CHAPTER IV

THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL POWERS AND DIMENSIONS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA
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The disintegration of the Soviet Union has brought unprecedented transformation in the nature of the post-Cold War international politics. A noted scholar, Graham E. Fuller compares the events with the collapse of the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires during the First World War.¹ The most memorable ramification of the collapse of the USSR was the emergence of the five newly independent states of Central Asia, viz. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In this dynamic situation, where political, strategic, security and economic vacuum exist, several players have stepped into this region to gain control over other strategic resources.

The geographical proximity of Central Asia with the Middle East and Southwest Asian region has automatically enhanced the geopolitical significance of the region for both regional players (Iran, Turkey, Russia, China), and extra-regional players (U.S.A., Pakistan, India). As the potential partners of the Central Asian countries, each of these states has both advantages and liabilities. Some of them are deep rooted in geopolitical, ethno-cultural and historical factors and others by contrast are derived from the character of regional and international politics. The above-mentioned powers always surface on the security scene of Central Asia given the

necessity of their global interests. In this backdrop, it is necessary to examine some of the fundamentals of this emerging equations among different power players by addressing the external relations of the region. More specific emphasis is provided for the region's present relations with Russia, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India, China and the United States.

Russia's Role in Central Asia

The historical relationship between Russia and Central Asia goes back to the times of Tsarist reign when three Khanates of the region namely Khanate of Kokand, Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara were conquered and annexed. The Tsarist occupation brought this region into a new direction of modernization by aggressively pursuing the policy of colonisation. The entire region experienced profound change under Tsarism that brought an interruption to their traditional way of life, nomadic life-style and other socio-economic process, which was a negative factor for regional cooperation.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 heralded a new era for the Central Asian region bringing a system of centralized rules from Moscow which helped to strengthen local national movements in Central Asia. The Soviet rule brought an unprecedented change again to these nomadic, sedentary people on the path of nationality. Stalin’s 'national delimitation' and demarcation of boundaries created five Central Asian countries on the basis of their titular nationality. The arbitrary demarcation of boundaries unleashed ethnic antagonism which continues even today. The five republics of Central

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Asia have never experienced the status of nation-state, but in their post-independence phase, they are experiencing every aspect of evolution of nation states. The seven decades of communist rule was a bad taste for them which impoverished them further culturally, economically and politically creating a 'dependency syndrome' which implied dependence-on-all-aspects of life on Moscow, the epicenter of the Soviet regime. The last phase of the Soviet rule under Gorbachev brought some democratic space against continuing communist authoritarian establishment. The ideas of 'perestroika' and 'glasnost' made immense impact on the whole process of rising nationalism and popular protest against Moscow-based communist domination which at last got expressed in the peaceful demise of the Soviet Union. Thus, after the disintegration of the USSR, emergence of five Central Asian newly independent states have become an epoch-making event in the contemporary world politics.

**Economic Factors**

Historically and economically Russia considers Central Asia as vital to its interests. The geopolitical significance of this region in the post-independence phase is determined by its location and huge resources of gas, oil and gold. Russia as the core player in the Eurasian politics is striving to maintain its traditional influence over the Central Asian region. Russia has made some systematic attempt to win over the states in this region. The creation of a safe transport corridor for the Central Asian states to transport

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their resources has been a major concern of the Russian officials. Russia's policy priorities are determined by her economic interests. The Yeltsin-era reformers planned to change socialist economy to a capitalist market-based economic system that led to sharp fall in production, to hyperinflation and a catastrophic decline in living standards. But the economies of Central Asian countries are inextricably linked to Russia, providing raw materials, manufactured goods, markets, and access to the rest of the world. Russia's interest in Central Asia lies on different factors; political, economic and strategic.

In mid-1990s, the Russian leadership began to pay more attention to the 'near abroad'. With this came the beginning of a coherent policy towards the Central Asian states. A series of bilateral treaties with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in May, Kyrgyzstan in June, and Turkmenistan in July 1992 were concluded. These were all-purpose agreements, with clauses on economic co-operation, but their emphasis was on security collaboration and equitable treatment of non-titular population residing in each other's territories.\(^4\) Russia has its 25 million Russian diaspora living outside of the Russian Federation, out of which 9.5 million Russians living in Central Asian republics. Given the concentration of Russians in adjoining border areas, Russia has spelt out a series of promises for stable relations with them.

The other landmark Russia-Central Asian security cooperation was the Treaty on Collective Security signed in Tashkent on May 15, 1992 by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Armenia. Different factors of national interests of Moscow expanded the security relationship. First, the treaty guaranteed and recognized Russia as the chief security provider to Central Asia both inside and outside. Second, Russia kept the charge of the High Command of the CIS for co-ordinating military security which ensured Russia's effective control over military activities in these states.

The bitter internal conflict in Russia in October 1993, when a new stage of Russian presidential system heralded, a noteworthy trend began with the emphasis that Russia could not 'leave' the Central Asian region in a state of jeopardy. It was suddenly recognized that by 'abandoning' Central Asia and reducing its presence in the region, Russia left a vacuum that had begun to be filled up by others, particularly western countries including Turkey, China, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Turkey was recognized as a particularly alarming case because of its cultural proximity to the Central Asian republics and its political support by the west. It was asserted that any intra-regional integration will be hostile to the Russian interests. In the winter of 1995, Moscow took a number of steps for the reintegration of the post-Soviet Central Asian space in the wake of the Chechenya crisis and NATO's allegedly eastward expansion. It included the signing of custom and free-trade

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5 RFE/FL Research Report, 18 June 1993, pp.4-5.

agreement with Belarus and Kazakhstan and the call for an active reintegration policy. Therefore, post-Yeltsin Russia took positive steps to rejuvenate the Russia-Central Asia relations stabilizing further for new partnership of cooperation and economic reintegration.

The advent of Vladimir Putin is marked by a new dynamic and active phase in the relationship between Russia and Central Asia. It has been noted that Putin's past experience is likely to guide his policies of "near abroad". Moscow in its Central Asian policy assessment of 2000, viewed Central Asia as the key component of Moscow's economic future. There have been numerous bilateral trade agreements between Russia and Central Asian countries and a recently concluded agreement to increase gas purchase from Turkmenistan is being one of them. Moscow has also increased its concerns about militancy in the Central Asian region with Putin indicating that the events of Central Asia will be top priorities for Moscow's policy makers.7

It is undeniable that any prospects of regional integration in the Central Asian region would have to begin by taking note of Russian interests in the region as also how Russia perceives regional integrative efforts and the involvement of other states in these efforts of regional organizations. The Russian sphere of influence is seen as a positive signal for regional cooperation. Russia considers Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states to be its own sphere of influence.

7 "Russia Frets over Islamic Militants", Asia Times Online (atimes.com), August 29, 2000.
Externally, Russia wants to demonstrate to the world that Central Asia belongs exclusively in the sphere of Russian interests, and will not allow any rival powers to emerge.8

Having lost its political and economic positions in Central Asia, Russia could no longer remain a landmark for the countries of the region. The vacuum was filled on the one hand by the increasing influence of China, Iran, Turkey and the US, and on the other, by attempts to create a 'common market of Central Asia' which, in the words of Nazarbayev, covers 50 million people, has huge hydrocarbon resources and has good prospects for rapid economic growth.

To protect its economic interests in the region, Russia does not favour alternate routes for the transport of hydrocarbon raw materials. Huge resources and the existing transport and transit restrictions are forcing Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to search for other accessible and profitable routes to the world markets. Objectively, the 'oil factor' is contributing not to re-integration of the region with Russia but reducing their dependence by bypassing Russia. For several reasons in the near future, the states of the Caspian basin will be potential competitors of Russia, delivering their resources to outside markets through alternate energy transit routes. Hence, they tend to attract more foreign capital where Russia's capital investment capacity is low and problematic. Second, the leaders of all Caspian states also support alternative route for their commercial interests.

