CHAPTER-V

RUSSIA–CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS SINCE 1991

The role of Russia in newly independent Central Asian Republics became visible in Tashkent treaty on collective security. The treaty, signed on 15 May 1992, regulated Russia’s military relations with Central Asian neighbours. The list of the participant signatories featured a clear Russian-Central Asian alliance having a southern or Central Asian orientation. The treaty was signed in Tashkent by the representatives of six states – Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It showed a mutual desire of Russia and Central Asian states to aim for military cooperation. The aim of the treaty was to provide an important multilateral umbrella for military cooperation between the signatory states and legitimizing Russia’s historical military-strategic commitment to each of the participants.

Turkmenistan abstained from signing the collective security treaty since it perceived the treaty as an absurdity at a time when the joint army of the commonwealth was being torn apart by conflicts.²


Turkmenistan, however, signed bilateral military treaty with Russia at a later stage which will be discussed in the chapter. This reflected Turkmenistan’s choice of Russia as guarantor of its security and stability in the region. Armenia on the other hand, joined the treaty due to its geo-strategic position and constant threat of a full-scale war with Azerbaijan. Kyrgyzstan delegation’s refusal to sign the treaty was linked to the absence of Askar Akayev from the meeting.

The selective participatory interaction showed the growing centrifugal tendencies within CIS and, the attempts of Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan to dilute close military relations with Russia. Russia was cautious of the criticism of the prospect of sharing strategic and ‘common purpose’ troops with Central Asian states. Despite the warnings that these states will be burden for Russia’s future, the treaty, on the part of Russia, recognized the necessity to keep Central Asia within the Russian military-political influence. The other aim Russia wanted to realize was to support the existing status quo in the region. With the fall of Nazibullah regime in Afghanistan and turmoil in Tajikistan, the politicians, academics and military officials in Russia became more sensitive to the emerging and potential volatile strategic threats emanating from Central Asia and the CIS southern underbelly. In Moscow, the military authorities were concerned with Russia’s vital interests in keeping the air defence complex, space monitoring
installations and existing military infrastructure intact. In the context of rising regional instability, growing rivalry among regional actors, Central Asian political elites perceived their strategic interest in allying with Russia.

The pointed support for Russia’s position was expressed by Uzbekistan not only during the Tashkent summit meeting but also during Boris Yeltsin’s visit to Samarkand in 1992. Concerned over the rapid development of events in neighbouring Tajikistan and Afghanistan, the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, wanted to see the Russian Federation as a kind of “guarantor of stability” in his region, or, put more simply, as a guarantor of the survival of the administration that exists in Tashkent. In part, similar considerations guided the President of Turkmenistan who was less fearful of the consequences of outside influence, but was more interested in Russia’s presence in the region as a welcome counterbalance to Iran. Central Asian republics because of their newly achieved independence, multiethnic society and demographic complexities experienced numerous tensions and were prone to various conflict situations. Russia as a of its geopolitical, economic and cultural entity was considered to be more productive in

3 "Tashkent Summit Signals CIS Realignment", n.1, p. 2.
4 Ibid.
terms of military-political and military-operational cooperation between Russia and Central Asian states.

A consensus among the Russian political elite forged the need for the Russian Federation to play a more assertive and pro-active role in the post-Soviet Russia. This role, Russian strategists argued, was imposed upon Russia by its unique geopolitical position, history, a host of new challenges from 'near abroad' and enduring interdependence between the Russian 'heartland' and the rest of the former republics. This interdependence was enhanced by the distinctive legacy of the Tsarist and Soviet continental reach. Unlike the French or British overseas empire, the Russian empire was a geographically continuous entity, with much stronger demographic, cultural and economic links.

Early attempts to regulate joint Russian-Central Asian activities in conflict management, including peace-keeping, dates back to March 1992 when CIS decision was adopted on creating military observer groups and collective peace-keeping forces. Following the dissolution of USSR in December 1991, peace-keeping initially came under CIS 'collective' military-political arrangements. This was in line with Moscow's early drive to preserve the 'joint armed forces' and 'common military-strategic space' in the CIS.

At their fourth summit meeting, held in Kiev on 20 March 1992, the eleven members of the CIS signed an agreement on 'Groups of
Military observers and collective Peace-keeping Forces in the CIS, which set the terms for peace-keeping operations in the Commonwealth. But the fine sounding multilateral agreement was shattered due to setting up of national armies by the centrifugal forces - Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan and Belarus - in the CIS. This enabled the Russian government to overcome the weaknesses and internal contradictions of multilateral CIS structures by building its own army and bilateral and regional military-strategic relations. Thus, peace-keeping took the form, primarily of bilateral and regional arrangements between Russia and the parties to the conflict, rather than of collective CIS action.

