THE CONTOUR OF “NEW GREAT GAME”: RUSSIA-US RIVALRY

The “Great Game” had been played between two major powers such as Great Britain and Czarist Russia during 19th Century and had been extended up to 20th Century. The main aim of “Great Game” was to dominate over the geopolitically significant region i.e. Central Asia. After many years of this phase, the two major powers such as the US and Russia engaged in Central Asia in order to control the energy resources of the region. Apart from these two powers, many powers are also engaged in this region. Unlike, the old great game, this competition affects the regional security balance of Central Asia. The newly independent states of this region were initially confused in the context of their foreign policy formulations toward these major powers along with the other external actors. They had a tough task to resolve the regional security and economic problems.

In this context, the roles of existing regional multilateral and economic structures in the Eurasian region have to be analyzed in the context of “new great game”. Additionally, these powers are cooperating with each other through these multilateral structures despite competing with each other in the great power rivalry. The newly independent states of this region have also started playing important roles in the “new great game” phase. They have got the opportunity to formulate their independent policies towards these external powers in order to get maximum benefits in the spheres of economy and security. In terms of pipeline diplomacy, the importance of Central Asian republics has been increased and they have started playing major roles in the Caspian diplomacy, especially in the sphere of diversification of transportation routes for exporting the hydrocarbon resources to the world market. They have already formed alliances with Russia, China, Iran and US to get the benefits from energy trade.

The formation of regional security structures such as SCO and CSTO has created opportunities for these states to address and resolve the regional security problems. Another important reason is these existing security structures are dominated by the powers such as Russia, China and the US, those who are the competitors in the Central
Asian geopolitics. Thus, Central Asian republics have joined these security organizations for getting economic and security benefits. They have several choices to extract maximum benefits in this “new great game” phase. All the Central Asian Republics have followed policies towards these two rivals along with other external powers to fulfill their economic and security needs. On the other hand, both Russia and USA have forged many bilateral and multilateral treaties and agreements with these Central Asian republics in order to fulfill their geopolitical interests. The geopolitical factor mainly regulates the behaviors of the external and regional actors in the context of power rivalry.

These regional and external actors, those who are involved in “new great game” phase, have stakes in the vast natural resources of this region. Apart from geopolitical interests, they have common security problems such as Islamic fundamentalism, narcotic trades, separatism, etc. In case of China, regional security problems such as separatism, narcotic trade and Islamic fundamentalism are the challenges to tackle. The growing role of US in Central Asia is the major challenge for Iran. For India, Islamic terrorism is the main issue to tackle. Thus, these powers are eager to resolve the regional security problems of Central Asian region for fulfilling their geopolitical interests. In this regard, the roles of existing regional multilateral regional security structures have played major roles to find means for resolving the regional security problems related with energy transportation issues. Because, the regional security structures have provided the opportunities to the newly independent states of Central Asia and the regional and external powers to cooperate with each other despite being the competitors in the great rivalry.

Convergence of Interests of Russia, China and US on the Issue of Terrorism

On the issue of terrorism in Central Asia, Russia, China and US have convergence interests. America is fighting against Taliban forces in Afghanistan, whereas Russia is a victim of Chechen terrorists. China like both the powers is also dealing with Uyghur separatists in its Xinjiang region. Thus, it is quite natural that, these three powers have to cooperate with each other to resolve this problem, despite their competition over hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia and Caspian. Russia and America have maintained
their strategic relationship over the issue of International terrorism. Mainly, it was the successful diplomacy of Russia due to which it could make the international community to feel that it was the worst sufferer of terrorism. On the other hand, America due to its own constraints had to depend upon Russia and Central Asian republics in its war against Taliban forces in Afghanistan. In this matter, both Russia and Central Asia supported US stance. In case of China, it also cooperated with US on this issue. China did not want to miss the opportunity to highlight its problem in Xinjiang region. After the September 11, 2001 incident, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited US to cherish their bilateral cooperation for fighting against this global menace. In this context, all these powers are cooperating with each other on the issue of terrorism.

Despite cooperation, these powers are competing with each other in Central Asia. There are certain issues over which Russia and America have differences. Several American officials criticized Russia because of its relations with Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea. Russia also opposed the US military action against Iraq. US also supported colour revolution for regime change in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia and Ukraine, which strained its relations with Russia.

Furthermore, Russia’s engagement with Islamic countries such as Iran and league of Arab states is also a matter of pressing concern for US, because these states have anti-American feelings. Russia became an observer in the Organization of Islamic Conference in June 20, 2005. Additionally, a so-called Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group has been formed called upon to expand cooperation between Russia and Islamic countries. These efforts have been made by Russia to be in constant touch with Islamic world. Despite US pressure, Moscow has maintained its strategic relations with Iran in the spheres of military and nuclear cooperation. Russia is also delivering arms to Tehran. Like, Russia-Iran cooperation, Russia continues to support HAMAS, the radical Islamic group of Palestine, by providing money, which is against the interests of US and its ally Israel. Both the US and Israel stopped financing Palestine administration after HAMAS coming to power (Malashenko 2007: 165) Thus, Russia’s rapprochement with Islamic countries is a major concern for America. Because, America has branded Iran,
Iraq and North Korea as part of "axis of evil" and imposed sanction on Iran. It has always opposed Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme. It has never wanted the growing influence of Iran in Central Asian and Caspian region. Thus, there is the possibility of future conflict between America and Iran over Iran’s nuclear issue, which can be avoided by successful diplomacy of Russia.

