the incident. Afterwards, the Uzbek government put restraints on the US military to use of its base, including a ban on night flights and limits on C-17 cargo plane landings (Beehner 2006). However, Tashkent denies that these
restictions are linked with the Andijan uprising. Relations between them have further deteriorated to the point where Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld left Uzbekistan off on his recent trip travelled to Central Asia in July 25 2005 to discuss the US military arrangements in the region, instead visiting Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Then the President of Uzbekistan urged the US to close down the military bases.

US military presence in Kyrgyzstan is in Manas Air field. Kyrgyzstan support the US led war on terrorism and give permission to use its soil to launch attacks in Afghanistan in 2001. However, experts believe that Kyrgyzstan’s main motivation for leasing the military base has economic dimension as well. “The U.S. base is the greatest source of foreign currency for the Kyrgyz,” says Charles William Maynes, president of the Eurasia Foundation, referring to the steep user fees the US government pays for the base at Manas. “For them to lose this would be a big thing” he added. The base contributes some $50 million to Kyrgyzstan's economy each year, according to the Associated Press. In addition, Bishkek receives roughly $10 million in annual military aid from the US (Beehner 2006).

On the other hand, the Kyrgyzstan position’s on hosting US forces after the tulip revolution are similar to that of Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan’s president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was voted into power in July 2005, after the so-called Tulip Revolution in March 2005, which deposed long time President Askar Akayev. Bakiyev called immediately on the US to announce a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces from Manas. Finally, on February 20, 2009 the Kyrgyzstan president Kurmanbek Bakiyev has signed a decree to close a US airbase reported Central Asian News Net (Central Asian News .Net 2009). This will give US 180 days to withdraw some 1,200 personnel, aircraft and other equipments from the airbase. Experts say that Bakiyev is bending to the will of China and Russia and wants withdrawal of American military from its soil. It is believed that Bakiyev announced plans to close the only US base in Central Asia after talks in Moscow early February in 2009, when he secured more than $2 billion in aid and loans from Russia (Central Asian News.Net 2009). But both Russia and Kyrgyzstan have denied any link between the aid deal and the closure of the Manas base. Meanwhile, Russia, which has an airbase in Kant, a short distance from the Manas base, recently said it was ready to allow Washington to use that base for non-military supplies to Afghanistan.
The decision to close the airbase was setback for US President as Barack Obama sanctioned to send an additional 17,000 soldiers to Afghanistan to fight Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters (Cooper 2009). Russia and China has also pressured the US to remove its forces from Kyrgyzstan and in Uzbekistan. But, the American diplomats worked hard to retain the Manas Air Base and their hard work paid off. According to the new agreement signed on June 2009, the use of Manas Air Base was extended for one year till July 2010 depending upon the situation in Afghanistan. The rent was increased to $60 million annually from $17.4 million (Schwirtz and Levy 2009). The air base was renamed as transit centre rather than air base. The Kyrgyzstan will control security around the base in place of American military personnel. Washington has also pledged to pay $36.6 million to expand the airport and will contribute millions of dollars toward economic development and the fight against drug trafficking. Possibly, this big economic incentive is behind the reversal of Kyrgyzstan government decision to close the air base.

Another Central Asian state of Tajikistan does not host any US troops; however, it shares an 800-mile border with Afghanistan and offers the United States air-space rights and refuelling privileges at Tajikistan airfields. In return the US has offered the Tajikistan government financial assistance, as well as to provide more training for its border guards to better curb the flow of narcotics and arms out of Afghanistan.

The US military bases in Central Asian soil (2001 onwards) are not welcomed by the Central Asian states themselves. It seems that initially the Central Asian states welcomed the US military presence for two reasons. First, they will get heavy amount of money which they urgently need for economic development. Second, to get help to flush out the religious extremists present in their soil. From 2005 onwards, Central Asian changed their mind for the continuation of the presences of military base. The ruling elite in both states believed that US is encouraging democratic forces in their country and it is harmful to their regimes. Both states reportedly believed that US is pushing forward pro-democratic forces in the Central Asian geopolitical space. They feared that if situation prevail this military presence may be used in the chain of regime changes in this region in the case of above mentioned Andijan and Tulip revolutions. So, they start opposing the presence of these military bases. The
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Uzbekistan has scrapped the US-Uzbekistan strategic partnership agreement. At the SCO's July 5 summit, Uzbek President Islam Karimov, whose government is widely accused of corruption and human-rights abuses, said Washington has "far-reaching geopolitical plans, the final aim of which is to change the balance of power and dominate the Central Asian region" (Beehner 2006). In addition, Central Asian leaders accused Washington of seeking a permanent presence in the region for reasons unrelated to its war on terrorism. Uzbekistan has already closed the base while Kyrgyzstan has first decided but again changed its decisions to close the military base at Manas. It seems the super power rivalry between the US and Russia to strengthen their position in the Central Asian region.

4.1.3 The Islamic Fundamentalism

Islamic militancy in Central Asia has for many years represented a major security concern of the five Central Asian republics - particularly Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Most prominent is the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Uzbekistan who opposes the then current regime of Uzbek government. The IMU's area of operation is primarily in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Soderblom 2004: 6-7). The confrontation between the IMU and the Central Asian governments culminated in 1999-2000 in battles with the armed forces of Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (International Crisis Group, Asia Report, 2001). Although it suffered many casualties during the US military campaign in Afghanistan, the IMU hasn't been entirely destroyed. Another illegal Islamic organisation, the Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (Party of Islamic Liberation), based in Uzbekistan, is also known to be very active in the region. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is an international movement active in various parts of the Islamic world, with the declared goal of re-establishing the 'Caliphate' and Islamic, Shari‘ah-based rule (International Crisis Group, Asia Report 2001: 7).

In the issue of handling Islamic fundamentalism in the Central Asian geopolitical space, Central Asian states as well as Russia, China and US have common interest. It is clear that Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan has a profound impact on the geopolitical map of the Central Asian region. America has established military bases in the Central Asian region because of this reason only. Initially, the Central Asian support to US war on terror was based on the idea that it will be helpful for the
Central Asian states to solve their own problem of Islamic Fundamentalism. Even, Russia and China also supported the US action on Afghanistan to handle their problem of terrorism. China is facing Muslim Uighur separatism in its Xinjiang province bordering Central Asian region. But seeing long term intention of US military presence in Central Asian States, which sparks security to Russia and China, started opposing US military presence in the region. Later on Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan also joined Russia and China on this issue and decided to close down the military bases.

