CONCLUSION

The emergence of the five Central Asian countries as independent countries following the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has led to the dawning of new geostrategic realities in this sensitive region. A geopolitical vacuum was said to be created and it was widely felt that a decade would be required for the crystallizing of the concrete picture of the future political developments in the region.

Although by now, after the passage of over a decade of independence, tendencies of regional cooperation and integration have clearly manifested themselves. Yet, there are clear divergence of opinion among the countries on various issues because of which a full integration may not take place in the immediate future.

On the issues where there are convergence of interests because of common problems, several cooperative movements have taken place among the countries. There are various instances of cooperation on economic and security issues. The creation of Customs Union in December 1995, Central Asian Economic Community in 1998 are the concrete examples of economic cooperation while the successful creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an example of cooperation on security matters.

Among the five erstwhile Soviet Central Asian states, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan pursue independent path that creates divergence of opinion among the countries. However it should be noted that in the long run both
Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan shall have to adopt a common policy stand on the regional problems for their mutual benefit.

Two of the three conditions utmost necessary for integration are automatically met by these countries. The first is the common historical experience among the countries of existing together under the long Soviet rule. Second is the close linkages of distinct kind (i.e. socio-cultural, ethnic, etc.) between these countries and the societies. It means that there is more interaction within the countries themselves than with the outside world. The third condition for regional integration is that there should be the emergence of an institutional framework or organization to facilitate the integration process in the region. It is due to this only that the countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have shown a clear divergence of opinion. But these countries cannot face the international community individually on issues concerning them because they are weak economically and politically. Thus it becomes indispensable for the five countries to cooperate among themselves and present themselves as a unit before the world. Institutions can and will play a vital role in this regard.

As President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan also stressed that, there is a series of initial conditions and pre-requisites for integration in the Central Asian republics, like a similar level of economic development, similarity of social and economic problems, unified transport and energy supply etc.

Thus as mentioned in Chapter 1, Meso level integration can emerge in Central Asia. This type of integration operates as a smaller component
within a pre existing international division of power. Such integration operates at meso level and has little bargaining power in the international politics. Such organizations may be dependent on or may have allegiance to the bigger regional organizations. The purpose of this type of integration is to present a common political, strategic, economic and decision making process. At a later time when the Meso level integration is strengthened, it may become linked to the international system.

Another notable conclusion that emerges is that Russia cannot be discounted in the present scheme of things because of its long involvement with Central Asian counties. The countries also realize that in the short run they have to maintain a high level engagement with Russia. Moreover the success of regional integration in Central Asia depends on the relations between Russia and the Central Asian states. Only a holistic view of regional integration based on a balanced safeguarding of the interests of Russia and the Central Asian States can help to develop regional cooperation as well as serve the interest of peace and stability in the Eurasian region.

Apart from Russia and USA, China will be a major external player in the international politics in Central Asia. This is testified by the fact that the Shanghai Five which was set up in 1996 has grown into a higher level of cooperative organization in a very short span of time. It has taken only five years of understanding and cooperation to convert the Shanghai Five into Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Its members are
China, Russia and four Central Asian Countries - Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The SCO is a formal regional alliance for security and economic collaboration that envisages close cooperation to promote peace, stability and economic development among the six members countries.

The rich hydrocarbon deposits in Central Asia has led to increase in regional and international rivalries. This has added a new dimension to the integration efforts in the region. The full utilization of the promising hydrocarbon resources in the region can be arrived at only after tremendous technical, economic logistic and geopolitical cooperation among the concerned parties. The fact that Central Asia’s growing oil and gas production will contribute to global energy security has attracted attention of countries like USA, Russia, Turkey, Iran, China etc. for different reasons. While USA is more concerned about the energy security, countries like Iran and Turkey compete for providing outlet of oil and gas to the sea. There are no signs that indicate that the rivalry between these countries will abate soon. Instead, as more and more oil and gas deposits are found in the region the strategic and commercial competition will further intensify. Since the nature of the distribution of the hydrocarbon resources is diversified in Central Asia, the counties have adopted different stand on this that suit their needs. In order to ensure regional stability and accelerate the full utilization of the region’s power resources (it includes oil, gas as well as hydro power) all the five counties have to
cooperate. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are rich in oil and gas which Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are rich in water resources.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on different targets in the United States and the ensuing American war on terrorism that destroyed the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has introduced new political, military and strategic dimensions in Central Asian integration efforts. Countries like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have taken a pro-US stand by offering their bases for the US troops. Although it is too early to speculate the long term impacts of the war, a couple of significant developments can be identified. The operation Enduring Freedom has substantially increased the US military presence in Central Asia. Countries like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have had security ties with the US. It serves the twin American purpose of maintaining stability in Afghanistan and at the same time enables it to watch the developments in Russia and China. No wonder officials in these countries have shown great concern over the presence of US military in their backyards. US has been accused of using the terrorism issue as a pretext to have a long term presence in the region and to enhance its commercial interests.