Likewise, Russia-China relation is not free from uncertainties. China has maintained cordial relations with Central Asian republics. China has also maintained its relations with Iran in the sphere of trade. Beijing has improved its trade relation with US. China has maintained cordial relation with Georgia, which is a matter of grave concern for Russia. Russia-Georgian relation is bitter over the issue of South Ossetia, where US is supporting Georgia’s stance. China has also suggested for peaceful settlement of this issue, which is against Russia’s policy towards Caucasus. This strategy of China has bolstered its relations with US. In the transportation of energy, China has stakes in Caspian’s energy sector. Thus, China can be regarded as a competitor of Russia in this "new great game" phase. In Central Asian geopolitics, China is an important power, which has maintained trade and economy relations with all the republics of Central Asia after their independence. It has successfully constructed its pipelines to import the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia and Caspian region. Beijing has also resolved its border disputes with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Thus, Russia has to compete with China in Central Asian geopolitics. Along with bilateral cooperation between these powers, they have engaged in the "new great game" phase in multilateral spheres. In this context, it is quite important to analyze the roles of existing multilateral security organizations.

Russia’s priority is to secure its neighboring states from regional conflicts because of its spillover effects. Because, the newly independent states are too weak to resolve these regional security problems. Putin’s policy in the region is a renewed effort in the matter of security cooperation in Central Asia and focusing on countering terrorism and narcotic trade. In this context, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) can be regarded as the beginning of the new era for the process of re-integration after the
collapse of Soviet Union in 1991. It is the first multilateral organization or regional multilateral security structure, which has been formed to re-unite the newly independent states of Central Asia and Caucasus under leadership of Russia.

Initially, Russia could not formulate an effective foreign policy towards these states, because of which the state such as Uzbekistan left this organization, while other members were not satisfied with Russia's dominant attitude. They started regarding CIS as Russia-dominated organization. During the period of President Putin, Russia started formulating pragmatic approach towards other member-states. Under the new foreign policy doctrine, Russia strengthened its relations with these states in both bilateral and multilateral spheres.

In the multilateral sphere, Russia could provide them the opportunity to link with other regional security and economic structures such as SCO, Eurasian Economic Community, OSCE, etc. During the initial years of disintegration of Soviet Union, GUUAM was created with the support of Washington to diminish the influence of Russia, where Uzbekistan joined after leaving CIS. This was a concern for Russia, because, it wanted to bring all these republics of Central Asia under its influence. Thus, Moscow started focusing on SCO to bring back all the republics of Central Asia, where Uzbekistan joined in 2001. Though, Turkmenistan is the only state, which has not joined any organization because of its policy of neutrality, it has improved its relations with Russia, China, Iran and India in bilateral spheres.

Along with CIS, another multilateral security organization, CST was created in 1995, which included member-states of CIS in order to make CIS more effective in the matter of resolving the regional security problems. Here, it is quite important to mention that all the member-states of CIS and CST are facing challenges from internal security problems, whereas, Russia regards the involvement of the US and NATO in the Central Asian region as its external security threat. This is the main reason for which Russia has strengthened this existing regional security structure. Finally, Collective Security Treaty
was turned into Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2002. It is only the culmination of CIS and CST. As a successor of the CST, the CSTO has become the Eurasian organization not only in the geographical, but also in political and legal sense by means of universal principles and practical purposes as well as direct participation of its member states in the European and Asian security structures, primarily, in OSCE and Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

In his address to the members of the Russian Security Council on 19 July 2004 President Putin acknowledged that Russia’s CIS policy has not always been “effective, pragmatic and consistent”. While, emphasizing the need to take the CIS more seriously, he warned that if this was not done “this geopolitical area will inevitably erode”. Again, at the Russian Ambassadors’ meet in Moscow in July 2004 Putin reiterated that the CIS remained “the main priority and cautioned that “the absence of an effective Russian policy in the CIS will inevitably result in a situation where other more energetic states will fill this vacuum”. He also laid stress on making “Russia’s relations with the neighbouring CIS states as attractive as possible not only for us but for them”. He also declared, “We should not be hypnotized by declarations that nobody but Russia has right to leadership over the CIS expanses. Of course relations with Europe were again mentioned as our traditional priority” (Kaushik 2007: 179).

Additionally, Putin followed a pragmatic approach towards Washington after the September 11 incident. He successfully brought the Chechnya issue under the world community and supported the war against the Taliban militia in Afghanistan despite the oppositions from Duma and media. Even long before the US operation against the Taliban, Moscow had identified the Taliban as the main threat to stability in the region and as a source of inspiration and material support for the fundamentalist Islamic movements that were posing threats to the governments of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. But the insufficient military and economic factors had made Moscow along with these Central Asian republics reluctant for taking any military action against these forces. Thus, US military engagement in Afghanistan had made Russia’s southern region secure. Though,
Russia was weak enough to check the spill-over effect to its borders, it took some effective measures for further developments in its relations with the CIS member-states.

The emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan had serious repercussions on Russia and Central Asian states. Because, the Wahhabis in the Ferghana valley of Uzbekistan started imparting military training to the students in madarshas attached to a chain of mosques built with Saudi assistant, which was a major concern for Uzbekistan. In June 1995, Uzbekistan started taking initiative by organizing a permanent seminar of the United Nations on Question of Stability, Security and Cooperation in Central Asia, where India, China, USA, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan were invited to take part. This project aimed at ensuring participation of other international organizations such as the OSCE and the OIS (Kaushik and Alam 1998: 42).