Russia increasingly recognized the advantages of sharing the burden of peace maintenance with its CIS partners. In mid-July, the meeting of CIS Foreign and Defence Ministers in Tashkent endorsed the working protocol on CIS peace-keeping, which called upon its signatories to train special military contingents and groups of military-police observers for operations in the Commonwealth. At the Bishkek CIS Summit in autumn 1992, Russia and the five participants in the Tashkent Treaty (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia) signed a new protocol on CIS peace-keeping, which linked it

---

to the wider CIS collective security system. The responsibility for the command, preparation and training of peace-keepers was given to the high command of the CIS Joint Armed Forces. Peace-keeping regiments of the participants countries, according to General Boris Pyankov, then Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the CIS Joint Armed Forces, were to be subordinated to the military command of their national armed forces, while simultaneously being under the operational control of the high command of the CIS Joint Armed Forces. 6

The practical aspect of the Bishkek protocol failed in the Tajik crisis. The experience of CIS involvement in Tajikistan demonstrated numerous problems and difficulties to stage effective ‘collective’ military operations. The Tajik operation was complex because CIS peacekeepers were deployed in the state which was fragmented along class and regional lines and was engulfed in the bloody civil war. Furthermore, the ‘internal’ conflict in Tajikistan attracted the deeper involvement of various military-political groups from another ‘failed state’ - Afghanistan.

The involvement of Russia’s Central Asian partners in Tajikistan was limited by the complex regional dynamics of Central Asian politics and domestic political considerations. Despite numerous agreements

---

and protocols, it took about a year to set up a Russian-Central Asian ‘collective’ peace-keeping contingent. An earlier appeal by Dushanbe for Kyrgyz and Kazakh peace-keepers was rejected by the Kyrgyz parliament. In November, representatives from Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed to send a multinational peace-keeping contingent to Tajikistan. At the January 1993 CIS summit in Minsk, the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan each decided to allocate a 500-strong troop battalion to reinforce the Russian units guarding the Tajik borders. None of these decisions, however, were implemented.

As the events in Tajikistan unfolded, it became clear that the peace-keeping mission was required not so much to separate the rival Tajik groups as to prevent the penetration of Afghan Mujahiddin into Tajikistan and armed formations of the ousted ‘Islamic’ opposition. This ‘border defence’ role fell more in line with the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty than with the previously agreed agreements on CIS peace-keeping.8

---


8 Article IV of the Tashkent Treaty proclaims that an attack on one member would be considered an attack on all and the other members would be obliged to show “necessary assistance, including military support” in Leszek Buszynsky, Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War (Westport, Praeger Publishers, 1996), p. 105.
Following the decision to abandon plans to create CIS Joint Armed Forces, the Russian Government tried in summer of 1993 to establish new inter-republican mechanism to address the security risks in Central Asia. Emphasis was placed on working with the 'most interested' partners - Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the first Russian-Central Asian summit in Moscow on 7 August 1993, the Russians emphasized the 'collective' responsibility for stability in the region and the need for a 'joint' peace-keeping effort on the turbulent border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The Russian delegation was reported to have applied very strong pressure on its partners, demonstrating both Moscow's refusal to defend Tajikistan alone and determination to give the Central Asians a tough choice - either collective action or nothing.\(^9\)

The new structure that was drawn up between Russia and four Central Asian states (Turkmenistan abstained) envisioned multilateral control over collective peace-keeping forces and a six-month peace-keeping term, renewable at the Tajik government's request. In October 1993, a 25,000 strong collective peace-keeping force, including Russia's 201\(^{st}\) Motorized Rifle Division, was reportedly mobilized.\(^{10}\)

---


\(^{10}\) *Ibid.*
troops remained preponderant in the collective peace-keeping force and Russia took the lead in organizing and commanding these forces.

For Russia, one of the immediate concerns after dissolution of USSR was to preserve as much former Soviet property left in the territories of ex-Soviet republics as was possible. When the CIS was established, no provisions were made for the manner in which Soviet-era property, including military installations and equipment, should be divided among the successor states and be managed. In Central Asia this issue was particularly sensitive in the case of Kazakhstan, because of nuclear weapons, missile launch pads and silos, and space installations on the Kazakh territory. As discussed in the previous chapters, negotiations on Baykonur Cosmodrome and Semispalatinsk, as well as bases for Russian troops and their presence in Central Asian republics started at an early stage of independence of these republics. Some of them concluded to establish general frameworks and payments for the use of appropriate installations. After lengthy negotiations Russia and Kazakhstan reached a compromise on 28 March 1994. According to this, space station would legally belong to Kazakhstan, but will be leased to Russia for 20 years at an annual rent of $115 million. But in some other cases Russia was left with no other choice. In these cases specifically and in general in the area of peace-keeping it was more in the interest of Russia which was evident from the Tajik crisis.
Until late 1992, Russian troops' role was to protect the strategic installations in the Tajik territory but shortly afterwards Moscow supported the Rakhmonov government and gradually replaced Uzbekistan both on the Tajik-Afghan border and inside Tajikistan. The failure of the collective peace-keeping forces led to the escalation of direct Russian military involvement in the region. Russia's assertive role in the region as an intermediary and direct legitimate participant in resolving conflict was recognized by Central Asian states.