Common Threats for Russia and Central Asia

There is an urgent necessity for close political, economic and cultural cooperation between Russia and the states of Central Asia. Russia still remains the most important neighbour and partner for all the Central Asian countries. Moreover, it is the only powerful guarantor of regional stability and security in the region. Common threats arising in the region are also of crucial importance for the strengthening of Russia's position in Central Asia. The 'Chinese factor' and the threat of 'Islamic-extremism' are perceived as common threat in their way to future betterment. Although the threats are different for each of the Central Asian states, the extent of the danger is understood by all. The events like Afghan-Tajik conflict could pose serious threats to the existing power balance.⁹

Security Issues

Russian policy in Central Asia is influenced by strategic significance of the region. The official documents on military policy of the Central Asian states do not specify probable enemies. In October 1993, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan signed an agreement in Bishkek on the 'Concept of Military Security' (Turkmenistan has not signed the original Collective Security Agreement).¹⁰

From the very beginning, it was obvious that there would be a need to create regional sub-systems and the Central Asian region was divided into

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¹⁰ For the full text, see Izvestiya, 16 May 1992, p.3.
two security zones, eastern (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) and western (Kazakhstan, parts of Russia and Kyrgyzstan), Russia's interests in the security field brought the Central Asian states closer into their potential military cooperation. The events of Tajik conflict, or patrolling Afghan – Tajik border under CIS Peacekeeping Force by Russian troops provides a lot of evidence of their security cooperation. Russia's "National Security Doctrine" noted: the deepening and development of relations with the CIS member states is the most important factor promoting the settlement of ethno-political and inter-ethnic conflicts and the maintenance of socio-political stability on Russia's southern borders.\(^\text{11}\) Enhanced coordination has also been planned by way of joint military doctrines between Russia and Central Asia in July 8, 1998, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Russian officers completed a three-day staff exercise at military base outside Almaty. The use of combined arms including infantry, armour and ground support aviation was rehearsed. It is clear that in the near future armies of the Central Asian states cannot reorient themselves to other partners, nevertheless the fact remains that new actors have emerged in this region.

Russia has been trying to ensure a greater impact in the Central Asian region through an enhanced military presence and greater coordination of efforts in the field of security because of the fact that the US has already made its military presence in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in the name of fighting global terrorism.

Russian Minorities as a Factor of Cooperation

The post-communist Russia found more than 25 million Russians living outside the Russian borders; approximately 10 million of these were in Central Asia. Given the deplorable economic conditions of Russia, it is least expected that Russia will be in a position to take back the entire mass of its nationals. The concentration of ethnic Russians is very high in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and nominal numbers are in other three Central Asian republics. The Russians, where they are in a high percentage in the overall population, hold important role influencing overall spheres of life because of their technological and developed management skills.

In Kazakhstan, the Russians for a long time counted the majority of the population and in post-Soviet phase, they were reduced to the equal percentage but now ethnic Kazakhs count more than 50 percent keeping the Russian population as low as 35 percent.\(^\text{12}\)

Outbursts of nationalism among the native people brought a sharp deterioration in all links with Russia which witnessed the fall in standard of living and the lack of political stability and personal security. The Russians in Central Asia had the utmost sense of insecurity for their own life and property, and fear for the future.\(^\text{13}\) According to figures published in the Russian press, only 8 percent of the Russian population consider life in Central Asia


acceptable. Under this scenario, the position of the Russians residing in the Central Asian states will progressively decline despite the fact that the leaders of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) have made repeated attempts to stop the Russian exodus. The attempts by the leaders of the CARs have been able to bring out some degree of solace among the Russian minorities in Central Asia. They are further assured with due protection and share both political and economic sphere. The Russian language has been given an almost equal status by each Central Asian constitutions, but the state's official language will remain their respective ethnic language which is an important factor for regional cooperation in Central Asia. Turkmenistan was the only country till now to have signed a dual citizenship agreement with Russia and in 1995, Tajikistan signed the same agreement with Russia. The Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev suggested that dual citizenship be allowed only to the Slavs. 14

The Eurasian perspective and its proponents defend the argument that Russia should exercise active control vis-à-vis Central Asia. This control is seen as Russia's natural right in its 'near abroad'. Therefore, it is logical to assess that Russia's policy makers oppose regional integration in Central Asia since it could weaken Russia's position and give birth to a possible security dilemma on its southern border. 15 Russian officials have emphasized that Russia retains major interests in Central Asia in terms of strategic, security,

economic and concern over the treatment of ethnic Russians. For instance, Russian strategic concern is focused on the region as a buffer to Islamic fundamentalism and to the criminal activities proliferated by drug-trafficking and arms proliferation. In order to meet its strategic concerns, Russia has signed bilateral and regional military cooperation agreements with the Central Asian states. For instance, Russian border troops defend outer borders in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

IRAN'S ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIAN REGIONAL POLITICS

The collapse of Soviet Union and the emergence of independent Central Asian republics as Iran’s new neighbours have brought new security challenges as well as economic and trade opportunities to the latter. Iran, in the present context, faces strong political and economic competition from Russia, U.S.A., and China in Central Asia to strengthen its position.

Iran's identification with Central Asia, first of all, is historical and cultural. Iran apart from having common land and water borders with Central Asia, has many spiritual bonds and interests with most of the people in Central Asia. Among these bonds, the existence of a common religion, common cultural heritage, common language (Persian) as the ancestral language in some parts of the region and common history are most prominent. To some extent, these bonds influence the development of relations between the CARs for regional cooperation.

Iran, naturally enjoys an excellent geopolitical position as a natural bridge between Central Asia and outside world. In pre-industrial times, Iran
was a land bridge between Inner Asia and Central Asia on the one hand and Europe on the other.\textsuperscript{16} It was at the cross roads of the world's inland trade between the orient and the occident.\textsuperscript{17} Iran, in the absence of the Soviet threat and its historical value as a buffer, continues by reason of geography to occupy a crucial role in the region. Further, the ethnic and linguistic factors facilitates Iran's penetration into Central Asia. The Persian-speaking Tajiks form the main social basis for Iranian presence in this region. Other non-Tajik Persian speakers form an additional social base. While common language and ethnicity provides strong links between Iranian and Tajik, cultural similarities ties the Iranians to all Central Asians.

The foreign policy objectives and interests of Iran in Central Asia have been based on cooperation and respect for the independence and territorial integrity of the republics. The Islamic Republic of Iran's strategy of "cooperation" in Central Asia is expected to be implemented in the following dimensions:

**Security Factors**

Iran attaches great importance to the establishment, safeguarding and continuation of peace and political stability in the region. One of the reasons for giving such importance is the close cultural-ethnic mixture in many frontier areas of Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan.


\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.377.
Iran cannot neglect the possibility that instability may spread from these states into Iran. Furthermore, the safeguarding of security and stability in Central Asia creates the potential for economic cooperation of these republics. Iran's policy of non-intervention and effort for peace and political stability in the region has, in practice, proven its goodwill by taking measures as well as engaging in honest brokerage during regional crises such as Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict over Nogorno Karabakh and the civil war in Tajikistan. In the post-Soviet Central Asia, the main target of Iranian anti-hegemonic policy is against the United States. Teheran is fearful of the consequence of Washington's new moves in the region, including the Americans overwhelming military presence in the Persian Gulf and increasing interest and involvement of American companies in Central Asian economic activities.