Russia took initiative by convening a meeting of leaders of the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on October 4 1996, in Alma-Aty. The joint statement issued by this meeting showed serious concern over the escalation of armed forces in Afghanistan and warned that such activities would be regarded as a threat to their common security as per article 4 of Collective Security Treaty, which was signed in 1992. They also proposed a special meeting of the United Nations Security Council with a view to ending military activity and achieving a comprehensive political settlement of the Afghan conflict and also for providing assistance to civilians and refugees. Russia also supported the forces of Northern Alliance led by the Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, Tajik leader Ahmad Shah Masood and the Shiite leader Karim Khalili. Northern Alliance was active in fighting against Taliban forces in Afghanistan. Additionally, Moscow tried to establish contact with the Taliban leaders in Pakistan for a peaceful solution, which was failed. In early 1998, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan agreed to jointly fight the threat to their territorial integrity and state system from the internal and external forces of religious extremism (ibid: 43). Additionally, Russia has been suffering from Chechnya problem since a long time. Thus, the growth of Islamic extremism in its southern border has prompted Moscow to take action against this menace. In this regard, Moscow has taken effective measures by uniting the states of Central Asia under the aegis
of CSTO for resolving the regional security problem. Likewise, Russia is also a founder member of SCO. Moscow along with China has shared common concerns over the regional security issues of Central Asia.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SCO has been an important mechanism for establishing peace, regional security and stability in the entire Central Asia region, besides Russia and China. It was evolved on the basis of the two agreements signed respectively in 1996 in Shanghai and in 1997 in Moscow on confidence-building in the military sphere in the border areas and on mutual reduction of military forces in border areas. Its cooperation has been expanded to political, economic and trade, cultural, scientific and technological, and other areas. The principles embodied in the above-mentioned agreements have determined the basis of the mutual relations among the SCO member states.

In June 15 2001, presidents of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan hold the first SCO summit in Shanghai, at which a joint statement was issued to announce Uzbekistan’s participation into the “Shanghai-Five”, the launch of the SCO and the Shanghai convention on crackdown on terrorism, separatism and extremism. In June 7, 2002, the second SCO summit convened in Russian city of St. Petersburg. The documents signed at the summit include the charter of the SCO, the agreement on setting on anti-terrorism agency and the presidents’ declaration charting the regional organization’s goals regarding this problem. In July 5, 2005, SCO leaders hold their fifth summit in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, to discuss the measures to strengthen unity and further cooperation in economy, security and people-related affairs. At the summit, agreements were linked for fighting the three “evil forces” along with the assistance in emergency relief in disasters (SCO Summit 2005).

In 2005, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbaev proposed to develop an Asian Energy Strategy within the SCO framework. Later on Russian President Putin
advanced this idea at SCO anniversary celebrations in Shanghai in 2006. As a result, this idea could be put into effect by “setting up a SCO Energy Exchange”. This energy club has aimed at integrating the members and observer countries in an energy-centered community. Additionally, it has created a platform for discussing the future course of action for actualizing this idea at multilateral level.

Apart from trade, SCO has conducted three military exercises to strengthen the capability of member-states for eliminating terrorism and maintain regional stability. Additionally, a regional anti-terrorist centre was set up in Tashkent in the year 2004 for coordinating the member-states in their future course of action. In the same year, SCO gave observer status to India, Iran, Pakistan and Mongolia for strengthening its role in Eurasian region in the fields of security and trade (SCO summit 2006).

Thus, Russia and China are strengthening their cooperation in SCO in order to challenge the growing influence of US in Central Asia. Despite being the competitors in Central Asian geopolitics, both Beijing and Moscow have cooperated with each other under the banner of SCO to resolve the regional security problems. All the Central Asian member states have cooperated with the two countries in SCO’s plan of actions. Thus, the strategic relations between Russia and China have to be analyzed in this great rivalry.

Russia-China Relations in “new great game”

In mid-1960s, China and Soviet Union had conflict over border and later on in 1980s, China had claimed 35,000 kilometres of Soviet land in Far East and Central Asia. It resulted in heavy militarization of Sino-Soviet border. But, both the powers did not perceive any military threats from each other. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, Russian leadership followed the policy of normalizing relations with China in order to reduce military burden and exploit its vast resources in its far eastern region for reviving Moscow’s economy. In December 1992, the two
governments announced that they were officially ‘friendly’ and began to develop broad bilateral relations. In 1994, both the countries announced that they now defined their relations as a constructive partnership before starting to develop a ‘strategic partnership’ in 1996 whose main objectives emphasized non-interference on each others’ affairs as well as their willingness to support efforts to safeguard each other’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Grare 2003: 54-5).

In 1996, Russia and China started maintaining strategic relations in the spheres of trade, regional security, scientific and technological cooperation. Both have common concern over the growing influence of US in Central Asia. In 1998, Moscow and Beijing objected to NATO’s eastward expansion, use of force in Kosovo and US-Japan plan for establishing an anti-missile defence system. In 2001, the prime ministers of the two countries discussed about the further cooperation in the areas of transportation of oil resources, enrichment of nuclear energy through joint development of new technologies (Ibid: 55).

In this same year, Shanghai Five was created with the participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for settling the border disputes between Russia and China. The two countries renounced offensive military action on their respective borders and pledged to limit the scale, scope and number of military exercises, inform each other of military activities within one hundred kilometers of the border and invite each other to observe any such exercises. This has been marked as a new beginning in Russia-China relationship in vast Soviet space.

On the issue of terrorism in Central Asia, China has common concern with Russia, because the former is serious about the terrorist activities in its Xinjinag region. Some of the militants were trained in camps located in neighbouring Afghanistan. China considers that a destabilization of Central Asia would necessarily have negative repercussions in Xinjiang. Like China, Moscow is also dealing with separatists in Chechnya region. It sees the role of Taliban in Afghanistan as a serious threat to both Moscow and Central Asia.
Thus, both Russia and China emphasize the regional security issues such as ‘terrorism, separatism and extremism’ under the aegis of SCO.