While the military played a significant role in developing a new security policy it has not dominated this policy despite the military's substantial influence caused by the presence of Russian troops in Central Asia. Instead, the debate over foreign policy amongst the civilian elite in Russia produced a shift towards the position previously held by the military, which has thus created a new accord between the civilian and military leadership. Now military retains a substantial role that goes significantly beyond that usually accorded to a defence ministry in foreign policy.

The new role of military in security policy was based on the belief that Russia should fill the security vacuum in Central Asia or Eurasia and exert its influence over the states of the former Soviet Union. This new assertiveness which has been labelled 'neo-imperialist' by some of
Russia's neighbouring states, may both stabilize and destabilize the region at the same time.

Russia's assertive role in Central Asia was based on the loss of 'super power status' enjoyed earlier by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union used its super power status to bolster domestic support for the regime. A section of the Russian society felt wounded and were unable to reconcile themselves with the break-up of the USSR. There were right wing xenophobic Russian nationalists who failed to reconcile with the loss of empire and the political victory of the democratic pro-Western coalition in Russia. From the ranks of the democratic coalition new circles of advocates of 'great power policies' for Russia reacted to the challenge of post-imperialism and reconstruction after their political victory over the old imperial center. According to them alliance with Central Asia was the basis for realizing 'the Eurasian' concept of Russia's national interests. A reasonable attack was also made in the military circles for dismantling Soviet military and strategic space facilities.

Thus, Russia is laying claims to the super power role of the Soviet Union in an attempt to use this status and international recognition to gain domestic support for the new regime and to build a sense of identity and strength. Though, Russia's super power and a special role within the CIS exacerbated fears in the near abroad (countries showing
centrifugal tendencies in Tashkent Summit) and in Eastern Europe that Russia will use Soviet style means of asserting and extending its influence.11 It is difficult to claim Russia’s special status in the CIS only on the ground of nostalgia for the Soviet state or Russian empire.

Russia’s assertiveness in Central Asia is derived from the perceived Russian national interests. The national interests of Russia were projected in the definitions of Yevgeni Ambartsumov, Andranik Migranian and Andrei Kozyrev. Yevgeni Ambartsumov, then Chairman of the Russian Duma’s Committee on International Affairs observed that “Russia is something larger than the Russian Federation in its present borders. Therefore, one must see its geopolitical interests more broadly than what is currently defined by the maps. That is our starting point as we develop our conception of mutual relations with our own foreign countries.”12 According to Andranik Migranian, a prominent political commentator and advisor to Yeltsin argued that the ex-Soviet republics are a “sphere of ... (Russia’s) vital interests” and that they should not be allowed to form alliances “either with each other or with third countries that have an anti-Russian orientation”.13 Andrei

---

11 Zbigniew Brzezinski presented a vigorous argument that stresses Russia’s imperial ambitions in Foreign Affairs, vol.73, no.2, March/April 1994, pp.67-82.


Kozyrev, then Foreign Minister, asserted Russia’s right to use force to protect “geopolitical positions that took centuries to conquer”.\textsuperscript{14}

The geopolitical interests of Russia was considered so vital for Russian state’s viability that use of force to protect geopolitical position was emphasized by Kozyrev. These interests may have been present in late 1991 when the USSR collapsed, but how they would be incorporated into Russian policy was not immediately apparent. Both the military and political leaderships were ill-prepared for the collapse of the Soviet Union and the problems that emerged in its wake. While the military leadership discarded the ideological percepts of communism quite readily, it also adopted a ‘realist’ view of geopolitics more rapidly than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concentrated on traditional issues of diplomacy with the West in 1992, the Russian military had forces deployed throughout the near abroad and was forced to confront the accompanying policy issues immediately.