With respect to military issues, Iran's interests in Central Asia is twofold. On the one hand, Central Asia can potentially supply Iran with certain conventional military hardware. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan produce arms and military equipment that might satisfy certain Iranian needs. For example, Uzbekistan produces communication devices and aircraft such as the MIG-29 and the IL-76.18 There is a special dimension to Iran's interest in Kazakhstan as it seeks to develop cooperation in the field of science particularly nuclear research. In this regard, the interest of Iran includes the search for nuclear capability. However, its stockpile of nuclear weapons have been transferred to

Russia. This has been a very sensitive aspect of Iran's interest for which it has been maligned. Yet, Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian country interested in military cooperation with Iran. This individualistic nature of Turkmenistan with Iran creates hurdles for cooperation in that region.

**Economic Issues**

The special geographic characteristics of the region and the fact that the countries of Central Asia are landlocked, have created a particular situation for Iran vis-à-vis the Central Asian states. Central Asian oil and gas consider as significant resources for Iranian leaders for its advantage of the lucrative commercial deals of its transportation via land or sea. There is a great deal of complementarity in this respect in terms of building the medium industries and fiscal infrastructure, exploration of raw materials, promoting trade and improving communication network. One potential field is the commercial exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the Central Asian regions. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have considerable oil resources. The conduct of international trade and export of Central Asian energy resources via Iran, which provides one of the shortest and safest route to international markets can generate both employment and hard currency revenue for Iran. On the other hand, Iran is of vital economic and strategic interests to Central Asian states in many ways. Significantly, Iran is the most logical route for the export of Central Asia's energy resource. For the energy

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19 FBIS, 13 May 1996.

poor Central Asian countries namely, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, Iran could become an alternative sources of energy and reduce their dependence on Russia.

There are two main avenues of economic relations between Iran and the Central Asian states. First, bilateral and second, multilateral agreements within the framework of the ECO and the Caspian Sea Littoral States Cooperation Organisation (CSLSCO). The major areas covered by these agreements have been energy, transportation, bilateral trade and joint venture.

Admittedly, Iran has modest financial means and some technical know how, but they are indeed very constricted, and can hardly meet the urgent demands of the Central Asian economic system that are right now in the middle of transition.21 While Central Asian states realize the mutual benefits of trade via Iranian ports, at the same time, they also do not want to exchange their dependence upon Moscow with Teheran.22 In this context, the Central Asian states are negotiating with other regional powers within the ECO structure. Further, the lowering of the oil price, with its negative effect on foreign exchange revenue has aggravated the situation. Unless the Iranian government finds a way to overcome Iran's economic problems, these will limit the scope of Central Asia-Iranian economic relations.

21 "Iran to help Central Asian Muslims", Frontier Post, February 20, 1972, p.120.
Cultural and Religious Issues

Projecting itself as the nucleus of an Islamic state and redeemer of the Islamic value system and ideology, Iran has underplayed its religious and ideological card. Cognizant of its own limitation in exporting its "revolutionary" model and aware of the supersensitivity of all regional factors, Iran tactically emphasizes the cultural rather than the political aspect of its Islamic credentials. Emphasis on "cultural Islam" has, to some extent, reduced the anxiety of Central Asian states while helping to maintain Iran's unique characteristics as an Islamic state.

Disillusionment with Soviet ideology, coupled with a resurgence of pride in their own cultural heritage has made Central Asians eager to learn about their Islamic past. Iran has responded to this need by sending copies of Quran, funding for the building of mosques and religious books and teachers.

However, compared to other Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arab and Pakistan, Iran is maintaining a relatively low level of Islamic activity. In fact, Iran has certain positive reasons for not resorting to religious activities in Central Asia. An active Iranian policy of exporting 'Islamic revolution' towards Central Asia would surely turn Russia in to an enemy. Secondly, the Shia-oriented Islamic radicalism of Iran is not capable of attracting predominantly Sunni Central Asians.

23 FBIS Daily Report: Central Eurasia, 21 October 1993, pp.70-72.
To sum up, Iran's relations with Central Asian countries have been marked more by economic cooperation and security consideration than by "Islamic brotherhood". Iran's presence in Central Asia remains restrained. Its rift with the west has been a major setback for its regional ambitions.

TURKEY

After the disintegration of the USSR, Turkey suddenly cast a shadow on Central Asia where Turkic people live. All of sudden, Turkey had an opportunity of ethnic affiliation, geographical proximity and historical experience. In Central Asia, Turkey appeared to have an unassailable advantage over its other potential regional competitors. There were common ethno-cultural roots between Turkey and the Turkic peoples of Central Asia who represent the overwhelming majority of the indigenous population of the region. The in-gathering of the Turkic nation struck an emotional card for cooperation in the countries of Central Asia. The expansion of Turkey's influence in Central Asia was also given an official stamp of approval by the West, Russia and the Arab states. Turkey's democratic secular form of government was judged to be the appropriate developmental model for the Central Asian states and the most effective political weapon against Iranian-sponsored Islamic fundamentalism. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was promoted as the standard bearer of democracy, religious moderation and western values in Central Asia.

27 Ibid., pp.50-51.
Turkey's initial euphoria towards sovereign Central Asia was buttressed by common culture. The languages of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are Turkic dialects, their peoples come from Turkic stock. Therefore, the leaders of Central Asia looked first towards Turkey for political inspiration and economic aid. The apparent ethnic symbiosis between Central Asia and Turkey overwhelmed Turkish leaders and they began to perceive their country's role in Central Asia. President Turgut Ozal professed that "the coming century will be a Turkic age".²⁸ Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel spoke of the Turkic world "from the Adriatic coasts to the Great Wall of China".²⁹ Turkish intellectuals professed that from the Balkans to China (Xinjiang), a Turk could now journey freely, meeting with his own people and communicating in his own language.

The peoples of Central Asia, except Tajikistan, are ethnically, linguistically and religiously related to Turkey. Both the sides profess the Sunni variant of Islam and belong to the Hanafi school of legal thought. Even though pan-Turkism was identified with the Ottoman Empire, the former did not fail to leave its imprint on the psychological and emotional make-up of the Turkish elites as well as the masses. The busy diplomatic traffic between Ankara and the Central Asian capitals seems to suggest that the latter have offered Turkey a new opportunity to evolve and put into effect such a grand

²⁹ Ibid.
diplomatic strategy.\textsuperscript{30} The West has actively promoted Turkey's image as the ideal model of an Islamic, yet secular and modern state has urged these countries to emulate Turkey. The United States and the World Bank have channeled part of their aid to these countries through Turkey. Largely because of western support, nearly all Central Asian leaders perceived that Turkey as the model to follow. To quote Prime Minister Sulayman Damirel, "Turkey has proved that Islam, democracy, human rights and market economy could go together hand in hand".\textsuperscript{31} The US President George Bush talking to the Turkish Prime Minister during his visit to Washington on 13 February 1992, said that Turkey is the model of a democratic secular state which could be emulated by the Central Asian Republics.\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, Catherine Lalumerie, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, visited the Central Asian republics and remarked that "Turkey provides a valid model of development for cooperation in newly independent countries of Central Asia".\textsuperscript{33}

For Turkey, emphasis on the ethnic and linguistic factor is very much important for influencing the region. Though it is not an official policy, pan-Turkism has been a force in the Turkish politics.\textsuperscript{34} It is well known that the concept did evoke emotional response among the Central Asians. Turkey's


\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Newspost}, 21 May 1992, p.7.


\textsuperscript{33} Andrew Mango, "The Turkish Model", \textit{Middle Eastern Studies}, Vol.29, No.4, October 1997, p.726.

\textsuperscript{34} R.S. Akhtar, "Turkey and Central Asian Republic", \textit{The Frontier Post}, 5 March 1992.