In October 2004, both the leaders of China and Russia pledged to enhance the cooperation in the areas of trade. They declared that “Sino-Russian relations have reached unparalleled heights”. Additionally, they agreed to hold joint military exercises in 2005. China also signed deals worth more than US$2 billion for Russian arms, which included naval ships and submarines, missile systems and aircraft. Both have targeted non-military trade to reach $60 billion by 2010, from US $20 billion in 2001, which included Russian energy exports to China. In October 2004, the China National Corporation and Russia’s Gazprom signed a series of agreements in order to know Russia’s potential to export natural gas to China. Additionally, Russia signed specific agreements with China on oil exports. Russia’s oil shipments to China were slated to reach 10 million tons in 2005 and it was increased to 15 million tons in 2006 (Marat 2006).

On the issue of US-Iran conflict over nuclear proliferation, both China and Russia opposed Washington. Because, both China and Russia have maintained strategic relations with Iran in the spheres of trade and security. Russia has historical, economic and security relations with Tehran. In the area of trade, both the powers have supplied advance missiles and missile technology to Tehran. China has also maintained its trade relations with the latter.

In spite of cooperation in the fields of security and trade, Russia has to compete with China in Central Asian geopolitics. It never wants the domination of China in this region. China has maintained strategic relations with the republics of Central Asia in the spheres of security, trade and energy transportation. China’s representatives in SCO are reiterating the economic trade potential of their country as a big deal than other member-states including Russia. On the other hand, after exploring the oil resources in its Siberian region, Russia has become able to attract many western companies to invest in this region. And, it is a fact that China is the fastest growing petroleum consumer in the world.
and has viewed Russia as an important alternative source of oil (Laumulin 2006: 11). Thus, this energy factor can help Russia to play a dominant role in Central Asian geopolitics. Russia is taking a series of measures by restricting the sale of new technology, limiting regional economic integration and controlling immigration. Moscow is also reinforcing trilateral relations between Russia, India and China, which has prescribed by Primakov, the diplomat of Russia (ibid: 12). Russia also believes that it has a unique opportunity to restore its geopolitical influence in Central Asia.

Russia-India-China Tripartite Axis

In this context, Russia’s relations with India have to be has to be analyzed, because both the countries have convergence of interests on the issue of terrorism. Both the countries are the victims of terrorism for a long period of time. Both the countries have pledged to strengthen their cooperation in their struggle against this menace. In November 6, 2001, both sides signed Moscow declaration on International terrorism. They affirmed, “International terrorism is a threat to peace and security, a grave violation of human rights and a crime against humanity. The struggle against international terrorism has become one of the priority tasks of the world community. This evil can be vanquished only by combining the efforts of all states” (Moscow Declaration 2001).

In 2002, Moscow and New Delhi demonstrated the unanimous position on their common neighbourhood such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Both the countries have agreed to cooperate in the reconstruction of Afghanistan as a new state free from regional security problems (Delhi Declaration 2002). Apart from security issues, New Delhi and Moscow pledged to enhance their cooperation in the areas of science, economic and technology (India-Russia Joint Declaration 2002). Both the countries have stakes in Central Asia’s vast natural resources. In the International North South transport corridor project, both are the founder members. On the issue of Central Asia’s regional security problems, both Russia and India have shared common concern. Thus, the role of Russia-India bilateral cooperation in the areas of security and trade can play a constructive role in Eurasian region.
Likewise, China has maintained bilateral relations with India in the spheres of security and trade. Both have shared common concern over the issue of terrorism. They have conducted joint military exercises to enhance the capabilities of both the armed forces to challenge the "three evil forces" such as terrorism, extremism and separatism. The main reason behind this military cooperation is that both are suffering from these security problems for a long period of time. After the September 11 incident, both have serious concern over International terrorism. It has opened the door for both the powers to enhance their security cooperation at bilateral sphere.

In the area of border dispute, both had conflict over the territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet in 1962, which was resulted in full-fledged war between the two countries. Finally, China unilaterally declared ceasefire. Since this period, China and India have dispute over these territories. In order to settle the border dispute, a joint working group (JWG) was established during the visit of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988. Since then, it meets annually at the level of Foreign Secretary. The last JWG Meeting was held in New Delhi in April 2000. The main objectives of this JWG include clarification and confirmation of the Line of Actual Control and consider the further programme of work (India-China JWG meeting April 2000). Thus, the dialogue between China and India is still going on for settling the border dispute.

In 2003, Indian Prime Minister Atal Vihari Vajpayee paid an official visit to China, where the meetings and talks were held in a friendly manner. Both sides agreed to show their desire for common concerns over regional peace and stability, prosperity, multipolar world order, socio-economic development, etc. Both sides agreed for amicable solution in settling the border disputes between India and China. The two sides firmly condemned terrorism in any form and pledged to cooperate on counter-terrorism through their bilateral dialogue mechanism (Joint Declaration by the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China 2003).
In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited India for strengthening bilateral cooperation between India and China. On this occasion, both sides agree to fully implement the provisions of the Memorandum on Cooperation in the field of Oil and Natural Gas signed in January 2006 and encourages collaboration between their enterprises, including through joint exploration and development of hydrocarbon resources in third countries. Both the sides praised the trilateral cooperation among Russia, China and India to maintain the balance of power in Eurasian region. India welcomed China as an observer country in SAARC. China also welcomed India in SCO as an observer country (Joint Declaration by the Republic of India and the People’s Republic of China 2006). Thus, India’s foreign policy has to emphasis good neighbourly friendship and cooperation with China. India has to work with China to seize current opportunities in trade and economy.