By late 1992, however, both civilian and military leaders were engaged in wide-ranging debate over the orientation and nature of Russian policy towards the near abroad. The debate, which continued till 1993, resulted in a more precise definition of Russian interests in the

region, both in terms of Russia’s foreign policy approach and in its military doctrine. On November 2, 1993, President Yeltsin signed the decree, which adopted a new military doctrine for the Russian Federation. The new military doctrine defined the Russian state as multinational and democratic. It identified armed ethnic, nationalist, and religious extremists as immediate sources of danger to the Russian security, the view which was shared by the westerners and Russian nationalists. For westerners, the new military doctrine would defend democratic pluralism against armed extremism at home, in the near abroad, and internationally. And for Eurasian nationalists the military doctrine was a legal justification for military action to build a Russian sphere of influence in the near abroad and to preserve order at home.

As discussed in the second chapter, Yeltsin justified his assault on the Parliament on the basis of military doctrine to maintain constitutional order and national security.

One important reference was made in the 1992 draft military doctrine about the protection of Russians in the near abroad. The draft included in its definition the sources of military danger to Russia according to which a serious source of conflict may be the violation of


16 Ibid.
rights of citizens of Russia and of people ethnically and culturally identifying themselves with Russia in the former republics of the USSR. The draft also included the defence of rights of these peoples as one of the military's basic tasks.

Thus, a consensus emerged about the role of Russia in the near abroad for Russia's vital interests. It was the historical and geopolitical compulsions which made Central Asian states a significant component of Russia's national interest and security. As a consequence of it, saving Russian ethnic population, threat of Islamic fundamentalism from the regional actors are factors that can rightfully claims Russia's pro-active role in the region. The status of ethnic Russians in the region is not purely the internal affairs of the regional governments but a legitimate concern of Russian state. This consensus also emphasized that Russian leaders should thwart hostile alliances or coalitions and counter instabilities that could erode Russia's position in the region.

The substantial reorientation of Russia towards the threats from the south was expressed by the then Defence Minister, Marshal Pavel Grachev. He stressed the importance of maintaining a defensive zone to the south of Russia (in Central Asia and Caucasus). Grachev expressed his concern about the potential Islamic threat to Central Asia and then
on several occasions, cautioned about a sort of ‘domino effect’. According to this view, the infiltration of Islamic fundamentalism into Central Asia could spark disturbances that would threaten Russian population in Central Asian states and trigger further unrest amongst Russia’s Islamic minority.

Russian military thinks of Central Asia as a buffer zone along its southern border and has followed the dual policy of supporting the creation of indigenous military forces based on close ties with the Russian forces, together with the forward deployment of Russian border troops and military units. According to them defence of CIS border in Central Asia would make simpler the defence of Russia’s border. This can defend Russia’s vital interest in the region, as it is sensitive to the possible encroachment of China, Iran and Turkey into Central Asia.

Russian interests in the region were most evident in Tajikistan. Russian forces in Tajikistan played ambitious role during the civil war in 1992. Moscow’s contribution of substantial forces to defend Tajikistan’s borders, building up the Tajik military and supporting the economy were the practical policies of Russia in the region. In fact, Russia’s role in Tajikistan was beyond the conventional definition of peace-keeping as the military and economic support was given to the regime in Tajikistan.

---

The pressure tactics followed by Russia within the CIS and simultaneous negotiations with the opposition reflects the economic and military costs of conducting a fixed defence against the guerilla forces in the region.

Russia's commitment to defend Tajikistan's border was triggered by the devastating attack against a Russian border-guard post in 1993. After substantial debate, the Russian parliament voted a few days later in favour of authorizing the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division (MRD) already based in Tajikistan, to augment the border-guard troops in their battle against infiltrating rebels – a decision questioned by liberal newspapers and legislators. Since then, the combined forces of the border guards and the 201st MRD have been defending the border, together with some units from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Tajikistan was an exceptional case, yet elements of Russian policy were visible in Russian action towards the other Central Asian states. In general, Russia was supporting the existing post-communist regimes, most of which were authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian. This enforced stability through repression appeared acceptable to Russia. However, it resulted in the suppression of pro-Islamic groups and also prevented the eruption of ethnic conflict in the region.

---

18 Ibid., pp. 101-2.

19 Maxim Shashenkov, n. 5, pp. 54-55.
Russia's relationship with the developing military forces of the Central Asian states were due to the fact that Russian nationals served as officers and conduct training programmes in these states. As a consequence of it, Russia may also be able to exert indirect influence over the Central Asian states through direct means. Over a period of time, this informal influence may dwindle, as the new officer corps in their complete growth will show allegiance to their home state. In the course of weakening of this informal influence, the bilateral and multilateral military contacts and treaties will become more important.