The US military involvement in the Central Asian region has solidified the presence of religious fundamentalist forces in the Central Asian region to some extent. The alleged presence of Fundamentalist forces in Andijan violence is an example. Further, the resurgence of Taliban in the NWFP in Pakistan and the Pakistan's government agreement with the pro-Taliban forces to implement 'Shariat' law in its own Swat valley of FATA region is also linked with it. These developments are also matters of worry to Central Asian leaders. Central Asian states fears that if the extremist forces gets foothold in Afghanistan then they will moves towards north to sustain themselves in Afghanistan. They will try to establish Islamic state throughout the neighbouring region. This will be a dangerous situation for the secular Central Asian states. Being, geographical neighbouring countries, Central Asian states and China are linked with each other in the issue of religious extremism. Because, the extremists stay, trained, carry away attacks and moves into the entire geographic region of Central Asia.

Commenting on the June 2010 ethnic violence in southern Osh city in Kyrgyzstan Cohen (2010) said that Kyrgyzstan could allowed fall down into civil war. In this ethnic violence more than 120 peoples have reportedly been killed, 1500 wounded and 75,000 refugees mostly Uzbek ethnic people fleeing into Uzbekistan till June 14, 2010 (Cohen 2010). Then the ethnic unrest will not just confine to Central Asian region and has far reaching consequences. The extremist's forces such as Hizb ut-Tahrir (Army of Liberation) and Islamic Movement of Turkistan, affiliated with Al-Qaeda, could exploit this opportunity and expand their propaganda and terror activities. The extremist could exploit the fragile environment to get grounds in those areas. Further, they can spread up to other parts of the Central Asian region. Apart from it, Osh and Jalal-Abad are the trans-shipping nodes for the Afghan heroin export
routes. From there, the drugs pour into Kazakhstan and Russia, and then Western Europe. More chaos means easier drug shipments (Cohen 2010). To control this type situations the stability of Central Asian states are necessary to maintain.

4.1.4 Fear of Russian Dependency
A certain tension was in the air in Central Asian region against Russia by the brief war between Russia and Georgia and the Russian-induced declarations of independence by the Georgian enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 (The Economist August 28, 2008). Even if the region need not fear Russian invasion, the war in the Caucasus does pose a threat. As Sultan Akimbekov, editor of the Kazakh magazine, Kontinent, puts it, “our region does not want to decide which side to take. We just want to have what we have today. And, if the confrontation between Russia and the West worsens further, that may no longer be possible” (The Economist August 28, 2008). Russia’s military humiliation of Georgia and its standoff with America have unsettled the region.

Russia has tried to maintain its influence in the Central Asian region in the field of energy resources and security. The Central Asian states are heavily dependent on Russian pipeline for their export of oil and gas resource, also, Russia is the largest trade partner. Central Asian states fears that their excessive dependence on Russia will be hurdle in the path of gaining true independence. So, they are trying to diversify their pipeline route to different direction other than Russia. The Central Asian countries are looking to diversify markets for their oil and gas. Turkmenistan, for example, is looking to Iran. The Korpezhe-Kurt Kui pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran, which was launched in 1997, is the first natural-gas export pipeline in Central Asia to bypass Russia. The Atasu-Alasonku pipeline between Kazakhstan-China also shows the desire of Central Asian states to reduce the excessive dependence on Russian pipeline transport infrastructure. Recently a new Turkmenistan – China pipeline and Second Turkmenistan-Iran gas pipeline was also opened. As Central Asian states are landlocked, they are dependent on the neighbouring states for transit route to their energy resources. Earlier, they were part of Soviet Union and all oil routes passed through Russia. But, when they got independence from Russia, they are looking for alternate pipeline routes. In this connection, oil hungry China will be the right choice for energy export. All these issues are discussed in detail in the next
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To check the Russian dependence Central Asian states are looking around other powers. They want to cash the growing interests US and China in the region. Central Asian states thinks that building good relations with this powers as well as other regional powers like Iran, India Turkey, will helpful to check Russian dependency in the region. In this connection Central Asian states welcome to China, has many dimensions. First, due to the land-locked location of Central Asia, there was a need to open new routes to the sea and gain port-access on China’s east-coast. Second, Russia’s dominance in the region restricted the options available to Central Asian states. Central Asian states thus welcomed the involvement of China or any other actor that presented them with more options. The fear of extremism in the region compels Central Asian states to initiate security cooperation with Russia and China (Liao 2006: 63). Taliban forces are still dominant in Afghanistan that makes Central Asian state’s cooperation with US, Russia and China more relevant to check their spread in Central Asian region.

4.1.5 Fear of China’ Dominance

Some speculations have been made in the Central Asian regions about the possible Chinese domination in the field of security, economy and demographic expansion and monopoly in energy sector. The possible China’s territorial expansion in the Central Asian region is flawed as the China and neighbouring states of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan has solved their boundary disputes peacefully. Kuakenov (2009) in a discussion said that the Chinese territorial expansion is not a real threat since there is SCO which promises to keep territorial integrity of the participating members. And, also the world community will not tolerate the Chinese territorial expansion. When whole of the world market is flooded with Chinese goods, it’s common among the Central Asian countries about the apprehension of Chinese domination in economic field. But, this threat doesn’t have solid ground as Russia is still the major trade partner of Central Asian states in compare to China (Paramonov and Strokov 2007: 4). In the future it may possible that China can dominate the Central Asian region in economic field.

With its large territory and abundant natural resources, Central Asia is logically a
place for China to desire. Therefore, the threat of ‘yellow peril’ in the Central Asian region is also aired sometimes given the fact that Central Asian states have less population in compare to the Chinese population. The facts allegedly speak for themselves, “Central Asia as a whole has fewer than 60 million inhabitants, whereas, over-populated China contains nearly one and a half billion people” (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009a: 159). From this viewpoint, Xinjiang is almost systematically cast as the key example of the Chinese quest for a new lebensraum. Central Asian experts indeed allege that the settlement of millions of Han in Xinjiang constitutes the development program for the Western region (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009a: 160). The Han settlement in Xinjiang changed the ethnic composition of Uighur. Experts assume that from Xinjiang, China can move towards Central Asian states. The ethnic composition of Xinjiang has changed since China’s incorporation of Xinjiang. It is now 46% of Uighur and to 39 % ethnic Han population in the beginning of 21st century (Dillon 2004: 25). Thus, the non-Han populations are in a majority in the region but not in the overwhelming numbers that they were in the 1940s. But, from this threat the Central Asian states need not to worry because the North-western part of the China is still under populated region. If there is any question of Han settlement arises then it will be first in these under populated region.