In the current scenario, the trilateral cooperation among Russia, India and China is vital, because of the convergence of interests of these powers on the issues of these above mentioned problems. They have aimed at a multipolar world order for maintaining balance of power in world politics. For many reasons, all three countries oppose America. The involvement of Washington in Central Asia and Caspian region are the matter of serious concern for Russia. Likewise, China is experiencing US pressure on the human rights and Taiwan issue. Beijing is dissatisfied with America, because the latter is using Japan to contain the influence of the former in East Asia. America has supplied arms to Taiwan, which is against China’s national interests. India is also experiencing US dubious attitude in its Kashmir issue. It does not want to involve any external power in resolving this issue. America has also maintained cordial relations with Pakistan, which is harboring terrorism in South Asian region. Its rapprochement with Pakistan on the issue of terrorism has made India to align with China and Russia. They have shared common security problems and worked for enhancing cooperation in trade and economy. Additionally, they do not want any interference of any external power such as US in their security issues. Here, the cultural, historical, economic and geopolitical factors are playing important roles in their policies towards neighbours. In the “new great game” phase, this triangular relations can become effective in bringing peace and stability in Central Asian region. At the bilateral level, India and China have to settle their
differences over the Line of Actual Control through mutual cooperation which has acted as a stumbling block in their strategic relationship.

NATO, CSTO and SCO in “new great game”

In the “new great game” phase, Russia and China have maintained their strategic cooperation for challenging the growing influence of US in Central Asia. In this context, the roles of multilateral security organizations are quite important. In the multilateral sphere, all these powers have got the platform for addressing the regional security and economic issues. In the competition over the vast natural resources of Central Asia and Caspian, there is space for cooperation. For instance, NATO has played important role in Central Asian security problems by providing military assistance to these newly independent states of this region. Likewise, CSTO and SCO have provided their support for integrating these states at multilateral level in dealing with regional security issues. All these organizations have convergence of interests in this regard. Thus, there is space for cooperation and coordination among these organizations, which has to be discussed.

As a US led organization, NATO has long resisted Moscow’s proposal for a CSTO-NATO cooperation agreement on Afghanistan but the worsening situation in the region has made many NATO members change their opinion. In 2007, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said “an overwhelming majority of NATO countries favor such an agreement” but “several member-states” continued to oppose it. In fact, it is the U.S. that has blocked any formal pact between NATO and the CSTO” (Radhuyin 2007). He also denied that the member governments’ efforts to strengthen the CSTO reflected any anti-American or anti-NATO intentions. "We have no plans to compete with NATO," he told the media. "On the contrary, we are striving to cooperate with NATO." As an example, he cited his long-standing efforts to establish a joint CSTO-NATO operation to curb drug trafficking from Afghanistan into Central Asia (RIA Novosti 2007). But, NATO member-states have declined to deal with the CSTO as a collective organization for fear of providing legitimacy to what they see as a Moscow-dominated institution. Instead, they continue to focus on engagement opportunities directly with the
organization's individual members. NATO's stance might call for reassessment in light of the CSTO's growing influence in Eurasia.

SCO has also extended its support to NATO in the regional security problem. On the invitation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Marat Tazhin, the SCO Secretary-General Bolat Nurgaliev took part in the Security Forum of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC)/NATO held in Astana on 25 June 2009. Discussions were held on the issues of global and regional security, including the growing influence of Central Asia, the situation in Afghanistan, as well as energy, food and environmental security.

On the other hand, Bordyuzha announced plans to extend CSTO-SCO cooperation to encompass other important Eurasian multinational organizations, including the Eurasian Economic Community, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). NATO could find itself painfully isolated in Central Asia if such an institutional constellation takes shape (RIA Novosti 2007).

SCO Secretary General, Bolat K. Nurgaliev stated in 2009, "The SCO is expanding practical interaction with regional institutions such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, The Collective Security Treaty Organization, The Eurasian Economic Community, the ECO, ASEAN, and ESCAP. The same holds true for our readiness vis-à-vis other international and regional organizations". The SCO can make use of the huge potential and extensive opportunities in the mutually beneficial cooperation in economic and trade fields among its member states, strive to enhance further development of both bilateral and multilateral cooperation among the member states and plurality of this cooperation. Russia also proposed to strengthen the CSTO by enjoining the SCO in order to give a challenge to the US led NATO structure aftermath of the US war in Afghanistan.
In 2007, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) proposed SCO for joining efforts on post-conflict rehabilitation of Afghanistan. During a video conference between RIA Novosti and the Russian information centre in Beijing the CSTO secretary general said, "We together, including China, which makes part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization should assist in preventing the Taliban from coming to power, otherwise we will get serious problems in Afghanistan, problems for many years". He also said, "Assistance to Afghanistan should not only be limited to armaments and finances. Work should be conducted in all spheres, political and economic, and assistance in the formation of armed forces, law enforcement and the fight against illegal drug trafficking". He also informed about the protocol for the cooperation between the two organizations in the matter of security issues (RIA Novosti 2007).

In this context, the role of Russia is vital to take the initiative for a proposal for NATO-CSTO strategic cooperation in Afghanistan. Russia can help NATO due to its knowledge about the security situation of this region. Before the USA war against terror, Russia took measures along with the Central Asian republics to check the spill-over effect of Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan. So, America led NATO has to take the assistance of CSTO in its fighting against terrorism, where CSTO is ready to give its support. It is quite important to quote Russia's foreign minister who said, "Russia has long been urging our NATO partners to conclude a treaty on cooperation on all aspects of the Afghan problem between the CSTO and NATO." He added that an agreement was impeded by the position of certain NATO member countries. "That jeopardizes the interests of those who are risking their lives in Afghanistan," the minister said. He also suggested, "The transport facilities that France and Germany are using to provide supplies to their military servicemen could also be used by other countries that have their military contingents in Afghanistan" (RIA Novosti March 11 2008). Like, CSTO, SCO has also aspired to resolve the problem of Afghanistan. In this context, both the regional security structures have declared their resolve to take responsibility for the security and stability in Central Asia. The SCO has also conducted military exercises on Russian and Chinese territories. On the other hand, CSTO approved the establishment of peace-keeping forces which would be ready to undertake UN-mandated peace missions "anywhere in the world", which was declared by CSTO secretary Nikolai Bordyuzha in July 1997. Both the
organizations have signed a security cooperation pact focused on helping Afghanistan to stabilize and rebuild the state. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has attended all the recent summits of SCO. Likewise, CSTO has formed a Working Group on Afghanistan that has instituted regular contacts with Afghanistan's military, security, and law-enforcement agencies (ibid).