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pan-Turkic policy in Central Asia is not unprecedented. Towards the end of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire tried successfully to "stir up the Turks in the newly founded Soviet state to create a breakaway independent pan-Turkic state in that region". In dealing with her relations with the Central Asian Republics, Turkey had to face many challenges. Firstly, the moral imperative having supported Eastern Europe and Central Asia for nearly a decade to attain freedom from the Soviet stronghold, Turkey felt morally bound to build pluralistic democracies in these newly independent states, which is now a major factor for integration among Central Asian countries.

Besides, another consideration is geo-strategic. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a strategic vacuum was created in the Central Asian region. Since it is assumed that Russia would not easily abdicate its vital interests in the region, it was felt that Turkey with due help from the US, Western Europe, and Japan, would be able to steer the new republics towards the path of economic development along them. While many presented Turkey as a model of a secular Islamic country, Turkish leaders were at pains to explain that their country had no pretensions and did not seek to impose its model on any of these republics. Moreover, its leaders claimed that it neither wanted to be a "regional power" nor wield a "zone of influence" nor wanted to "fill any vacuum" at the behest of any other power. This stance sprang from Turkey's historical and brotherly links with the region and it desired that its

36 Ibid.
relations should be a two-way street that would be constructive and mutually beneficial of course. It was also in their interest, if the Central Asian Republics themselves chose their friends. For instance, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan emotionally remarked in one of his heavily accounted Turkic speeches: “I announce to the world that my country will go forward by the Turkish route. We have chosen this route and will not turn back”. In a similar way, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan told a Turkish newspaper that “we want to implement a free market economy. The only model we have is Turkey”. Likewise, President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan described “Turkey as a moving star for them all.” In this respect, Turkish leaders began to enhance their country’s role in Central Asia.

**Turkey's Influence as a Secular Model**

With independence, the Soviet supremacy on religious activities in Central Asia came to an end. During the later years of perestroika (1989-91), taking advantage of religious freedom and the liberalization of foreign travel in the USSR, hundreds of welfare party and Nationalists Labour Party activists travelled to Muslim majority Soviet republics to build contacts with anybody and everybody who were interested in Islam or pan-Turkism, and the people there rediscover their Islamic and Turkic roots.

The Muslims of Central Asia, like their counterparts in Turkey, belong predominantly to the Sunnite Hanafi School. Turkey’s religious assistance to

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38 Ibid.
Central Asia was channelled through Directorate of Religious Affairs (DRA), an organ, representing the "official Islam". It is one of the largest and best financed government departments which controls mosques, religious education, various foundations and charities. The DRA, through its Religious Affairs Foundation, provided various types of voluntary aid to Central Asia, such as shipments of the Quran and other religious books, despatch of Ulemas (persons, who is well versed in religious texts), and scholarships to Central Asian students intending to pursue the study of Islam in Turkey. The DRA, through its Religious Affairs Foundation, provided various types of voluntary aid to Central Asia, such as shipments of the Quran and other religious books, despatch of Ulemas (persons, who is well versed in religious texts), and scholarships to Central Asian students intending to pursue the study of Islam in Turkey.40 "Secular" Turkey was one of the first countries to send Ulemas to the former Soviet Central Asia. It began with the dispatch of 397 Turkish Ulemas to these Central Asian countries and other states.41 Again in March 1992, the DRA despatched another batch of seventy six Ulemas to Central Asia to lead prayers in mosques and give sermons. This was followed by an appeal to Turkish Muslims for funds to build 100 mosques in the region.42 The Directorate of Religious Affairs also disclosed that it was funding 197 scholarships to students of Central Asia to study at Quranic schools in Istanbul and it had also shipped more than 200,000 religious books to these states.43 It has Directorate even prepared model sermons to be delivered by imams to congregations at mosques.

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41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p.71.
43 Ibid.
While doing all the aforesaid activities, Turkey’s leaders, in their public utterances, emphasized their country’s secular and modern character. There is a widespread feeling that this country needs a synthesis of secularism and Islam. A real cultural debate has begun in Turkey.44

The frequent refusal of the European Community to integrate Turkey into the organisation generated a popular interest in its Islamic heritage, indicative of the re-Islamisation trend in Turkey. There has been a steady expansion of the neo-Islamic Refah Party (Welfare Party), which had tripled its electoral gains from 7 to 21 percent between 1987 and 1995. In the political history of Turkey, for the first time in June 1996, Turkey had a Prime Minister whose political philosophy was largely based on Islamic solidarity, rather than national solidarity. But, a shift in state ideology was reflected in Turkey’s foreign policy under Turgut Özal, the first civilian Prime Minister after the coup, who intended to project Turkey as a “bridge between the West and the Arab World.”45 In October 1995, a conference was held in Ankara to coordinate Islamic activities in Central Asia. In a message to the conference, the President described Islam as “one of the most important bases of our solidarity”.46 And Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the opposition party, hailed a his address to the gathering that “Islam as the rising star of all times”.47 This

46 Ibid., p.36.
47 Eric Rouleau, “Beyond Ataturk”, Foreign Policy, No.103, Summer 1996, p.78.
Islamic bondness created by Turkey is a rising star in the matter of regional cooperation in Central Asia.

**Turkey's Role in Regional Cooperation in Central Asia**

Since 70 percent of the population of the Central Asian Republics is Turkic speaking, Turkey has been taking a great deal of interest in the region.\(^{48}\) As far as economic relation is concerned, it has a special importance. Turkey has been trying very hard for economic influence in the region, although it has no territory contiguous with Central Asia. Turkey highlighted its regional credentials through its membership of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), a long dormant institution of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) alliance revived in early 1992 to create a regional economic configuration to incorporate the Central Asian states, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Turkey also continually sought to institutionalize the Pan-Turkic drive for economic and political integration which was to reach its culmination in Ankara in November 1992 at the summit of Turkic-speaking nations.\(^{49}\) The economic influence would help in posting its exports through developing bilateral trade and exporting markets. According to the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency figure, Turkey has now about 9000 businessmen in Central Asia, the second largest after the United States. The Turkish enterprises in Central Asia have an annual turnover amounting to 10 billion dollars. Turkey is the number four donor with around 400 million dollars and established joint banks in the

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\(^{48}\) Interview with Dr. Nobert Holl, UN Representative in Afghanistan, *Pakistan Observer*, 5 November 1947.

\(^{49}\) Turkish TV, 4 March 1992, cited in SWB-SU/1322 A4/1.
republics of Central Asia,\textsuperscript{50} which accelerate economic cooperation in Central Asia.

Since 1992-93, Turkey has earmarked a total of US$886 million in development programme and investment credits to these republics.\textsuperscript{51} Besides, many agreements were signed for the sale of foodstuffs on credit worth around $400 million with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{52} In 1993, Turkish disbursed 0.22 percent of its GNP as official bilateral assistance, primarily to the Central Asian Republics and the Caspian region.\textsuperscript{53} Privately, around 400 Turkey's companies were involved in a wide range of investment projects with a total investment of five billion dollars.\textsuperscript{54} The main sectors attracting Turkish investment are infrastructure construction as well as industrial facilities. Apart from these, Turkish firms are engaged in trade, bakery, food processing, restaurant, service stations, workshops, and other small businesses. Training programmes are organised in both public and private sectors in the fields of foreign economy such as banking and insurance. Trade, too has increased manifold. As for transport and telecommunication sectors, they are being developed positively.