In the energy sector the fear of Chinese monopoly is exaggerated (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009). Russia is still the biggest export route for Central Asian energy resources. Besides, there are other Western oil and Gas company present in the Central Asian region. The Central Asian states see their opening up of other export route which bypasses Russia as a way of only guaranteeing autonomy.

Besides, the above mentioned threat perception of Central Asian states about China they have maintained good relations with China. From 2005 onwards, the official friendship between China and Central Asia has developed to the extent that all Central Asian heads of state now make pointed statements about the major role that they reserve for China in their foreign policy and economic development (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009a: 65). There have number of issues in which they bound to cooperate due to their geopolitical setting. The field of cooperation ranges from controlling the Islamic extremist to opposing the allegedly western supported regime changes in the Central Asian geopolitics space. In the economic field the Central Asian states wants
to get advantage from the economic development of China. In the energy sector China offers the profitable export route as well as promising market. In the current priority list of Central Asian states, China's position is second after Russia. But, in the coming days, China may become first preference (Medeubaeve 2009).

4.2 Chinese Security Threat Linked within Central Asian Geopolitical Space

4.2.1 Internal

4.2.1.1 Separatist Movement in XUAR

Since the Han Dynasty established the Western Regions Frontier Command in Xinjiang in 60 B.C., the Chinese central governments of all historical periods exercised military and administrative jurisdiction over Xinjiang (Chinese Government White Paper on History and Development of Xinjiang 2003). The jurisdiction of the central governments over the Xinjiang region was strong and weak, depending on the stability of the period. China incorporated the Xinjiang region in 1949 and in 1955, it formally became the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR), establishing Chinese rule with provincial governance.

Xinjiang is China's western border province comprising 18% of the country's entire land area. It is a region beset by change, and increasingly, confrontation between two very distinct peoples – the more recently arrived, Han Chinese and the indigenous Uyghur Turkish Muslims (Fuller and Starr 2003: 4). The confrontation revolves primarily around a struggle for domination over the province and a Uyghur quest for autonomy or even independence from Beijing's rule. This conflicting interests and goals of these two communities narrate the current realities in Xinjiang. Uighurs are struggling to establish separate homeland of East Turkistan in the Xinjiang region.

Before, going deep into the reasons and starting of separatist movement in the Xinjiang it is important to point out the evolution of term ‘East Turkistan.’ The term 'Turkistan' appeared in Arabic geographical works in the Middle Ages. It meant “the region of the Turks” and referred to the areas north of the Sir River in Central Asia and the adjoining areas to the east of the river. With the evolution of history, the modern ethnic groups in Central Asia were established one after another. By the 18th century, the geographical concept of ‘Turkistan’ was already very vague, and almost nobody used it again in the historical records of the time (Chinese Government White
In the early 19th century, with the growing colonial expansion of the imperialist powers into Central Asia, the geographical term ‘Turkistan’ was revived. In 1805, Timkovsky, a Russian, used the term ‘Turkistan’ again in a diplomatic mission’s report to describe the geographical position of Central Asia and the Tarim Basin in China’s southern Xinjiang. In view of the different histories, languages, customs and political affiliations of the two areas, he called the Tarim Basin in China’s Xinjiang situated to the east of ‘Turkistan’ as ‘East Turkistan’ or ‘Chinese Turkistan.’ In the middle of the 19th century, Russia annexed the three Central Asian khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Kokand one after another, and set up the “Turkistan Governorship” in the Hezhong (Samarkand) area of Central Asia. Therefore, some people in the West called the Hezhong area ‘West Turkistan’ or ‘Russian Turkistan,’ and China’s Xinjiang region ‘East Turkistan’ (Chinese Government White Paper on History and Development of Xinjiang 2003).

The analysis in the above paragraph indicate that the whole region of present day Central Asia and Chinese Xinjiang region was integrated with each other in terms of history, language, and culture and called as Turkistan. But, from the administrative purpose it was divided into East and West Turkistan with China and Russia as the respective administrative power in middle of the 19th century. Since then the ‘East Turkistan’ which is now present day Xinjiang region is fighting with the Chinese Central authority to gain independence and established separate Uighur nation.

Before 1949 there were two incidents when the ethnic Uighur created disturbances in the Xinjiang region and established their own rule in Xinjiang region. In November 1933, Sabit Damolla and others founded the so-called “East Turkistan Islamic Republic” in Kashi, but it collapsed in less than three months. In 1944, the “Revolution of the Three Regions,” which was part of Chinese people’s democratic revolutionary movement, broke out against the Kuomintang rule (the three regions referred to Ili, Tacheng and Altay). But, separatist Elihan Torae (an Uzbek from the former Soviet Union) usurped the leadership of the revolution in its early days, and founded the so-called “Republic of East Turkistan” in Yining, with himself as its “chairman.” In June 1946, Ahmatjan Kasimi and Abduckerim Abbasov, leaders of the
revolution, dismissed him from that post, and reorganized the “Republic of East Turkistan” as the Advisory Council of the Ili Sub-provincial Administrative Region (Chinese Government White Paper on History and Development of Xinjiang 2003).

The major sources of dissatisfaction of the Ethnic Uighur are violation of their socio-economic and cultural rights, and Han immigration. The Han immigration has changed the ethnic composition of Xinjiang in favour of Han peoples. Some, chronological accounts of the separatist movements in Xinjiang since its incorporation in the Peoples Republic of China, are mentioned below.

4.2.1.1.1 Khotan Uprising (1954)

The first major resistance to the Chinese was the Khotan uprising in December 1954 in southern Xinjiang. "The main cause behind this uprising was the agricultural cooperative movement in China in mid-1950’s, which gave the birth to People’s communes during the Great Leap Forward period, 1958-56" (Debata 2007: 137).

4.2.1.1.2 Ili Disturbance (1962)

Though Khotan uprising failed, it became a major source of for other protest movement in the region. The people of Ili raised their voice against the grain rationing system, Han migration, rivalry between Military Land Reclamation Units of Xinjiang division and the local residents over scarce agricultural land, water and pastures. This resulted in major disturbance in the city of Ili in April-May 1962 leading to the mass exodus of 60,000 people (mostly Kazakh and Uyghurs) and 3,000 cattle to former Soviet Union (Millward 2004: 6). Those who fled including the former officials of Chinese Communist Party, government, military and public security, set up Turkistan People’s Liberation Committee in exile (Shichor 1994: 73). This group acted as a forum for expatriate political activities.