On October 2007, the leaders of the CSTO convened one summit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The assembled presidents and senior staff reached several important decisions on CSTO's expanding regional security ambitions. First, they adopted procedures formally authorizing members to conduct joint peacekeeping operations. Second, by reaffirming Moscow's willingness to sell arms to its CSTO allies on a subsidized basis, Russia could retain its dominant position in regional security affairs. Finally, the CSTO principals agreed to establish formal security ties with the SCO, creating the potential for substantial security cooperation between the two institutions in future. At Dushanbe, the leaders of the CSTO signed over 20 documents, which included countering narcotic trafficking, terrorism and other forms of transnational organized crime. Their most important agreement involved the establishment of a joint CSTO peacekeeping force. In this regard, the CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha approved the conducting of a multilateral exercise and called for CSTO-SCO cooperation “in preventing the Taliban from coming to power, otherwise we will get serious CSTO peacekeepers could in theory deploy anywhere in the world, provided they receive appropriate authorization from the United Nations”. In practice, the intent of most CSTO members is to have a force suitable for deployment within the territories of existing member states. According to CSTO agreements, such use would not require the approval of the U.N. Security Council, where the United States and China have the right of veto. The CSTO secretariat would simply inform U.N. headquarters of its plans (Weitz 2008). In this context, CSTO can play an independent and effective role to deal with the regional security problems such as civil strife, narcotic trade and terrorism. CSTO peacekeepers can be deployed to enforce a ceasefire in a member country experiencing civil strife. Alternately, they can establish a protective barrier along a national border, such as the one between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which is a common route for drug smugglers. At least some of the member governments might want CSTO soldiers to protect them from
domestic challengers, whom they would presumably label as foreign-backed terrorists to legitimize an intervention by the CSTO, whose current mandate addresses defense against external threats. Russian President Vladimir Putin used the Dushanbe summit of SCO to formalize Moscow's willingness to authorize the other CSTO members to purchase Russian weapons and homeland security equipment at the same prices paid by the Russian armed and internal security forces, which has been already provided (Weitz 2008). In this context, Russia can use CSTO and SCO as a measure against US led NATO in Central Asia. And, the strategy of Moscow to merge these two organizations can be considered as its Eurasian policy.

There is considerable overlap in the memberships of the two organizations. Five of the seven CSTO member states are in the SCO, while five of the six SCO member states are in the CSTO. Since the spheres of responsibility of the two bodies also coincide, at least in the security arena to cooperate on a number of security issues, including countering terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other transnational criminal activity. In this context, both the organizations are serious about Afghanistan. At a July 2007 press conference in Beijing, Bordyuzha said, "problems in Afghanistan, problems for many years." Improving defense interoperability between the two institutions would make it easier to carry out a collective military operation in Central Asia, since Chinese forces could better interface with the CSTO. It would not, however, alter the fundamental disparity between Russia and China. Moscow could still organize a joint military intervention in Central Asia Under auspices without Beijing's approval" (RIA Novosti July 31 2007). Thus, the cooperation between CSTO and SCO would have positive impact on the regional security situation in Central Asia in the future, if these member states maintain cordial relations with each other in the matter of security.

Eurasian Economic Community has played an important role in re-integrating these republics to resolve the common economic issues. Here, Russia is also a founder member of this organization. This organization has been formed in the line of Eurasian idea. Even, Russian President Putin also declared it as a Eurasian organization to resolve the economic problems of this region. Rather, it can be regarded as a policy of Russia,
which is influenced by Eurasian school of thought to deal with Euro-Atlantic powers such the US and EU. Thus, the Eurasian idea has still relevance in Central Asian geopolitics, where the geo-economic factor is playing a major role.

In another incident, SCO Secretariat, jointly with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the Chinese National Bank of Development, organized the first Eurasian Economic Forum in China’s Xian. In that occasion, Wu Banguo, Chairman of the Chinese National People’s Congress Standing Committee said, “Eurasian countries have the advantages of geographical proximity and economic complementarily, as well as broad spheres and good prospects for cooperation. He further added, “Eurasian countries try to highlight the role of more dynamic and stable growth of regional economies” (Lukin 2007: 143). In both these organizations, Russia is taking the lead role, while formulating its policy towards Central Asian republics. Moscow has proved that it is the major Eurasian power in the vast Post-Soviet space, which can help the newly independent republics to achieve regional stability and economic prosperity through their active participation in these regional multilateral structures.

