Russia and Central Asia underwent a novel experience in the process of disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union. The emergence of new political entities, Russia and the Central Asian states were confronted with the post-Soviet realities that affected their long history of interdependence. Russia, the sole inheritor of the former USSR, was to shape itself in the post-Communist world order. For Central Asian states, dependent for over a century upon Russia, loss of big brother was the cause of their future uncertainty. In such a situation, the role Russia in Central Asia is unique in many ways.

Russia's uniqueness after disintegration of the Soviet Union was due to its geo-political, historical and cultural positions with respect to Central Asian republics. Russia's proximity and presence of Russian diaspora in these republics required a special role of Russia in Central Asian republics.

Central Asian republics on their part were less prepared to meet the challenges of independence and sovereignty in the wake of disintegration of the Soviet Union. These republics were jettisoned from the old empire almost against their will and without clearly defined vision of their national or strategic interests. They were considered to be
culturally, politically, religiously and intellectually alienated from the giant Slavic and Christian Orthodox core of the old empire.

The study begins with a discussion on the effects of disintegration of the USSR. The emphasis is on the challenges for Russia and Central Asian republics after the demise of Soviet Union. What made Russia and Central Asian republics to have opposite view regarding the dismantling of the Soviet Union? Although glasnost, perestroika, and the national reawakening that swept over the Soviet Union affected the domestic politics of Russia and Central Asian republics, the latter as a block remained the most pro-union oriented of all the Soviet republics.

In the views of many in Russia, the relevance of union with less productive republics was questioned. It was with this background that Russia’s policy towards Central Asia became more versatile but also at the same time less predictable, compared to the Russian/Soviet period. This happened due to the absence of basic factors at work in shaping the major parameters in Russia. It is in this context that the present study analyses the role of Russia in Central Asia in detail.

The study entitled, Role of Russia in Central Asia since 1991 has been organized in six chapters.

The first chapter deals with Russia and Central Asian republics in historical perspective. It traces the past historical contacts between Russia and Central Asia to understand their relations before the disintegration of the Soviet Union.
The second chapter focusses on the 'giant task' ahead for Russia to give a clear-cut definition to Russia's 'strategic interests' in the post-Communist world. This chapter discusses the Russian state's confrontation with the new situation calling for a definitive break from the Communist past and to ensure a space for itself in the new world order.

The third chapter analyses the emergence of Central Asian states in the former Soviet space. The focus is on the economic hardships and the multi-ethnic character of Central Asian societies, which resulted in the mismatch between state and national boundaries.

The fourth chapter begins with Russia's perception of Central Asia and the beginning of Eurasian school of thought in the Russian official thinking. It has been analyzed how the discernible shift took place in Russian policy towards Central Asian states. Russian response towards regional actors and Central Asian neighbours is elaborated in this chapter.

The fifth chapter studies Russia's relations with Central Asian republics since 1991. These relations have been discussed broadly in political, economic and military spheres. How Russia has utilized the most effective lever for economic and politico-military cooperation has been analyzed.
Chapter six sums up the study and concludes that the role of Russia in Central Asia is not based purely on superior military power and proximity. It is multifaceted.

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