4.2.1.1.3 East Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party (ETPRP)

In the late 1960’s the Chinese authority faced most chaotic situation in Xinjiang. This was a period of Cultural Revolution and the reign of terror by Red Guards (1966-69). In Xinjiang some underground groups raised their voice against Chinese authorities. On such prominent group was East Turkistan People’s Revolutionary Party (ETPRP). It is considered as the single largest groups in Xinjiang offering resistance to Chinese
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authorities since 1949. The ETPRP’s aim to establish an independent Turkistan is described in the documents of the *The Destiny of Uyghuria*, the ETPRP constitution and the General Programme of the ETPRP (Dillion 2004: 58).

4.2.1.1.4 Baren Uprising (1990)
Against Chinese Central Government measures towards national minorities, a group consisting mainly of Uighurs showed their dissent while attending prayers at a mosque in Baren on April 5, 1990. The Uighur turned violent when there was ban on the construction of privately sponsored mosque near the oasis of Kashgar (Shichor 1994: 74). On April 6, 1990, there were more attacks against police and other government officials and buildings, during which small arms and bombs were used (Dillion 2004: 62). From this unrest in the Xinjiang region, the Uighur revolt against the Chinese authority took a religious overtone. There were several incidents of demonstration, violence, bombings, Assassinations, killings occurred in Xinjiang from January 1990 -March 2003.¹

4.2.1.1.5 Impact of Soviet Disintegration and Independence of Central Asians States on Xinjiang Separatist Movement
The Soviet disintegration and establishment of five independent Central Asian republic have created awakening among all indigenous ethnic Muslims of Xinjiang about their Islamic and Pan-Turkic identity (Warikoo 2000: 47). Uyghurs now have before them the example of five newly independent Turkic states to their west (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). These Central Asian states were demarcated by Soviet nationalities policy in 1920’s in the line of ethnic groups. Thus, Uyghurs feels that they can also get separate and independent state in Xinjiang having ethnic Uighurs. A model of political sovereign entity based on ethnic nationalities and having cultural autonomy in the Central Asian geopolitical space inspire Uighurs to become independent from Chinese rule. China blamed former Soviet union for being instrumental in the conditions in Xinjiang since the early 1990’s. The rise and growth of radical Islam in Xinjiang was further strengthened by the rapid religious resurgence in the former Soviet Union republic in

late 1980's and early 1990's. Moreover, free travel across the Central Asian borders and Xinjiang region created awareness among the Muslim living in Xinjiang about the ethnic and politic conflicts in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan as well as economic betterment of their fellow Muslims across the border. These factors helped to intensify their feelings of deprive and subsequently gain independence from China. It was natural also as historically, Xinjiang was closely connected with Central Asia and both the regions were unified into single socio-cultural and economic region.

After disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991, the five Central Asian states, being next door neighbours to Xinjiang, and have witnessed violent separatist activities by the Uyghurs, within their territory. This illustrates the connection between Uighur extremist in Central Asian region. For Instance, in Kazakhstan, a non-violent Kazakhs Nationalist Party existed aiming at reunification with Kazakh nation in Xinjiang. Uighur Liberation Committees were set up in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan together with International Uyghur Union for Uyghurs living throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States (Ferdinand 1994: 278). There are so many instances which shows that Xinjiang Uyghur activities in the nearby Central Asian States. In 2000, the police unearthed underground hideout organized the Uyghur separatist from Xinjiang in Almaty. The Chinese authority blamed the Uyghurs separatist for the killing of Wang Jianping, the Chinese Ambassador in Kyrgyzstan and his driver, Uma Nurmuhhamed, an ethnic Uyghur, on June 29, 2002 (Alibekov 2002).

In December 2003, the Chinese Ministry of Public Security released an official list of "East Turkistan" terrorist organizations containing the names of four groups, including ETIM and ETLO, as well as the World Uyghur Youth Congress (WUYC) and the East Turkistan Information Centre (ETIC) (Xinhua Online 2003). "The four identified terrorist organizations had colluded with each other and had close connections with Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda organization, the Taliban regime of Afghanistan, Chechen rebels and other terrorist organizations" (Xinhua Online 2003). In addition to ETIM, ETLO, and ULO, China's 2002 document cites several other groups: the East Turkistan Islamic Party of Allah (to which it attributes the 1997 Yining Incident), the Shock Brigade of the Islamic Reformist Party, the East Turkistan Islamic Party, the East Turkistan Opposition Party, the Islamic Holy

Xinjiang’s geopolitical location has immense importance for China. Xinjiang occupies the oil and gas rich Tarim basin, and is China’s commercial gateway to Central Asia. Therefore it cannot overlook separatist feelings in Xinjiang and further solidification of these separatist feelings by getting inspirations from neighbouring Central Asian states. So, it has adopted all measures to check this problem.

4.2.1.6 Chinese Policy to Handle the Uyghur Separatist Problem

Until 1949, China strained to keep a tenuous grip on the region. Frequent Uighur rebellions and insurgencies, aimed at expelling the growing Chinese presence, scarred the region’s political terrain and seriously challenged Chinese authority (Kok 2004: 258). Communist victory in the Chinese Revolution (1949) ended the possibility of Uighur independence or autonomous rule, despite Mao Zedong’s pledge that national minorities would enjoy extensive freedom if the Communists emerged victorious. Mao had made such promises during the darker days of the war, when the then-struggling Communists desperately needed broad support from China’s many ethnic minorities. Afterwards, however, national unification became the overriding priority of the new regime. Today the levers of power in Xinjiang do not belong to Uighurs, and the region is autonomous in name only (Kok 2004: 258).

From 1949 onwards China had taken a number of measures to solve the problem of ethnic-religious separatism XUAR in the field of military, economy, and diplomatic initiatives with neighbouring and regional power. From 1949, China took a hard line to impose its control in Xinjiang. After 1985 it shifted to a softer approach, focusing on economic incentives, affirmative action in education, and a respectful place for the Turkic Uyghur language in public life. Then in the late 1990s, concerned over the idea of separatism and radical Islam in Xinjiang, Chinese government adopted a hard policy named “Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure” (Starr 2005). It has used this campaign to focus on crimes of separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism.

The new initiative of ‘Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure Campaign’, emphasized that public security agencies should keep close watch and ‘strike hard’ when dealing with terrorist activity, in order to safeguard national security and social stability (Dillon 2004: 84). The campaign aimed at launching a crackdown on criminals in general, it

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targeted the unofficial anti-government political organisation and in particular the separatist in Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang. Under the campaign, Chinese security forces arrested 1,300 criminals, including separatist leaders and activities destroyed 70 criminals' outfits and recovered a huge cache of arms, ammunitions and large amount of hard cash. Attacks on police, government officials and other vital installations in Urumchi were ruthlessly suppressed (Dillion 2004: 89-90).