**India-Russia-China-Iran Relations in “new great game”**

India has forged bilateral relations with all the republics of Central Asia. It has also historical, traditional and cultural ties with Russia and Central Asia. India has been maintaining cordial relations with Moscow since the period of Soviet Union. In this context, India’s relation with Russia has importance in Central Asian geopolitics after New Delhi getting the observer status in SCO. In the future, India can play an important role in Central Asia at multilateral level due to its convergence of interests in the spheres of energy security, trade and regional security problems. In this context, Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev’ said, “The perspective of India’s admission into SCO would make the organization a powerful security structure in Euro-Asian continent”. It means, this ‘advancement of SCO to south and east of Asia, where establishment of cooperation with ASEAN looks attractive’ (Askarovna 2009: 59). After the September 11 incident, India has expressed its solidarity with Russia and Central Asia in the struggle
against Islamic fundamentalism, where New Delhi is also a victim in its Kashmir region. The Taliban government of Afghanistan was a major factor for the growing terrorist attacks inside Indian cities. Thus, India has cooperated with Russia in the sphere of military security. In the sphere of trade, India has joined Russia and Iran under the North-South transport corridor project, because of its own energy requirements. This project can provide an opportunity for India to bring the energy of Caspian region into its territory.

India and Iran have also shared thousand years old historical, cultural and trade relations. Furthermore, exchange of visits by the heads of the governments of Iran and India during the recent years and linking of certain important documents, such as road map have strengthened cooperation between these two republics. In 2002, the visit of Mr. Mohammad Khatami, the President of Iran provided an opportunity for further expansion of the bilateral as well as regional cooperation between the two countries. In January 2005, both the republics signed a document on energy trade. As per the document, Iran would sell 7.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas to India for next 25 years. And, India got the opportunity to develop Iranian oil fields and extracting some 100,000 barrels of oil per day (8th India-Iran Joint Business Council Meeting 2005). In this context, another opportunity for India is laying the Iran-Pakistan-India Gas pipeline, which would provide India the natural gas in a lower cost along with the creation of fresh job opportunities and speeding of the economic progress as well as foreign investments in India, Iran and Pakistan. Indian government has also approved this project, which would have positive impact on the regional security balance in South Asian region. Here, geopolitical and geo-economic factors are working in their strategic relationship.

The role of India must be pragmatic, while maintaining strategic relationships with US and Iran. But, India has to maintain its cordial relation with Iran in the matter of energy security. India’s inclusion in the SCO in the future would have positive impact on its economy. India can control its energy prices such as gas and oil, which would benefit Indian people. On the issue of terrorism and separatism, India can play a positive role in SCO, because of its military experiences. It can become a growing power in the Eurasian region.
Like, India, Iran has got the observer status in SCO, which would help it to flourish its trade in the Eurasian region, despite its hostile relations with US. Thus, the cooperation among Russia, China, India and Iran can play a constructive role in the Eurasian region for maintaining regional stability. But, the growing role of the SCO has its impact on US policy towards this regional security structure.

The growing role of Russia, China, Iran and India in SCO is a matter of pressing concern for the US. It never wants the domination of any multilateral organization in vast space of Eurasian region. Though, there is not any possibility of direct conflict between the US and any of the regional and external powers in Central Asian region, Washington is yet to compete with these powers in the matter of geopolitics. It has already imposed sanction on Iran, while accusing the latter as a part of “axis of evil”. Washington has also taken measures against Western energy companies to avoid any trade relation with Iran. Despite, America’s measures, Russia, China and Iran have maintained cordial relations in matter of energy security. Russia is also assisting Iran in the matters of developing its nuclear technology. These are all the matters of serious concern for the US.

America interpreted China’s increased involvement in the rivalry over hydrocarbon resources as a threat to Western interests. NATO’s response to the news about the transfer of the Shanghai Five into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was a fairly negative one. Some Western analysts believed that the Central Asian republics joined the SCO under pressure from the two regional powers and in exchange for their support. At least, this opinion was confirmed by the fact that Uzbekistan, which had stayed away from multi-sided military-political organizations, joined the SCO. Uzbekistan was driven by threat of international terrorism and its participation promised support from both Moscow and Beijing. At that time America was pursuing an inconsistent and far from active policy in Central Asia. On the other hand, the absence of any alternative forced the Central Asian republics to seek closer relations with Russia and China (Khamraev 2004: 67). Due to the growing importance of SCO in the Central Asian region, NATO paid special attention to the plans for setting up an Antiterrorist Centre in Bishkek and creating rapid deployment forces consisting mainly of Russian and Chinese.
military units. American apprehensions were strengthened by the intention to make the Centre a coordinator of the military structures of the SCO and CIS, as well as by more active Russo-Chinese cooperation, which envisaged among other things, an increase in trade with China and training of Chinese officers in Russian military academics (ibid: 67).

In this matter, the US has to take the support of these two powers in resolving the regional security problems such Islamic fundamentalism. The alignment of these three organizations can create new opportunities for the Central Asian republics. In all these organizations, the Central Asian republics are playing independent roles.

The Role of US in “new great game”

The power politics between Russia and the US has its impact on the republics of Central Asia aftermath of Soviet disintegration. Initially, these powers were confused regarding formulating their foreign policies towards their neighbors along with external powers, but, after the growing role of this region due to the cause of geopolitical factors, these republics have become medium for the exploitation of vast natural resources. At the advent of US and NATO in Central Asia made these powers to join in Euro-Atlantic as well as Eurasian forces, because of their own economic and military limitations. But, the dependence on the great powers such as Russia and the US along with the regional groupings such as CSTO, SCO and NATO could make them self-sufficient to formulate their independent policies towards these powers.

The impact of these powers on the domestic politics of these republics is both positive and negative. In the positive side, the Central Asian republics have got the exposure to the world community, especially, the Asian, European and Western powers, though it was lack during the periods of Ottoman Empire and Soviet Union. They have got the opportunity to diversify their energy routes to the Western and Eastern markets. They have got platforms to express their concerns regarding the common security and economic problems in the Eurasian region. In the sphere of military security, they had
depended on the Soviet military assistance for a long time. Now, they have got the assistance of the US led NATO, the Western military structure to get the expertise in the field of sophisticated military technology to deal with Islamic terrorism in their territories. The CSTO and SCO have also provided assistances in this regard.