It was against this background, Russia concluded that strengthening the CIS Collective Security Pact would provide some advantage rather than limiting its freedom of action. It would enable Russia to formulate a legal basis for interference. The creation of an integrated defence system within the context of the "CIS Collective Security Pact" can reduce the cost of military reforms in Russia. In particular, part of military equipment could be transferred or, even better, sold at reduced prices to Russia's allies. But the assertive policy of Russia to bring the ex-Soviet republics under control, if need be, by using its military power through formal and informal means, as in Tajikistan, aroused the suspicion of other members. This probably

---

explains the unwillingness of the other CIS members to join a tight CIS Collective Security Pact and to develop an integrated defence system.

During the CIS summit of February 1995 in Almaty, the CIS countries rejected a Russian proposal on the common defence of CIS frontiers, including its air space. This refusal came despite pleas of the then Russian Defence Minister, General Pavel Grachev, who described the CIS defence system as “the weakest link in border security” and called for an integrated general force for air defence.21 Russia not relying much on multilateral accord was concluding bilateral agreements with the Central Asian states since mid-1992. With Kazakhstan it signed a Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance on 25 May 1992. Both the countries agreed to form a unified military and strategic zone and to jointly use the military bases, test sites and other military infrastructures.22 The treaty was concluded after the Ashkabad Summit in which Central Asian leaders and the leaders of Iran, Turkey and Pakistan contemplated an ‘Asian bloc’ formation. The message of Ashkabad summit to Russia was to discard its indifference and passivity towards the geopolitics of the Central Asian republics. The treaty with Kazakhstan showed Russia’s Eurasian shift and regaining of some of the lost ground in the region.


To form a military strategic partnership Russia concluded a bilateral treaty with Uzbekistan on 30 May 1992. Both the countries agreed that "territories of Russia and Uzbekistan will form a common military strategic area". Under the "Treaty on the Fundamentals of Inter-state Relations, Friendship and Cooperation", each granted the other 'the right to use military facilities situated on its territory in case of necessity on the basis of mutual agreement'. Later on in February 1993, a Russian military delegation headed by Pavel Grachev, Minister of Defence, met with President Islam Karimov. The discussion took place for military-technical cooperation, joint plans for combat, mobilisation, training and military exercises of the Russian and Uzbek armed forces.

By developing close military relationship with Uzbekistan, the most populous state of Central Asia, Russia gave the clear indication of creating one of the pillars of security in Central Asia. Russian officers who constitute more than 80 per cent of Uzbek army have had a continuous presence in the state. The willingness on the part of Uzbekistan to perform an activist role in dealing with regional ethnic conflicts, as in the case of Tajikistan, could provide the military arm of a Russian-Uzbek political consensus in the region.

---

On 12 October 1998 Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in Tashkent signed the declaration which intended to develop dialogue and collaboration in security and defence on the basis of equality, partnership and enhanced military technical cooperation.²⁴ In the document both countries also agreed for economic cooperation till 2007 which was the integral part of their bilateral relations. On economic cooperation, till 2007 Russia and Kazakhstan also clearly mentioned that there were no political, financial and economic problems between them. The role of Russia to shoulder the responsibility of reforms in Kazakhstan was expressed by the President Nazarbayev, in the document of 12 October 1998.²⁵

Though all Central Asian states showed their mutual desire with varying degree for Collective Security Treaty, but the developments in Uzbekistan in 1999 needs an important mention for its future prospects. The Uzbekistan’s intentions of disassociating itself, before the expiry of Collective Security Treaty in April 1999, became evident in their Foreign Minister’s statement. The statement says:


²⁵ Ibid., p. 68.
"The position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan is that Uzbekistan sees no point in further membership of the Collective Security Treaty, which expires in April this year."26

The statement could be seen in the light of the presence of Russian 201st Division in Tajikistan and the plans of Moscow and Dushanbe to strengthen cooperation in the military sphere. But Uzbekistan, becoming the first Central Asian state to announce its refusal to extend the Commonwealth’s main military-political document signals an alarm in the future relations between Russia and Central Asia. At present, it would be too early to draw any conclusion as bilateral relations between Russia and Uzbekistan shows certain area of mutual cooperation.

Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan was the next Central Asian leader to go to Moscow for a similar treaty with Russia. The two countries signed the 'Friendship and Cooperation Treaty' on 10 June 1992, a treaty that, according to Yeltsin, raised the bilateral relations to a new level putting the two states ‘on an absolutely equal footing’, and thus signifying the end of Russia’s imperial ambitions.27 Russia’s role as the guarantor of Kyrgyzstan’s security was assured by the treaty. The bilateral agreement further reaffirmed Kyrgyzstan’s economic difficulties

26 ITAR-TASS news agency, 4 February 1999, reprinted in ibid., p. 74.

and inability to handle the financial responsibility of taking part in CIS formations.