China believes that its 'Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure' campaign is a sensible response to a genuine threat of religious extremism and separatism. Two radical Islamist groups in Xinjiang were recognized by the US and UN as terrorist organizations (Starr 2005: 32). On January 21, 2002, the Information Office of the PRC State Council released a document titled "East Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity" that provided a catalogue of violent acts allegedly committed by separatist groups in Xinjiang. It also mentions several organizations in implied connection with the incidents on the list (Millward 2004: 11-12). These actions are rationalized by China in terms of the campaign against separatism.

The location of Xinjiang demands China to get close cooperation from Central Asian neighbours in this issue. As soon as diplomatic relations were established, China began to apply pressure on the Central Asian governments to restrict the activities of Uyghur communities in their countries. Although precise data are not available, it is estimated that the Uyghur population in Kazakhstan numbers some 350,000 with around 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (each) (Shichor 2008a: 57-58). Out of this Uighur population some had settled in these countries as early as the 19th century, while some more fled Xinjiang in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of Chinese persecution (Shichor 2008a: 57-58).

After 1991, the opening of borders made the situation worse in the context of exchanging separatist idea (from the Chinese perspective) as it allowed free movement of Uyghurs from Xinjiang to Central Asia as well as from Central Asia to Xinjiang. China tried to get regional cooperation and support, which materialized in the form of SCO. Resulting this a number of Uyghurs caught in Central Asia for alleged involvement in terrorism, crime or nationalist activism were extradited to China where they stood trial, sentenced and occasionally executed. Also, some
Uyghur schools, theatres, newspapers, radio, TV stations or programs in Central Asia have been forced to close down. However, some Uighur still present but now their influences are not prominent now. At the same time, the Central Asian states also do not like to be dictated by the Chinese with regard to their own Uyghur minorities (Shichor 2008a: 57-58). If the Uyghur in Xinjiang gets continuous support from the fellow Uighur living in neighbouring Central Asian states, they will intensify their struggle against Chinese authority. In this situation it will very difficult for the Chinese authority to maintain control over Xinjiang. That's why China is very serious about getting help from Central Asian states. The SCO has adopted a convention\(^2\) to fight against terrorism, separatisms and extremism by member countries. By this China can ensure that the Central Asian states will not support Uighur separatist forces in their territory and hence it will be bit easier to control those forces in Xinjiang. Laumulin (2009) views that at present the question of ‘Uighur’ is a “sleeping”(dormant) factor between Central Asia-China relations and economic issues have taken the centre stage.

Beijing also realizes well that apart from use of forces the socio-economic development in the Xinjiang region is important instrument in the suppression of separatist ideas in the region. The basic idea is that the economic well being of ethnic Uighurs in Xinjiang would reduce the separatist tendencies and activities in Xinjiang. By improving the socio-economic development of the Uighur peoples, their attention of could be deflected from their persistent demand for a separate and independent state out of China. So, to accelerate the economic development in the Xinjiang region, China launched a major development project in the Xinjiang region named ‘Western Development Programme’, and tried to integrated the region with emerging Central Asian market. The Chinese economic development plan for Xinjiang in the 1990’s has been based upon:

1. Recentralization of economic decision making;
2. Han in-migration;
3. Exploitation of Xinjiang's hydrocarbons resources; and

4. Strengthening political, social, economic and cultural ties with Central Asia (Chung 2003)

The Western Development Programme undertaken by the Chinese government not only stress the economic development of the backward western region but also a part of China's domestic economic strategy to promote trade between Central Asia and western China. The two most important projects as part of the Western Development Programme in XUAR are: (i) The West to East natural gas pipeline from Lunan in the Tarim basin to Shanghai stretching 4,200 kms. At the cost of 15 million US dollars, and (ii) the restoration of the lower reaches of the Tarim River with the World Bank assistance (Bacquelin 2004: 364-365). The detail study of economic and trade linkages between Central Asia and China is in the next chapter. The point is that the economic development of Xinjiang also depends upon its linkages with the Central Asian states. Historically, the whole regions were socio-economically linked with each other via silksroad. So, China cannot ignore Central Asian states in this connection.

4.2.1.2 Domino Effect of Central Asian Colour Revolutions in Chinese Western Provinces

Colour revolutions or are the names given collectively to a series of pro-democratic related movements that developed in post-communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe. It is spreading elsewhere including some places in the Central Asian states. The participants in these pro-democratic movement use mostly non-violent resistance to protest against governments seen as entrenched and authoritarian, and to advocate democracy, liberalism, and national independence. In the above we have seen that there was a possible spread of colour revolutions in the form of Tulip and Andijan violence in the Central Asian region.

China fears that all these developments in the neighbouring regions have negative impact on its own territory of Xinjiang, where already separatist movement is going on. These colour revolutions can increase the spirit of separatist forces in Uighurs. So, China is opposed to any kind of this type of colour revolution in Central Asian geopolitical space. Regarding the latest political changes in Kyrgyzstan on April 6-7, 2010, China has very cautiously commented on this revolution. The Chinese Foreign
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Ministry immediately issued a statement expressing that it 'is deeply concerned' about the situation and hopes the country will restore peace soon and maintain stability. 'China hopes issues will be settled in a lawful way,' Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu told a regular briefing (Hsiao 2010). China is well aware of the fact that there has been considerable support for the rebels in their fight against social inequality and corruption, and for political democratization in Kyrgyzstan revolution. Thus, the Chinese government will do its utmost to prevent the spread of such trends to Xinjiang.

4.2.2 External Factor

4.2.2.1 China’s Border Security in Western Front

The Central Asian borderlands of China are situated along the frontier of Xinjiang with the former Soviet Union, covering altogether about 3,200 km: 56 km with Russia in the Altai mountains, 1,718 km with Kazakhstan, 980 with Kyrgyzstan, and about 450 with Tajikistan (Raczka 1998: 374). Xinjiang’s total international border is almost 5,600 km long, which constitutes a quarter of China’s total land frontier of about 22,000 km (the longest in the world). Among the provinces, other foreign neighbours are also Mongolia (1,435 km border) to the northeast and Afghanistan (80 km), Pakistan (530 km) and India (about 350 km) to the south. These geopolitical facts alone explain the importance China attaches to the region for its security and strategic projection as well as the extreme sensitivity it exhibits with respect to developments taking place in the vast area (Raczka 1998: 374). The security of border is of immense important to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any country. So, China is looking for good relations with the Central Asian countries to protect its western front.

China’s border security in the Central Asian front has three dimensions. First, attack from the neighbouring countries or from the powers stationed in these countries. China has already settled border issues with the three border states of Central Asian region peacefully (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009b: 5). The possibility of attack from the weak Central Asian side is least but aggression by any super power stationed in these states may not be ruled out, especially US military presence in Kyrgyzstan.