In the spheres of energy security, they have signed many treaties and agreements in the bilateral level. They have been provided with technical expertise by energy companies of China, Russia, US, Japan and EU countries for the exploitation and exploration of hydrocarbon resources. Now, they are formulating their independent energy policies in the matter of Caspian oil diplomacy. They have raised their concerns regarding the matter of Caspian legal status, which has been dominated by Russia and Iran since a long time. In the matters of trade routes, they are now independent to formulate their policies. In this case, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are the littoral states, those who have allowed many Western and Eastern energy companies to explore their abundant hydrocarbon resources. Many new pipelines have been created to transport the energy resources to the world market.

On the advent of US in Central Asia provided these republics sufficient amount of economic aid to reform their military structures. They have also got the opportunity to participate in Euro-Atlantic partnership for peace programmes to deal with terrorist forces. The main beneficiaries are Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, those who allowed the US led allied forces in their territories. Uzbekistan is the first country to allow the US to establish its base in Karshi-Khanabad. It also maintained strategic partnership with Washington in the sphere of military cooperation.

But, the Andijan incident in 2005, where, Uzbek security forces used excessive forces against unarmed protestors due to suspicion of terrorists made the US-Uzbek relations sour. The US accused Uzbekistan for human rights violation. On the other hand, Uzbekistan did not allow enquiry as per the international norms. It even gave the time limit to the US for closing its Karshi-Khanabad base, which was supported by Russia and
China under the banner of SCO. Thus, the US-Uzbek relations have been strained after these above mentioned incidents.

In case of US-Kyrgyz relations, the color revolution has caused for straining the relationship. In March 2005, Kyrgyzstan’s President Askar Akayev was pushed from power in Tulip revolution, which caused for disenchantment among the leaders of Central Asia towards the US. Because, some of the NGOs funded by the US involved in helping the protests that followed the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan and the US also pressed for transparent elections. Like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyz republic has also provided its Manas air base for allied forces, which has been proved to be more of a political risk, because of protests against America inside the country. The reason is the death of a civilian at the hand of a serviceman in that area, which has caused for protests. The US is also not ready to allow a US serviceman to be tried in Kyrgyz courts. Thus, these incidents have made Kyrgyzstan to strengthen its relations with China and Russia.

In case of Kazakhstan, it has successfully maintained its relations with the US, China and Russia due to its multi-vector foreign policy. It has supported the stance of US against Iraq by sending its troops to Baghdad. But, it has not granted any base to US allied forces due to the cause of Russian factor. Astana does not want to strain its relation with Moscow, because, it has shared 4,300 Kilometers borders with the latter and a member of SCO and CSTO. It is also a littoral state of Caspian Sea basin. Here, the energy factor is playing a major role in Astana’s relations with Russia, China and the US. China has already built a pipeline to transport the Kazakh energy resources to its territory. Thus, Russia and the US do not want to lose Kazakhstan as their partners due to cause of growing influence of China in Central Asian region.

US-Turkmen relation is also influenced by the geopolitical factor such as energy projects such as the trans-Caspian pipeline and Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which US has promoted to bypass Russia and Iran in Caspian region. After its disengagement with Uzbekistan, the importance of Turkmenistan has increased. The closure of Karshi-
Khanabad (K2) has caused for the growing dependency of US on the Turkmen facilities. On the other hand, these incidents have prompted Russia and China to strengthen their strategic relations with this republic.

Like other Central Asian republics, Tajikistan has maintained its relations with the US, because it is immediate neighbor of Afghanistan and only country in this region, which is rich in water resources. Thus, the US wanted to get the lease for developing its hydroelectric power through its firms to benefit the Afghan market. But, the deplorable condition of Afghanistan has caused for the deteriorating relations between the two countries. Turkmenistan needs the stability in Afghanistan, where, being a regional power Russia can provide enough security assistance through CSTO and SCO. Here, the US is facing challenges from the growing influence of China.

The US involvement in promoting democracy and market economy in Central Asia has been suffered due to the cause of color revolutions in this region. It is a matter of major concern for Russia, because, the regime change under the banner of color revolution was funded by the US. Thus, Russia along with the Central Asian republics started showing suspicious attitude towards the US. They never wanted the type of democracy, which the US desired to promote. Though, these republics have come under the global attention, they are yet giving respect to their traditional values and culture, which cannot be changed in short span of time.

The US engagement in Afghanistan is considered as a partial success, because of the regrouping of Taliban once again in this region. US war against Iraq is regarded as a major failure of its foreign policy due to the loss of innocent lives since the time of invasion. Thus, America has to take assistance of Russia and China in dealing with terrorism in Central Asia, because these regional powers have sufficient knowledge about the security situations of this region. In this context, the cooperation between NATO and CSTO and NATO and SCO is desired to resolve the regional security problems.
In Russia-US rivalry over the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia, the importance of Central Asian republics has been increased. They have come to global attention after the disintegration of Soviet Union. Now, they are independent to formulate their policies towards the external and regional actors in Central Asian geopolitics. Here, it is imperative to mention that US presence in Central Asia has made Russia to reassert in its traditional sphere of influence. It has strengthened its relations with these republics for containing American influence. Moscow has become successful in this regard. In future, it would remain as an influencing power in this region, because of its historical, traditional, cultural and economic, military relations with Central Asian countries. Whereas, America is an external power would involve in this region in the sphere of trade. On the issue of terrorism, America has to assist Russia and Central Asia for combating this problem without disturbing the strategic balance of the Eurasian region.