Russia’s bilateral security treaties with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan were absolutely different compared to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia’s treaty with Turkmenistan envisioned the formation of national army for Turkmenistan under a joint command. According to the agreement, Turkmenistan will have the limited control of air defence system and armed forces. The logistics, training and exercise were to be in Russian hands and the cost and manpower was to be contributed by Turkmenistan. The treaty also allowed the retaining of loyalty of the Russian servicemen to Russia. Their approximate strength is about 42,000.28

Russia’s agreement with Turkmenistan had geopolitical significance for both in the region. Turkmenistan’s problem of financial burden to create a national army was overcome. By the creation of a national army with Russian collaboration, Turkmenistan secured the reliable defence of its sovereignty as larger neighbours surrounded it. The significance for Russia was the retention of the former Soviet Union’s military units in Turkmenistan. The treaty also strengthened Russia’s ‘southern flank’ by maintaining its defensive flank and strength

---

of its armed forces unchanged. This was in pursuance of Russia’s vital interests in the near abroad.

Russia by signing military-strategic treaty with Turkmenistan shattered the overall geo-strategic position of Iran. In order to neutralize Iranian concerns, Turkmenistan tried to maintain a posture of neutrality towards the CIS by raising doubts on its viability as a military base. After signing the agreement Turkmenistan started portraying its foreign policy as neutral designed for removing the suspicion of Iran. Thus, Russia succeeded militarily in bringing Turkmenistan under its zone of influence.

Russia’s bilateral relations with Tajikistan remained disturbed due to the on-going struggle in Dushanbe between President Rakhman Nabiyev and the democratic and Islamic opposition. Disturbances in Tajikistan started with the collapse of the Afghan regime and victory of Islamic forces. As a result, Mujaheddin influence and border penetration led to the turmoil in Tajikistan which became immediate concern for Moscow and Central Asian states. The ensuing civil war between northern and southern parts of Tajikistan after the victory of the democratic and Islamic coalition in Dushanbe and the collapse of the Tajik border troops formation, made the infiltration of arms and fighting groups from Afghanistan a potentially explosive issue. Among the Central Asian states Uzbekistan’s security was at stake as it consisted of
a good percentage of Tajik population. Thus, Uzbekistan was the first one to raise the issue of Tajikistan in Tashkent and Moscow summits in 1992.

Moscow belatedly responded to the Tajik crisis. Moscow was initially reluctant to get involved in Tajikistan's turmoil and patiently waited for the invitation to intervene as the only possible peace-keeper in the region. Though, Russia was responding to the call of the Central Asian leaders to perform the 'peace-keeping role' envisioned in the collective security agreement, the need for Russian intervention was echoed with no hesitation or ambiguity by the leaders of the besieged government of Tajikistan headed by Akbarshah Iskandrov. Moscow's earlier posture of unwillingness to intervene was enough to neutralize the charges of Russian imperialism. It further undermines the effectiveness of nationalist charges of Russia's aggressive interventionist policy. On the part of Central Asian states, there was a general consensus for Russian political military intervention at the regional level for checking the spill over effect of Tajikistan in Central Asia as a whole. And, at the republic level in Tajikistan, confirmed the existence of a structural dependency between Russia and Central Asian republics.

Russian intervention in Tajikistan’s civil war was both direct and indirect. Russia's preoccupation with its own deepening political-economic crisis, its explosive entanglement in the North Caucasus
conflict, in addition to concern over charges of neo-imperial policies were factors that collectively encouraged an activist security role for Uzbekistan in Tajikistan. Russia perceiving Uzbekistan's emergence in the region, involved directly in Tajikistan because Moscow was not willing to delegate total responsibility of regional policing to Uzbekistan.

It is noteworthy that it was under the impact of Tajik republic that in September 1992 a new CIS agreement on collective peace-keeping forces was adopted which modified the latter's mandate to include the functions of 'collective defence'. To support that decision, the joint command of CIS Peace-keeping Forces was created. Further events in the Tajik civil-war led to escalation of direct Russian military involvement. As discussed above, majority of Central Asian states was by and large prepared to accept Russia's role as an intermediary and a direct legitimate participant in the process of conflict resolution, if not a guarantor of regional political settlements. Undoubtedly; such a role for Russia was even recognized by the opposition in all Central Asian states. When the Tajik opposition managed to gain power for a brief period in 1992, it immediately appealed to Moscow for armed interference for purposes of stopping the local conflagration.