The US and NATO forces are already stationed in Afghanistan to fight the Al-Qaeda and Taliban since 2001. The system of bases in Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan makes it
possible for the US to exert military pressure on China, Russia or Iran. Second, the re-emergence of Taliban forces in Afghanistan and the possible connection of Uighur extremist with them. It makes China little bit fear of possible incursion of radical forces into Xinjiang. Hence, China has to maintain tight security in the western border to check infiltration into Xinjiang. Third, protect the infiltration of drug-trafficking and smuggling in western border of China. In the western border of China, lies the ‘golden crescent’, the illicit opium production area located in Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hence, the roles of Central Asian states are very crucial to maintain secure border in western front. Central Asian should not flourish sanctuaries for extremists’ forces in their soil; foreign military bases were to be closed as soon as possible and to coordinate in the issue of drug-trafficking.

4.2.2.2 Fear of Strategic Encirclement by the US
In the current global power structure US is superpower and China is emerging power. Sometimes, China fears about the strategic encirclement by US, when US established military bases within the soil of Central Asian region in the connection of its war on terror in Afghanistan in 2001. The US presence in Central Asia is strategic concerns for China as it provides US with a potential source for strategic encirclement. The danger will be more if US makes security agreement with the Central Asian state in the similar way as it has with Japan, South Korea and other East Asian countries. “Although Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea and Japan are not formally members of the NATO, they are linked through military partnerships, affiliated government agreements, a network of partnerships, and bilateral military agreements with the United States and Britain” (Nazemroaya 2007). Since 2001, US troops and warplanes are now based or have fly-over rights in its member states of Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan. The Russian government, with which China had signed a “strategic partnership”, has adapted to the new circumstances and is collaborating more closely with the US. The US is also developing military ties with India, China’s regional rival (Chan 2002). Thus, US presence in the Central Asian region makes fear in the minds of Chinese to be encircled by US in case of possible conflict with it.

The US is present in every corner of China’s border. On the Korean peninsula, the inclusion of North Korea in ‘axis of evil’ by US has pushed tensions to the brink of
war. The US has increased weapons sales to Taiwan and restated its blanket guarantee to use whatever force necessary - including nuclear weapons - to defeat any attempt by China to force the island to reunify with the mainland (Chan 2002). Washington is actively encouraging the remilitarisation of Japan to assist in putting more pressure on China. In the Pacific sea area, US forces have moved back into the Philippines, with which China has disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea. Washington has also bolstered its military ties with Australia and Thailand, overshadowing China's overtures to these US allies in recent years (Chan 2002). In the current situation, a possible war does not seems possible between US and China, but the military pressure from all sides definitely exerts pressure on China to freely conduct it moves in international arena.

The US presence in Central Asia also undermined China effort to expand its influence in Central Asia and secure access to rich deposits of oil and gas. The Chinese inspired SCO, which was aimed at forging close military, economic and political ties between China, Russia and the Central Asian states, has not been effectively worked. So, China has strongly opposed the military presence of US in Central Asian region. In this issue, China gained some support in 2005, when the member states of SCO adopted a resolution for time bound withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. China is strengthening it cooperation with Central Asian states through the SCO and with Russia to wipe out the US military presence on its backyard of Central Asian region.

4.2.2.3 NATO's march in the Central Asian Region

The NATO has expanded itself to the Central Asian region through the arrangement of Partnership for Peace programme. The NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, launched in 1994, now includes Chinese neighbours as Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Through this NATO now reaches China's northern and western frontiers (Gill and Oresman 2002). NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, visited the five Central Asian states first time on October 18-22, 2004. The visits main goals were threefold: demonstrating NATO's understanding of Central Asia's importance to Euro-Atlantic security, encouraging the region's countries to intensify bilateral cooperation with the alliance in the Partnership framework, and obtaining transit passage rights for NATO forces to Afghanistan via Central Asian countries (Socor 2004). In this visit a review of implementation of NATO's
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Partnership for Peace (PfP) with the Central Asian countries was done. Also, some possibilities of offering them to participate in NATO-led operations were made (Socor 2004).

NATO forces are also present in the western border of China, particularly in Afghanistan through the part of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) since 2001. To sustain ISAF more effectively, the NATO and its alliance seeks lines of communication and corresponding transit agreements with the Central Asian states. NATO forces are still present in the Afghanistan. At present, in December 2009, there are 68,000 U.S. troops operating under both NATO and U.S. commands, and around 42,000 non-U.S. forces under NATO (Dougherty and Labott 2009). And, it seems that they will stay in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future, as long as condition in Afghanistan doesn't improve.

This is not welcomed by China as NATO was once established to contain former Soviet Union in 1949. China believes that NATO forces in the western border can also be used to contain China in the similar fashion as in the case of former Soviet Union. But, China cannot do much regarding the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan instead hopes that the conditions in Afghanistan improve at the earliest.

4.3 Chinese Diplomatic Efforts to Counter the Security Threat
4.3.1 Strengthening Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The SCO was formed in 2001, a successor of 'Shanghai Five' which was primarily established to resolve solve border issues among the member states in 1996. One of the main goals and tasks of the SCO is 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 2001). It is believed that Chinese encouragement to the establishment of the SCO is a part of its security strategy to prevent the Uyghur separatist from using Central Asia as a launching pad for separatist and terrorist activities in Xinjiang (Komissina and Kurtov 2004: 158). Chung (2003) argues that Chinese regional security cooperation through the SCO is based on two hypotheses - first, fear of violent Islamic extremism in Central Asia spilling over to Xinjiang; and second, concern for being branded as an anti-Muslim nation worldwide by the Human
Rights group as well as the Muslim nations for the alleged suppression of the Uyghurs. China hopes the SCO will bolster the territorial integrity and secular character of the regimes in Central Asia to curb rising sentiments of Pan-Turkic nationalism, Islamic extremism, and terrorist activities in the region. A peaceful and stable Central Asia region would secure China's western borders against separatists forces crossing into Xinjiang.

China has never officially elaborated its strategic objectives in Central Asia through SCO. However, the word ‘Shanghai’ in the renamed Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) reflects its principal strategic objectives in Central Asia. China has articulated these objectives officially through the SCO charter as the struggle against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism all directly related to Xinjiang actual problems. After 2001, the US military presence in Afghanistan in the wake of war on terrorism added one more undefined objective to check US influence in Central Asia. (Shichor 2008a: 56-57). China postulates this as a threat to security in Xinjiang, and also its political, economic and strategic influence in Central Asia. To counter such threat China realised the meaningful relationship with all the Central Asian states. China has been able to make strong bond with the Central Asian states through SCO mechanism.