Air links have been established through regular and chartered flights to all major Central Asian Republics cities including Tashkent, Bishkek, Almaty


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
and Ashgabat since 1992. Turkey's relations with these countries are based on the principle of sovereignty, independence and mutual benefit. It is not in competition with other countries. This is despite Turkey's rhetoric that the 21st century would be a Turkish century.\(^{55}\)

**Turkey-Central Asia: Security Aspects**

As far as military and security affairs are concerned, Turkey's role has been negligible. There are three important causes for this. Firstly, Turkey does not share borders with Central Asia, so it can not directly affect the stability of that region. Turkey is not in a position to be involved in the military and security affairs of Central Asia. Due to heavy foreign debt, estimated at about $55 billion, it simply can not afford the high cost of direct military penetration on behalf of a regional state organization or significant financial and material commitments to assist the Central Asian armed forces.\(^{56}\)

Secondly, being a non-regional actor, the deep involvement of Turkey in the military and security affairs of Central Asia would predictably provoke a Russian response. Besides, Turkey also can not afford direct confrontation with Russia, because Russia is one of its main economic partners; over 90 per cent of Turkey's trade with CIS states is with Russia.\(^{57}\)

Turkey being surrounded by hostile neighbours cannot afford to have another enemy in its proximity. Facing several active and potential enemies,

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Turkey should have no interest in pushing a nuclear super power with formidable conventional military capabilities to join its enemy camp. The Central Asians neither wish to be dominated by Turkey, nor do they want to impair their relations with Russia over Turkey.

Out of the above discussion, it is clear that Turkey is handicapped by the absence of physical access to Central Asia and the variety of structural constraints along with transformative challenges that the Central Asian republics are confronted with, Turkey can not serve as a role model for these Central Asian republics. Furthermore, Turkey’s function as a western bridgehead into Central Asia has been of less importance since the governments of the region began to establish more and more direct links with western firms and governments. Therefore, it can be safely said that the Turkey’s long term interest could be better served by encouraging the positive cooperation factors among all the regional states of Central Asia.

THE ROLE OF CHINA IN CENTRAL ASIA’S REGIONAL COOPERATION

Unlike Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, China does not claim any cultural, linguistic or religious affinity with Central Asia, but like Turkey and to a lesser extent Iran, China is also a possible model for the countries of Central Asia. For Central Asian states, it is China’s rising military and economic power that has been both a matter of curiosity and concerns, while China look towards Central Asia’s rich deposits of petroleum, natural gas and other minerals and metals, which is very necessary for China’s rapid industrial development. Besides that, China has also common borders with three Central
Asian states. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, China as well as the Central Asian republics are trying to overcome their mutual misunderstandings in view of the changing world order. This emerging relationship is based on equality, friendship, mutual trust and sincere cooperation.

In this backdrop, it is very much necessary to examine China's overall expanding strategic, security and economic interests in Central Asian Republics and highlights China's inherent strength and weakness and to trace some broad trends for the future of its Central Asian policy formation.

The foremost strategic concern of China over the region is border problem on the north and north-west frontier. Considering that China shares 3,500 km joint borders with the (Kazak, Kyrgyz, Tajik) Central Asian states, that's why it is the fundamental need of China to maintain security and stability in its northwestern part. The border disputes with the newly Central Asian republics became an important aspect of China's strategic relations with Central Asia.

Various steps were taken to resolve the long-standing border issue between China and the Soviet Union in the mid-eighties. The collapse of the former Soviet Union was initially seen as China's gain in terms of newly independent states on China's borders but it has created its own complexities. This is because Central Asian Republics are being formed on the basis of ethnic identity which had virtually recharged separatist sentiments among

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China’s minorities living in its western provinces like Gansu, Qinghai, and its autonomous regions of Ningxia, Tibet and especially Xinjiang which is a non-cooperative factor in that region.

For the settlement of border disputes, China moved quickly to start negotiations with the three Central Asian states. There were some basic principles in their negotiations. These are:

i) Give respect to various agreements, which had already been entered into the Sino-Soviet border issues.

ii) Recognition of existing treaties as basis of the future negotiations.

iii) Willingness to settle all disputes in accordance with established rules of international law.

iv) Mutual consultation on equal manner and mutual accommodation.

The Sino-Kyrgyz and Sino-Tajik joint communiqués in 1992 and 1993 confirmed these above mentioned principles.

The most notable progress in negotiating for the bilateral settlement of disputed border was with Kazakhstan which resulted in the Sino-Kazakh boundary agreements on 27th April 1994 by the then Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev, which finalized 1700 km long Sino-Kazakh border disputes peacefully.

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61 Ibid., p.209.
In April 1994, the then Chinese Premier Li Peng also paid a high profile visit to the Central Asian states except Tajikistan, emphasizing peaceful coexistence, common prosperity, freedom of choice of development model and regional stability.\(^62\)

The negotiations to settle the border issue between China and the Soviet Union which began in the mid-eighties were subsequently joined by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, culminating in the five countries at Shanghai Summit in April 1996. The main aim of the Shanghai Summit was to settle the border problem and secure tension-free relationship among the five Central Asian countries. Apart from this, mutual accord was signed for reduction of troops in the border areas. They have acknowledged to reduce the number of troops in the border area to such a level that offensive action would not be possible, and they would not even use force or threaten when dispute occurs, nor would seek unilateral military superiority.\(^63\)

In 1997, the second Summit was held at Moscow, where the then Russian President Yeltsin had proposed for creating a zone of peace along the 10,000 km border shared by these five countries. On 4\(^{th}\) July 1998, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin and the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed an agreement that brought an end to the long outstanding border disputes. A declaration signed by Shanghai Five leaders (Russia, China, Kazakhstan,


Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) in their meeting in Tajikistan capital Dushanbe on 5th July 2000 highlighted that utmost attention is required for the maintenance of state sovereignty. Hence, border problems are unlikely to pose a serious security crisis in the near future. But more than these specific issues, this forum has also tried to project itself as an alternative cooperative security paradigm for evolving the 21st century world order. To quote from Chinese President, Jiang Zemin's speech at the fourth summit at Bishkek in 1999, "the new security model that we advocate, differs from that derived from the Cold War mentality, and its successful putting into practice have set a fine example in the international arena". 64

From an economic point of view, China has a vital interest in getting access to the vast energy resources of Central Asia in view of the increasing energy requirements of its growing economy. Immediately, after the emergence of independent Republics of Central Asia, China quickly established rail and road connections with the bordering Central Asian states. Cheap indigenous Chinese productions were launched massively into Central Asian market. China has also allowed its sea to the land-locked Central Asian states through its ports on the Pacific Ocean.

Traditionally, all the transport and communication systems of Central Asia have been through Russia, but access to the sea across the Chinese territory helps the Central Asian Republic with an effective alternative routes

64 Shao Zongwai, "Summit Agrees to Promote Regional Security and Stability", China Daily (Hong Kong, August 26, 1999), p.5.
and reduces their dependence on Moscow.\(^6\) The revival of the ancient Silk Road network which is linking China across Central Asia to Europe and the Middle East has caught the imagination of all concerned. China's entire strategy in the region is being driven by the thesis that economic prosperity will be the viable answer to all the ethnic and religious conflicts, that's why China's policy towards Central Asia is determined by its desire to have a good economic relations between the Central Asian states and its sensitive western borders across Xinjiang.\(^6\)

In the field of energy, the economies of Central Asian Republics on the one hand, and China, on the other, are mutually complementary.\(^7\) The huge hydro-carbon resources in Central Asia and its huge reserves like the Tarim basin in Xinjiang province hold great promise for cross-border cooperation. In Central Asia, estimates of seven billion barrels of proven oil reserves and at least 6,700 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves have been made. The fact is China may be importing 3 million barrels of crude oil per day by 2010 which makes it necessary for Sino-Central Asian cooperation in this field.\(^8\)

China is particularly interested in gaining access to Turkmenistan gas and thus ensure future energy security. The China-Turkmenistan joint statement issued on 6\(^{th}\) July 2000, at the time of President Jiang Zemin's visit

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to Ashgabat, has given special importance to strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation in the energy sector. It is a matter of fact that greater transportation grid could help boost the region's economy. The Central Asian Republics realize that increased cooperation with China will also link their economies with the Asia-Pacific economic boom. Though China individually has good economic relations with Central Asian countries, which is a negative factor for the co-operation because China is economically developed country, that's why the Central Asian countries are very much interested to develop their relations with China personally, therefore the need of regionalism is not developing among them.