Politico-Economic Role

As discussed in the previous chapter, the tug-of-war like situation existed between Yeltsin's Russia and Central Asian states before the
demise of the Soviet Union. For Yeltsin’s Russia, Central Asia was a
drain on Little Russia’s scarce economic resources. The eagerness with
which Boris Yeltsin and his supporters agreed to the dissolution of the
Soviet Union was evident enough that Russia wanted to get rid of
Central Asian republics. To the Belovezhskaya Pusha not even a single
Central Asian leader was invited. Russia’s perception of discontinuing
the burden of subsidized alien republics like Central Asian republics
was changed very soon. Even after the commencement of radical
economic reforms in Russia, local economies in Central Asia remained
important partners for Russian industries.

The presence of Russian minorities and their welfare would
remain a factor in continuing Russia’s economic, political and military
involvement in Central Asia. The legal status of Russians living in the
near abroad was also pointed out by the then Russian Vice-Premier
Sergei Sakharai, “We will be at the stage of a transitional period, and the
methods and forms of Russian guardianship of compatriots will largely
correspond to the quality of this transience.”29 The Russian diaspora
was made the cause for the advancement of economic policy by another
Vice-Premier, Aleksandr Shokin in November 1993. He stated that the

29 Moscow, Novaya Yezhednevnya Gazeta, 6 July 1994, in FBIS-SOV-94-131, 8
issue of Russian-speakers (not just Russians) abroad would appear in all economic talks with Central Asia. He further stated:

Moreover, we shall negotiate the extension of credits solely with those states which will first conclude with Russia agreements on emigration with rigid obligations, including that on material compensation for migrants and second, conclude an agreement on dual citizenship...we tie politics with economics...The same is true of the condition of the Russian speaking people in the 'near abroad'. Whenever some benefits are requested from us, we are entitled to pose a question about the balance of interests...I believe that with time we will all become accustomed to the thought that this does not amount to some imperial ambitions but a normal negotiating process.30

Russia’s raising the question of dual citizenship clause for Russians in Central Asian states was again to reassure them against any future insecurity. In Ashgabat CIS Summit, Kyrgyzstan accepted the demand of Russia to introduce dual citizenship in the country because of its poor economy and the future threat of outflow of skilled personnel from the country. Later on Turkmenistan also signed the agreement with Moscow on dual citizenship.

The Russian foreign policy concept published in January 1993 followed by the Military Doctrine in November 1993 clearly distinguished the obligation of Moscow to protect the Russian diaspora in the near abroad. The document also formally acknowledged that

the near abroad was Russia's top foreign policy priority. The idea of protecting Russian diaspora was included in the Military Doctrine with the argument that Moscow had every right to use military force in the defence of Russian nationals on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

Later on, in July 1994, Yeltsin’s commission for questions of citizenship, helped by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, drafted an edict outlining guidelines for Russian policy towards CIS states where Russians were living. The draft linked the solution of issues of economic and military cooperation with CIS states to the rights and interests of Russian communities. For example, discussion to establish Russian language radio and TV service was conducted; enterprises with Russian workers and public organizations of Russian communities were supported. More importantly, a share of Russian credit to CIS members was allocated for the support of Russian factories in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The edict went into effect on 31 August 1994.31

As discussed in the previous chapter, Russia’s pro-active policy towards Central Asian states was influenced by the domestic pressure and the emergence of coalition of the nationalist, the ultranationalist

---

and the Eurasianists. Russian policies for ensuring economic ties with Central Asia, as a result, evolved through several stages. At first, Soviet-era subsidies to Central Asia for finished goods and energy products continued. Russia also let republican central banks issue rouble denominated credits so they could avoid the economic contraction that was imposed on Russia when Gaidar government freed prices and launched economic reforms in 1992. This policy greatly stimulated inflation at home and undermined Russia’s own economic interests. It was estimated that these subsidies cost 10-15% of Russia’s GNP: but Russia quickly decided to overturn that relationship and force Central Asian republics out of rouble zone into a new market dominated system that gave Russia substantial control over their economies. In 1992-93, Russia began issuing ultimatum that the republics should accept the Central Bank of Russia’s monetary authority or stop issuing rubles as their domestic currency. This ultimately led to the breakdown of rouble zone and the creation of independent currencies by the Central Asian states except for Tajikistan.

Retaining of Russia’s economic interest in the near abroad required restoration of the severed economic ties between Russia and

---

Central Asian States. Initially Russia abandoned these states and raised prices of its exports closer to the world prices. Moscow’s increasing willingness to use its economic power as a bargaining lever for unilateral advantage fuelled suspicion in the Central Asian States. Though the republics were to introduce their own currencies and abandon the pre-1993 Russian rouble, it led to a serious crisis in the macro-economic structures. They were asked to peg their new currencies to the rouble, coordinate their economic and monetary policies with Russia and desist from any actions that either lead to the creation of alternative economic zones or impinge upon Russia’s access to strategic raw materials. In Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Russian diaspora was used as an instrument for coercion by Russia. Under the circumstances, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan accepted the conditions for temporary inclusion into the rouble zone of the new type but later on moved rapidly to introduce their own national currencies.