Since its establishment, the SCO has advanced with some remarkable achievements in security cooperation for all the member states. The cooperation is mainly displayed in many aspects. The border problem of China and Central Asian states were resolved by the development of Confidence-building measures within the members of SCO. Within the frameworks of the SCO, and due to joint efforts of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, all the border disputes of more than 3,000 kms that had bred instability and conflicts for centuries, were completely solved in short period of time. There is close cooperation in the struggle against the trans-border evil forces of terrorism. Within the frameworks of the SCO, the member's states established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), a solid step in the struggle against extremism and terrorism. SCO is also helpful in maintaining the stability and security in the Central Asian region. Within SCO frameworks, the Central Asian region managed to restrain the conflicts like the civil war in Afghanistan in late 1990's from spreading in the region. One can say that if there was no system of the
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SCO, the Taliban could have possibly continued marching northwards, and the Afghan conflict could have possibly spread to the neighbouring countries as well. In this regard, the SCO is playing an essential role in maintaining the regional security and stability.

Russia and China also argues the hands of US behind the ‘colour revolutions’ in the Eurasian geopolitical space. Moscow and Beijing believed that U.S. non-governmental organizations were behind the opposition movements and the ‘colour revolutions’ in Central Asia (People's Daily 2005). The cooperative move by Russia and China to oppose US military presence was visible in the SCO when a declaration calling for the US to set a timeline for its withdrawal of military forces from Central Asian region was issued on July 5, 2005. Russia and China believed that the US military bases were not meant to be permanent and were only installed to assist the US led war in Afghanistan, which SCO members believed, has ended. On the other hand, according to US the primarily aim to established military bases in Central Asian flush out the Taliban and other terrorists that are not finished yet. So, Washington had rejected the demands, stating that the military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are part of bilateral agreements with the respective governments not with the SCO. US had closed the military base in Uzbekistan after the demand came from Uzbek government. But the US base is continued in Kyrgyzstan.

The western media postulates that SCO is being used by Russia and China as a vehicle to assert their influence in the region (Beehner 2006). US think that in the matter of closing military bases in Uzbekistan, the respective states have taken decision under heavy pressure from Russia and China. Moreover, it is also an established impression among US officials that SCO is China's primary multilateral instrument to implement its anti-US policy in Central Asian region (Blank 2007). China proclaims that the SCO is a not directed to any third country. Although the SCO is undeniably an attempt to counter western influence in the heart of the Eurasian continent, there is no member state that wants to implement aggressive policies clearly aimed at opposing US interests (Iwashita 2004). China cannot afford to be declared as one of Washington’s rival countries since its economy is very dependent on its relations with the United States. As for the Central Asian states, they want to maintain relations with the West to balance the influence of both Russia and
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China, as well as to reach out of their international isolation.

The function of SCO as a regional security guarantor is also questioned by some experts in Central Asian states. The director of the Centre for Politics, Religion and Security in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Orozbek Moldaliev, points out that the SCO was neither able to intervene in Afghanistan nor to halt the ‘coloured revolutions’, and therefore does not seem to have the capacity to resolve any large political crises (Moldaliev 2008). While, the director of the Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies (KISI) in Almaty, Kazakhstan, Bulat Sultanov, manifests hopefulness about the role of SCO. He argues that the SCO is not a Russo-Chinese creation but a collective solution to the internal security of Central Asia, an opinion which is far from shared by the rest of the expert community (Lauerle and Peyrouse 2009a: 121). Seidullaevna (2009) argues that SCO’s main aim is not to change the geopolitical structure of the Central Asian region but to preserve the current geopolitical structure of the region. According to Central Asian states the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is perceived to more effective guarantee of Central Asian military security than SCO.

In real terms China wanted to secure its Central Asia backyard. In US dominated unipolar world in military field China and Russia are looking to create a multi-polar world. The establishment of SCO may serve as a forum of cooperation in this direction. Through SCO, China and Russia seek to strengthen their strategic partnership and create a world in which the United States will find it difficult to dominate international affairs. This partnership under the umbrella of SCO is seen as an expanding instrument against the western influence in Eurasian region.

4.3.2 Russia-China Cooperation

To protect the earlier mentioned fear in Central Asian region, China is looking for Russian cooperation. Chinese and Russian is cooperation in the region is useful for both the states as well as for the Central Asian region. Both the states have common interest in many subjects in the Central Asian region. Both countries find themselves threatened by terrorism, separatism and extremism. To safeguard their interest and for regional stability they have coordinated with Central Asian states under the SCO mechanism. Both countries feel concerned about the growing military presence of the
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West and NATO expansion into the region. Both countries take a strong interest in tapping energy resources in the Central Asian region. Both China and Russia claim to have been the victims of Washington’s policies of containment; China because of the United States’ activism in the Pacific, and Russia because of the regime changes in the post-Soviet space. On the geopolitical level both states calls for multi-polar world against the uni-polar world led by US. In this matter Beijing agree in their view of the maintaining Russia’s military and strategic supremacy in the region for its own interest. Russia’s military presence in Central Asia does not raise any problems for China because it limits American presence and ensures that China will have stability on its borders (Swanstrom 2005).

Russia and China also have differences in matter relating to energy and trade. Russia is trying to maintain its traditional influence and dominant position in Central Asia. In the field of energy in Central Asian region, Russia wants to maintain upper hand by controlling the exporting pipelines. It sees losing grounds to China when new pipelines started flowing oil and gas resources from Central Asia to China. Russia believes it would hamper its own interests in Central Asia energy field and its share of the vast Chinese energy market will be reduced. Russia and China are highly significant trading partners for the Central Asian countries. The figures for 2006 show Russia having about a 17% share of the foreign trade of the Central Asian countries and China about a 12% share (Paramonov and Strokov 2007: 3). In recent years the Chinese share is increasing.

The cooperation between Central Asian states, Russia and China in the region is much needed for the stability and security of the region. The common struggle against the Islamist threat is on area and all the three sides are backing each other to prevent Islamic extremism. China, for example, has backed the Russia in its wars in Chechnya, while Russia and the Central Asian states have supported the Chinese policy on Xinjiang, and Moscow and Beijing have contributed technological and military know-how to help the Central Asian regimes fight not only the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), but also the broader secular political opposition (Lauerlle and Peyrouse 2009a: 28). A geo-strategic rapprochement is also materializing on the Afghan question. For the Central Asian states, Afghanistan remains an “open wound” which feeds Islamism, drugs, and arms
networks, and prevents the development of relations with the South. So long as there is no stability in Kabul, it will be difficult for the Central Asian states to develop economic relations (in the form of pipelines, export of electricity, or business relations) with India or Pakistan (Starr 2007). China shares Central Asia’s concerns and wants to see stability in Afghanistan. The cooperation between Russia and China in Central Asian states will turn out to be beneficial for the economic development and the long-term stability of the region. At present all are cooperating with each other via SCO mechanism in the Central Asian region.