Besides economic relations, security and nuclear issues are also most vital for China's engagement with Central Asian Republics. In 1991 – Kazakhstan was the only Asian country other than China to have declared its nuclear might. The Chinese were very much concerned about President Nazarbayev’s assertion in early 1992 that Kazakhstan had the right to join the nuclear club due to its geostrategic location and nuclear threat perception from its neighbours. China is very much concerned about the possible development of another nuclear power along its borders. However, under the persuasions of US in May 1992, Kazakhstan decided to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons country. On 23rd May 1992, it signed the Lisbon Protocol of

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70 Ibid.
the START treaty maintaining its non-nuclear status. By mid-1995, all nuclear warheads in Kazakhstan were either transferred to Russia or destroyed. After Kazakhstan became a nuclear weapon free-state in February 1995, the Chinese government gave its security assurance to Kazakhstan. The Chinese government urges all nuclear-weapon states to undertake strong commitment for the security of all non-nuclear weapon states.71

In defence sectors, China is also seeking military contacts with the Central Asian states. The significant achievement in defence and military cooperation between China and Central Asian states and Russia was the signing of the “Five Nation Agreement on Confidence Building” in the military forces of the border area at Shanghai Five formed a regional border security forum and agreed to cut their armed forces along their common borders and refrain from rising forces against each other. Such exchange of high-level military delegations as it has been going on between China and Kazakhstan since 1993, China has extended an aid of 11 million Yuan to the Kazakh armed forces during the visit of the Kazakh Defence Minister to China in April 2000. Turkmenistan Defence Minister visited China in September 1999 and expressed interest in cooperation with China in the field of military training and use of equipment.72 On 23rd July 1999, the visiting Chinese military delegation pledged aid to Kazakhstan,73 and on 13th July 2000, Chinese military

71 Ibid., p.185.
72 SWB/SU/3639 S1/2, September 14, 1999.
73 SWB/SU/3596 S1/2, July 26, 1999.
delegation also visited Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{74} There is no doubt that on the one hand, these high level military delegation will create a positive environment in promoting goodwill and increasing transparency in region's security interactions, but on the other hand, it will create a negative impact for their cooperation because Central Asian countries develop relations individually with China, which is anti-regionalism by nature.

China has perhaps been one of the more successful external powers in Central Asia. So long as Xinjiang remains quiescent, China will continue to cement the relations with Central Asia. It is unlikely that these countries would seek to alienate their big neighbour through excessive protectionist measures. A friendly relationship with China also offers the governments of Central Asia an additional weapon to deter Russian attempts to reimpose its imperial rule.

THE UNITED STATES

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, a new dimension was added to Central Asian geopolitics. The strategic importance of Central Asia has become more distinct. In this dynamic situation where a political and security vacuum exists, several players have stepped in to gain control in this region particularly, the US, which is not geographically close to the region, but were given a chance to come closer to these newly independent states. It has made significant efforts, striving for the leading role in dominating the development of the region. The newly independent Central Asian States have

\textsuperscript{74} SWB/SU/3894 S1/5, July 17, 2000.
even caught the US policy makers unaware. Perhaps one of the biggest foreign policy problems for the US today is to deal with the newly liberated Central Asian states. The problem is biggest in the sense that neither the US academicians and policy makers know much about the region nor have the US any past experience of interaction with the region. As Leslie Gelb of the New York Times has commented that “Washington's Soviet experts were mainly experts from Moscow and with the break-up of the Soviet Union, they have been adrift”.  

It has also been pointed out by an anthropologist, William Beeman, as: “years of neglect have left the United States starved for knowledgeable regional specialists. Only one institution – Indiana University, currently offers courses on the region as part of a regular curriculum of study”. Since mid 1990’s, the US strengthened its, 'New Central Asia Strategy' by making use of all sorts of measures. The target for this new strategy is to consolidate its status as the sole super power to restrain Russia in the north, to guard against Islamic world in the south and the contain China in the east.

The US has multiple objectives in the region. Firstly, it claims to bolster the independence and sovereignty of states of the region and to promote democracy and free market. This, however, must be seen in the context of US desire to develop the Caspian Sea region as an alternative source of oil and

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gas in view of the uncertain situation in the Persian Gulf. Secondly, it wants to promote US companies in successful and lucrative oil deals which will bring economic benefits to the US.\textsuperscript{77}

The present geo-political scenario differs sharply from that of the post-1945 era when the US readily filled the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of Britain from its colonial world. One of the fundamental contrasting feature is that Russia, unlike that of Britain, does not want itself to be replaced completely by the US, even though there is a much wider range of cooperation between the two. Russia, despite with its severe domestic political crises, wants to retain its influence over the whole region known as Former Soviet Union (FSU), of which Central Asia was the inalienable and strategic component. Moreover, the situation also varied from the post-World War II era in terms of the numbers of actors involved in the “revisited great game”. The United States has not only to face China as a strong inter regional power, which highly conscious of the western and the US designs and moves towards the region but also has to face the number of assertive actors like Iran, Turkey and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{78}

In recent years, the United States is able to inject its political presence in the new post-Soviet republics of Eurasia – all the way to the frontiers of China as well as to dominate the Persian Gulf region on the Southern fringes of Eurasia.\textsuperscript{79}


\textsuperscript{78} Abdul Shakoor, op.cit., p.75.

From the geographical point of view, the U.S. has to face three states on the southern rim of the Central Asians states (CAS) – namely Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. To get penetration into the CAS, the US has to operate via media, either or in combination with these three states.\(^{80}\) However, any US linkage or commitment with the region is fundamentally dependent of its intensity of interests perception. The United States has multiple interests in the Central Asian region. The most important objectives are –

- Containment of fundamentalism.
- Military-strategic interests.
- Containment of Iran.
- Economic and commercial interests.

The spread of Islamic resurgence in Central Asia is not only a popular bogey, but is conceived as a real threat by the western media especially after the Tajik Civil War began. The US interest in Central Asia is dominated by a fear of radical Islam which is anti-western in nature. In this regard, the former US Secretary of State, James Baker, publicly warned Central Asian leaders to stay clear of radical Islam and the influence of Iran.\(^{81}\)

Besides, the activities of Islamic groups in Central Asia against political status quo are also disturbing the United States. Turkey is being encouraged by the US to play an active role in this region both to act as a bulwark against Islamic force and to promote a secular model of governance. Coincidentally,

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\(^{80}\) Abdul Shakoor, op.cit., p.78.

\(^{81}\) Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.245.
Turkey itself is in trouble as its own group of Islamic parties have gained tremendous support. But in any case, they will carry on their secular principles as long as it could be possible. Apart from Turkey, the US has also been trying for another tool, Pakistan, a model Islamic state in the modernist mould. But fierce battles between Shia and Sunni inside Pakistan makes itself weak on inter-state agenda. In this sense, US as well as its tools are in a phase of seeking change as well as continuity.\textsuperscript{82} Many of the western powers regard Islamic fundamentalism as a serious challenge to international security \textsuperscript{83}. The western countries are trying to create their influence in the region through Turkey, because Turkey is a secular, market oriented economy and has a pro-western regime. To reach their goal, the US and NATO states have encouraged Turkish nationalism in the Central Asian region after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US which sent back waves of horror around the world, but they also proved a major wind fall to the Karimov government, which at once became a key player in Bush administrations war effort. Suddenly, the Islamic threat, which Tashkent faced locally, was transformed into a global problem, and the primary suspects in the attacks lay just across in the Afghan border. This change meant that international and most important, the US military and economic resources would be given to fight Islamic militants. Karimov now hopes this campaign will be extended to fight Taliban's


ideological counterparts in Uzbekistan. From religious point of view, the US has not been promoting regional cooperation in Central Asia because they are anti-Islamic and regard Islamic fundamentalism as a direct challenge for their security.