In political and psychological sense, Central Asian leaders exacerbated their own problems by accusing Russia of economic imperialism and colonialism and announcing their readiness to move to other arrangements in foreign trade and cooperation. On the other, some of the Central Asian states contributed to the collapse of the rouble zone by extending gigantic rouble credits to the enterprises,
undermining the efforts of Russia to combat inflation. In such a background, high hopes were placed on their neighbouring Islamic countries.

However, by late 1993 it became evident that neither Turkey nor Pakistan nor Iran had the colossal resources needed for the reconstruction of Central Asian economies. Further disappointments were caused by failures in acquiring financial support from Japan, the US, the European Community, the countries of the Gulf and others. At the same time, international economic and financial institutions were setting up conditions for loans that were even more severe than those imposed by Russia. The position of the West proved to be particularly undesirable because of the linkages established between extension of loans and credits and the necessity to introduce democratic changes into local political structures and regimes.

For Russia, the old economic relationship with Central Asian states became a major area of concern. The Russians and Russian speaking people living in these republics, since the time of the Russian empire and during Soviet times, became well accustomed to living these states. Their expected exodus to Russia was to cause serious economic and social problems. The Russian government, which was attacked for its failure to protect the Russian diaspora, was afraid that the Central Asian States would come under the influence of some
hostile power, probably radical fundamentalist Iran or some version of Pan-Turkism. Thus, in order to safeguard the interests of Russians in Central Asia where they played a major role as a technical elite, prevent Islamic and Turkish influence from spreading via some sort of domino theory and in order to revive old economic relationships, the emphasis on reintegration was given.

Russian experts and leaders also believed that foreign assistance alone cannot overcome Central Asia’s profound economic-social and ecological crises. If left to its own devices, the area will both stagnate and become a major source of threat to Russia. Thus, reintegration, at minimum, was sought to be the only alternative with Central Asian states. In pursuance of this assessment, Russian government vigorously used direct economic pressure on weak states like Kyrgyzstan to grant Russians dual citizenship and to hold Kazakhstan’s oil pipeline projects hostage. Moscow opposed plans, for example, to transport oil from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan via Turkey, suggesting that it should be transported instead to Europe via Siberia. Russia also thwarted agreements between Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan and the Western companies on the extraction of oil and gas and the use of Baykonur space travel station.

Russia’s policies in 1994 were resolutely pursued for economic and military-political reintegration with the Central Asian states. For
example, efforts to protect the rights of the Russian-speaking population and strengthen the economic and cultural positions of the Russians show the concern of Russian policy makers in this regard. Their desire to increase efficiency of the already functioning mechanisms of cooperation and fostering the creation of economic union was well formulated in this direction. In the military-political field, the provisions of the Treaty on Collective Security was to be strengthened and the active exertion of influence by the third countries, especially in the field of military cooperation was to be ruled out.

The pro-active role of Russia in Central Asian states indicate a clear Russian desire and willingness to protect its historical politico-strategic interest in Central Asia. The ascendancy of the Neo-Eurasianist thinking and policy in Moscow also indicates that notwithstanding the Soviet collapse and the emergence of new independent states, Russia has been able partially to recover the apparent strategic vacuum through measures like Treaty on Collective Security and bilateral security agreements with newly independent Central Asian states. Thus, the entire border of the former Soviet Union with the states of the traditional 'southern flank' remains within


34 Ibid.
the realm of Russian and the CIS strategic reach. The treaty-bound presence of Russian troops in the border republics points to a major element of strategic continuity in the midst of incredible changes in the region. The enduring military, economic and political legacies of the Soviet Union are difficult to ignore for both Russia and the Central Asian states. Between the Russian 'centre' and its Central Asian 'periphery', there exists a level of structural dependency and interdependence which could not be overcome overnight.

The Russian military was to overcome enormous political, financial and organization difficulties to perform its functions in Moscow’s overall strategy. Yet Russian military activism in Tajikistan and similar efforts in other states indicate the commitment of the Russian military to perform its role.35 The Soviet economic legacy and the continuous inter-state dependency further perpetuate Russia’s dominant position. Not only the new states still need each other and Russia for their continuous flow of production and trade, but the similarity of challenges facing economic reforms in Russia and Central Asian states points to a level of convergence in the economic models of these states in their post-Communist transition.