4.3.3 Improving Bilateral Relations with Central Asian States

China realises the importance of the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are immediate neighbours along the Xinjiang border. The inter-ethnic presence Uighur population on both sides of border has significant value for Chinese security interest. China’s expectations from the Central states are many. First, Central Asian states does not make sanctuary for the separatist forces operating in Xinjiang, Second, these state do not poses foreign military base on their soil. Third, these states plays significant role in Chinese energy security. While, Central Asian states look China for diversification of energy resources and for larger economic cooperation.

On the other side, the Central Asian states seems on pursuing a ‘multi-vector’ approach to foreign policy, essentially diversifying their foreign policy interests and seeking to play the regional and global powers like China, Russia and the United States against each other in an effort to negotiate generous security assistance packages (Mevlut 2004). China warm relationship with the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has a promising prospect to stabilise the region. Ongoing cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries within the framework of the SCO can help serve regional economic integration and can help solve common security and development problems.

Chinese diplomatic relations with Central Asia have taken their course slowly. Laumulin (2009) believes that China’s policy initiative towards Central Asian states are based on realpolitik, and hence, it advances step by step. In the first half of the 1990s, China’s main intend was to resolve its border disputes with the newly
independent Central Asian states to an end. In the second half of the 1990’s, it sought to promote stability and security of the Central Asian regimes in order to stay away from difficult Uyghur problem. At the beginning of the 21st century, China launched active strategy for energy resources (Hu 2005). And finally, since 2005, it gear up itself to enhance strategic interests in the Central Asian region.

4.3.3.1 China-Kazakhstan

China is very much serious about its relationship with Kazakhstan, which stems from its security interest in the volatile north-western. Out of the 500,000 Uyghurs in Central Asia states (Chung 2004), a little more than forty percent (approximately 210,000) live in Kazakhstan alone, mostly in Almaty, Zhambyl and southern Kazakhstan region (Nadyrov 2003). Pursuing both economic and diplomatic tactics to befriend this Central Asian neighbour, Chinese Premier Li Peng, during the Central Asian visit in April 1994, had discussion with Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev. Both leaders signed an agreement defining the border between China and Kazakhstan. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev assured the Chinese leadership not to provide any support to the East Turkistan separatist and non-intervention in China's internal affairs. Further, in the ‘Shanghai Five’ summit in Moscow (24 April, 1997) on Border Region Arms Reduction”, Chinese President Jiang Zemin and his Kazakh counterpart Nursultan Nazarbayev issued a joint statement condemning separatism in China. President Nazarbayev categorically stated that Kazakhstan opposes any organisation on its soil advocating anti-Chinese activities (Dillion 2004: 144). The opening of the Atasu-Alasankou pipeline in December 2005 further strengthens the cooperation between these two states.

4.3.3.2 China-Kyrgyzstan

Chinese relation with Kyrgyzstan started with the signing of a joint official announcement on the establishment of diplomatic relation on January 5, 1992. Kyrgyzstan, which has a sizeable Uyghur population, openly stated its opposition to any form of anti-Chinese activities from its soil. During the Shanghai Five summit in Shanghai on April 26, 1996 China and Kyrgyzstan both agreed to oppose any form of separatism besides strengthening bilateral economic cooperation. Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev paid a five day official visit to China on April 26 1998. During meeting with Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the visiting leader pledged Kyrgyzstan's strong

On August 14, 2007 China and Kyrgyzstan signed in Bishkek a comprehensive joint statement on bilateral relations, anti-terrorism, military cooperation, trade promotion and other major international issues of common concern making to strengthen the relation. Both states feel that the fight against the terrorist group, East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), is an important part of the international anti-terror struggle. China appreciates and supports Kyrgyzstan's efforts to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism in Central Asia. China and Kyrgyzstan agreed to implement the extradition treaty between the two countries signed in April 1998, and to cooperate closely to fight different kinds of cross-border crimes, in order to deal with non-traditional security threats and challenges more effectively. (Xinhua, August 15, 2007).

4.3.3.3 China- Tajikistan
Immediately after independence, Tajikistan got deeply involved in a civil war in 1992 that ended in 1997. Fearing the spill over effects of the Tajik situation on Xinjiang region, which shares a 450 km long border with Tajikistan, the Chinese authorities had to maintain good relationship with Tajikistan.

Visiting Chinese President Hu Jintao and his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon have agreed to enhance the good-neighbourly and cooperative relations between the two neighbours, said a joint statement issued in Dushanbe in August 2008. According to the statement, the two sides agreed that the Chinese-Tajik, ‘Good-Neighbourly and Friendly Cooperation Treaty” signed last year bears historic and realistic significance by forging a solid legal basis for the development of bilateral ties. The two countries pledged to abide by the guidelines and principles formulated in the treaty and to carry out the implementation of all political documents signed since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the statement said (People’s Daily 2008).

Apart from these three bordering states, China is being supported by Uzbekistan and
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Turkmenistan also to curb extremism and separatism through various meetings in SCO summit. Establishment of the SCO has definitely created favourable conditions and new opportunities for developing China-Central Asian relations. In terms of security, China and the Central Asia states share common interests. The actions of ethnic separatists, religious extremists and the threat of transnational crime, terrorism and regional conflict are mutual concerns. Maintaining the stability of Central Asia and the western border areas of China is win-win situation for everyone.

4.4 Summary

This chapter analyzes the various threat perceptions of Central Asian states and China in relation to the ongoing geopolitical struggle going on between different regional and global powers mentioned in Chapter three. The major security dilemmas for the Central Asian states mentioned here are: fear of regime changes in the context of Tulip Revolution (Kyrgyzstan), Andijan Crisis (Uzbekistan), and Political Changes in Kyrgyzstan (2010); US military bases in the Central Asian region after 9/11; the Islamic Fundamentalism; fear of Russian Dependency and lastly the fear of Chinese Dominance. Whereas, Chinese security dilemmas are related to its separatist movement in Xinjiang, strategic encirclement by US and NATO, and the possible domino effect of colour revolutions in Central Asian geopolitical space. In the last section Chinese policy to handle these threats are discussed. China has made full effort to strengthen the SCO besides improving and making strategic bilateral relations with the bordering Central Asian states.