The war on Afghanistan is also related to pipeline construction. Under the Taliban regime, the proposed pipelines passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan were put in cold storage. But since the fall of Taliban, the private companies like Unocal Corporation and other
concerned parties are reconsidering the decision to construct pipeline through Afghanistan.

Another conclusion that emerges relates to the initiation of a new great game in Central Asia. The control of oil and gas reserves and their outlet to the sea forms the basis of this new great game in which Russia and USA are the key players. The earlier Great Game was one in which Russia and Britain contested for influence in the region. It should however be emphasized that the present struggle in Central Asia should not be considered as virtual repetition of the nineteenth century great game. The situation inside the Central Asian states is vastly different. These states were earlier feudal monarchies that were loyal only to their rulers. But now these have become sovereign independent states who have the right to take their own decision. Moreover, the role of neighbours like Iran, Turkey, India and China have serious bearing on the decision making of the Central Asian countries. This situation did not exist earlier.

There is no doubt that the situation is complex and there exists a struggle for power and influence in the region. But the situation should not be judged merely in terms of historical precedents as it may prove to be misleading. The present situation should be understood as it is.

Initially, when the countries became independent, it was assumed that the Central Asian countries would easily come under the influence of Islamic fundamentalism. But the threat of Islamic fundamentalism did not prove to be as pessimistic as was anticipated. After a detailed analysis on
this topic if emergence that 'folk Islam' did convert itself to 'political Islam' and this converted to fundamentalist Islam in areas like Fergana valley. Despite this, fundamentalism did not have a hold in the region because of about seventy years of modernization under Soviet rule, promotion of secular ideas and institution by the Soviet, emancipation of women, total literacy and the weak hold of Islam over the nomadic culture. Thus only the cultural aspect of Islam developed in Central Asia and not the political aspect. Thus the threat of Islamic revival did not take dangerous propositions. Moreover the visionary leadership of the leaders of the Central Asian countries also kept Islamic fundamentalism at bay.

Given all these geostrategic characteristics and imperatives, the Central Asian region stands to achieve much in terms cooperation and prosperity through regional integration in the long run.

Although efforts at cooperation and integration are being made in the region, still there are certain basic issues that should be considered in the future:-

(i) a cooperative mechanism for durable peace and security has to be evolved.

(ii) there has to be regular consultation among the Central Asian countries so that the big diversities of the region can be accommodated amicably. The difficulties can be overcome through institutional and framework and mechanisms.
(iii) the decision-making on common issues like the solution to border problems should be found through common consensus. The emphasis has to be placed on creating an atmosphere of cooperation.

(iv) the consultation process should involve the views of academicians, businessmen etc. People to people contact should ease the ethnic problem.

(v) the main problems in regional cooperation and integration, like the leadership issues should be put in the background.

(vi) although cooperation is taking place in the republics on common issues, there is a need for foreign aid in the economic field.

If, after cooperation and integration efforts, the Central Asian countries project itself as a single unit in the global geopolitical map, it may play an effective role on the international stage.

In conclusion, the newly emerged states of the erstwhile Soviet Central Asia have started their political, economic and security pursuits of a geopolitically crucial stage on the world arena. Their geostrategic locations have allowed them and have also put constraints on them simultaneously to chart out and evolve their path. The geostrategic considerations of their behaviour and resultant shape of things in this sensitive region have been critically analysed and calculated in this work. The happenings so far indicate that they have responded to the geopolitical imperatives including the possibilities and constraints both, cautiously. The efforts and pursuits at achieving regional integration
through cooperation have borne fruits, although not in absolute terms, that is not possible also.