**Military-Strategic Factor**

The US has increased cooperation with the Central Asian countries in the military and security fields. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction is a reality for the Americans as they are highly determined to check any such possible proliferation. Once Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Chief, James Woolsey told a Senate Committee on Non-proliferation that proliferation poses one of the most complex challenges, the intelligence community will face for the remainder of the century. The problem raised by Kazakhstan's acquisition of nuclear weapons, considered the fourth largest nuclear power in the world, dominated the American and Western strategists. Kazakhstan inherited 104 SS - 18 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with a total of 1400 warheads. Each ICBM can travel up to 11200 kilometers and carries 10 independently targeted warheads. Here, the most important point to be noted is that Kazakhstan became the first ever Muslim state that could strike directly at the heartland of the West.

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86 Ibid., p. 234.
That is why Kazakhstan became a source of grave concern for the US whose diplomats visited frequently Alma-Ata after the failed coup of August 1991. The nuclear card became a political leverage for Ukraine and Kazakhstan, as both tried to extract more concessions from Russia and greater financial aid from the US.  

The US has increased cooperation with the Central Asian countries in the military and security fields by concerning with the rise of China, the possible revitalization of Russia and the existence of Islamic extremist activities. The Central Asian countries too have a common willingness to conduct military cooperation with the US. By taking advantage of this mindset, the US-led NATO has succeeded in establishing "peaceful partnership" with Central Asian countries. 

The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) extension to the region was a strategic move which did little to alleviate the security concerns of Central Asia. Apart from this, the US is very much interested to maintain cooperation in security issues as a major element in its foreign policy framework. Central Asian joint maneuver were held between the US and Kazakh troops in Kazakhstan in September 1997. The US government declared that it intends to include Central Asia in the area of responsibility of the Central command of the US armed forces. 

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87 Ibid., p. 235.
US can have effective means of establishing security links by expanding help to states having geographical proximity with Central Asian states like Pakistan, Turkey and Russia. But at the practical declaratory level, the US is not supporting Pakistan because of mass anti-American sentiments in that country. It cannot present Pakistan as a model state for Central Asia. More so, the US has to contend with Pakistan over its nuclear programmes political instability and Islamic revivalism. Despite all these controversial relationship, the US has not completely ignored Pakistan. Recent massive foreign investment in energy sector, finances from International Finance Commission (IFC) and aid-consortium, and International Monetary Fund (IMF) health certificate to Pakistan should be viewed in this context. 90

In recent years, US has increased economic assistance and investment to Central Asia, taking advantage of Central Asian countries, common economic difficulty and their psychological eagerness of acquiring wealth out of the oil and gas resources. As an alternative to the Middle Eastern oil resources in the future, these days American investors and businessmen are very active in evaluating the region's oil and gas potential. Shafiqul Islam, an economist, in his recent article says, “the natural resources that has attracted the attentions of Americans, Japanese and other foreign investors to Central Asia its huge energy oil and natural gas” 91. The US lured the Central Asian states with capital investment, compelled the latter to adopt “democratic

political system and free market economy". By setting up joint ventures, US has invested in enterprises and purchasing the stock right of the key enterprises in the region. The US has gradually controlled the key industries, especially the energy industries of some Central Asian republics. An at the same time, the US encouraged these republics centrifugal forces against Russia, tried to weaken the latter's influence in the region and bring Central Asia into their sphere of influence.

Possible economic and commercial gains for the US in Central Asia can be achieved if the region is politically stable and economically viable for proper investment. Central Asia can provide a market of 52 million people for the United States and Washington can help the states of that region to build a modern economic and technological infrastructure. The Central Asian region could be a source of attraction for the US, given the immense deposits of natural resources. Uzbekistan has 25 percent and Kazakhstan has 9 percent of former USSR's gold reserves. Kazakh has the second largest unexploited oil reserves of the former Soviet Union.

Technological expertise and hard currency are two important needs of the Central Asian states and given its economic and technological clout, the US can be helpful to these states. US can most realistically hope to influence the politics and attitudes of the republics through the support of structural economic and institutional reforms and programmes. The leaders of these states have supported the involvement of World Bank, the IMF and other

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92 Ma Jiali, op.cit, n.88, pp. 40-41.
development agencies. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have already adopted economic reform programmes,\textsuperscript{93} by making one to one relationship with newly independent states of Central Asia.

Apart from the above discussed factors, the US has increased political contacts with the Central Asian countries. It recurrently invited state leaders of the Central Asian countries to visit America. Senior civilians and military officials of the US and NATO have also paid frequent visits to Central Asia. The US side hopes such exchange of visits could enhance mutual understanding, reduce each other's suspicion and drive a wedge between the Central Asian states.\textsuperscript{94} Besides, the US continues to carry out "psychological warfare" by financing the scholars and socialites of the Central Asian countries to visit the west, in order to transform them into pioneers of the "peace revolution". Similarly, the US established teaching institutions in Central Asia, provided youth in the region with opportunities of studying abroad, in order to foster a pro-US and pro-west social base in this area. From the entire relationship between US and Central Asia, whether it may be economic, military or security aspect, it clearly indicates that the economic and commercial interests, particularly the rich oil reserves and huge energy potential of Central Asia are the main attention of US foreign policy objectives. Moreover, the US involvement in Central Asian states is based on common mutual interests, and over the years the mutual common interest perception has shown remarkable


\textsuperscript{94} Ma Jiali, op.cit, n.88, p. 41.
progress and the process is likely to strengthen. In the long run it will help to facilitate for regional cooperation in Central Asia.

PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN CENTRAL ASIA

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of five Central Asian republics created a new politico-geographical situation. The newly independent Central Asian states have a majority of Muslim population except in Kazakhstan where the Kazakhs are in a minority and the Russians, Ukrainians are in a majority. The emergence of new Muslim states in the region and the demonstration by them of their Muslim identity has given Pakistan hope for diplomatic support in its confrontation with its eastern neighbour. Pakistan has shown great willing to cement political cooperation with the Central Asian states towards that end. The historical connection between Pakistan and Central Asian states extends so far into their past that there is the evidence of overland routes, long before the urban-settlements of the Indus Valley Civilization at Harappa and Mohenjodaro of 5000 year old.\(^{95}\) Indeed, the entire ethno-cultural life of these areas which now comprises Pakistan was moulded in the pattern of Central Asia. The national dress of Pakistan, its languages and even its religious traditions were much influenced by this connection. In the vast belt of the Asian heartland extending from Central to West and South Asia, the maintenance of one cultural standard was possible because there were free movements of people and brisk trade, that

continued among the constituent states, inspite of war and conflict. The Pakistani cities of Multan, Thatta, Peshawar and Lahore had direct links with Samarkand, Bokhara, and other Central Asian cities until the early 19th century when colonization of Central Asia by Russia, and the South Asian subcontinent by Britain, broke the connection and led them to look in different directions.

Pakistan views the emergence of Central Asian states as a challenge as well as opportunities in achieving the following objectives.

Religious – Ideological Interests – Pakistan has tried to export its own brand of Islamic culture into Central Asia. An overwhelming large majority of the people of Pakistan follow Sunni Hanafi Islam. Pakistan had been cherishing the revival of historical links with Central Asia since the days of Zia-Ul-Haq. The spread of Islamic culture driven by General Zia-Ul-Haq in the seventies and the eighties had promoted the emergence of Deobandi-Wahabi militant groups which have been carrying on a virulent anti-Shia violent campaign against the Shia population in Pakistan. The Saudi Wahabi propaganda and financial assistance to Sunni groups is taken advantage by Pakistani militants in Central Asia. General Zia's intelligence chief, Lt. General Akhtar Abdur Rehman, once told the visiting US dignitaries that the holy war against communists would not remain in Afghanistan alone but would be pursued into Central Asia. In this context, Pakistan's interests in Central Asia have been determined by its rivalry with India. As Pakistan faces persistent threat from a

96 Ibid., p.44.
hostile and hegemonic India, the independence of these republics with their historic and cultural links to South Asia and their likely quest for an outlet to the sea via Pakistan make them into a potential hinterland. Pakistan has begun to challenge India's monopoly over trade in Central Asia over a considerable period. As regional cooperation and Islamic bond develop, this could alter the strategic configuration in a manner favourable to Pakistan, which would make up for the loss of importance the country suffered as a "frontline state" during the cold war era. Pakistan strongly perceived that Islamization of Central Asian states would strengthen and rationalize Pakistan's own existence as an Islamic state. The Amir of Jamaat-e-Islami, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, speaks of a golden opportunity for Pakistan to help to born an Islamic government in Afghanistan so that the door to the Central Asia opens for Pakistan and at the same time, Indian dominance in the region will be checked.

Western strategic concerns about Pakistan is based on the fact that it is already the epicenter for three civil wars in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kashmir. All three conflicts involve fundamentalist elements which have been clandestinely fuelled by Pakistan's religious parties and its military. Thus, the impact of developments in Pakistan will be felt across Central Asia, India and

China. However, after September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on World Trade Centre in New York and Pentagon, the US attitude towards international terrorism emanating from Pakistan and Afghanistan changed drastically and led the campaign to oust Taliban from power and destroy terrorist centres.

On the part of Central Asia, the newly independent republics share a feeling of affinity and kinship with Pakistan, since they have retained the Islamic link as the bridge to their distinctive cultural identity. There has been a revival of Islamic awareness after long standing restrictions were removed, and not only have thousands of mosques been opened, but also Islamic-oriented political parties have also emerged and secured a considerable position, and developed cooperation among them. This Islamic bondness has been the main factor for regional cooperation between the Central Asian republics, which is unchallengeable and undeniable in the present world order.

Strategic and Economic Perspectives

Pakistan is one of the countries which is very keen to develop relations with the Central Asian republics. Its main advantage is its geographical location, as it provides landlocked Central Asian states, access to the sea. Pakistan can take full advantage of its links with the region only if the political situation in Afghanistan settles down and a regime friendly to its interest emerges in Kabul. Given peace in Afghanistan and development of means of communication and transport, Pakistan will hold the key to Central Asia. The

United States also has a vested interest in this scenario. For the US interests, the route to Central Asia through Pakistan will be the most convenient.\(^{102}\) Pakistan has been keen to lay pipelines through Afghanistan leading to its ports. This will bypass Iran and that would deny any advantage to Iran. In contrast, in 1997 Iran had constructed a pipeline to carry Turkmenistan oil from the Caspian Sea to Turkey.\(^{103}\) But this was not liked by the United States and Pakistan. In this context, the United States and Pakistan have a convergence of their interests to keep Iran out of the Central Asian hydrocarbon resources. On 21 October 1995, the UNCAL of US and the DELTA Oil Company of Saudi Arabia signed a protocol of intent for proposed oil pipelines to extend from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan.\(^{104}\) For states of South Asia, Pakistan in particular, a land based pipeline could offer access to cheap energy to support its economic expansion, especially after the sanctions imposed on India and Pakistan following their May 1998 nuclear tests. However, because of US refusal to recognize the Taliban regime in Kabul, the prospects of this pipeline for now, are not bright.

Pakistani perception and economic policies in Central Asia strongly reflect Pakistan's economic priorities through Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO). Pakistani leaders believe that ECO founded in 1985 holds


\(^{103}\) Kalim Bahadur, "Pakistani and Iranian Rivalry in Central Asia", World Focus, Vol.21, No.8, August 2000, p.20.

the promise for a new expanded cooperation among the countries of the region. Pakistan hopes that the induction of the Central Asian republics will infuse new blood in the organization. The major reason, why Central Asian states would like to strengthen their links with three original members of ECO apart from economic cooperation is to restore cultural and social links with these Muslim countries which are crucial for the cooperation among Central Asian republics. Pakistan is separated from Central Asia by a narrow strip of land in the north and had long historical links with that region. In the first Summit for the expanded ECO which was held in Ashgabat, it was decided to construct a rail road, linking all the member countries of the ECO as well as gas pipeline and highway. That could be a positive factor for developing the cooperation in that region.

Pakistan’s economic priorities are clear, developing bilateral trade in raw materials and manufactured goods, opening of communications with the region and conducting for regular power supply. A long term goal is a projected highway and railway across Afghanistan to Pakistan giving trade access to the Indian Ocean. Besides manufacturing and light industry, Pakistani entrepreneurs feel that they have a great deal to offer in setting up or expanding banking and insurance sectors, as well as stock markets, joint venture capital and import and export. In this context, Pakistani firm will face considerable competition from Turkey, India, Western Europe and North America.


\[106\] Anthony Hyman, op.cit., n.98, p.267.
In this context, Pakistan has one important advantage as compared to other ECO member countries for promoting economic activity in Central Asia. It has no direct conflict with any of the five Central Asian states and hence, it enjoy the confidence and trust among these countries.

Though there is a scope for economic cooperation between the two, there are several problems which have to be tackled. The principal needs of Central Asia being for capital and technology, but Pakistan as a developing country at the lower end of the economic scale, can make only a modest contribution in this regard. Even in the field of trade Pakistan cannot look for much. The Central Asian states are heavily dependent on Russia for their trade.

The ECO is also plagued with almost the same problems in the way of deepening cooperation among the members as the old RCD. There are divergent economic interests and political objectives. These factors still hinder the ECO. Even the perception of the importance of the Islamic link varies from country to country, the Central Asian republics have avoided extreme Islamic postures which is likely to antagonize the West. The inclination on the part of Russia to assent its dominant role and its preoccupation with containing the Islamic upsurge are also seen as major handicaps for Pakistan. It lacks the resources on the direct overland connection to Central Asia. In order to have direct access to that zone, it must either link up with Xinjiang or Afghanistan. Both possibilities have limitations, China has strongly opposed Pakistan’s efforts to sponsor Muslim secessionist movements in its neighbourhood. 107

However, within the parameters of existing realities, there exist unextensive possibilities for developing mutually beneficial cooperation. Pakistan can provide training facilities in certain sectors where it has expertise including banking, railways and other fields where Central Asia needs trained cadres. As the agreement for a joint venture in building a cement plant concluded in July 1993 with the visiting President of Kazakhstan, Pakistan can offer credit facilities together with available technology to assist these republics to develop self-reliance. An agreement was concluded in 1995 between the Islamic Development Bank and ECO for the conduct of surveys and feasibility studies. This demonstrated that the multilateral framework involving Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) and ECO provides a precedent of the kind of support these institutions can provide to further cooperation.\(^{108}\)

To sum up, it can be said that the emergence of Central Asian republics can be viewed as positive development by Pakistan. Though, Turkey and Iran may have certain advantages based on ethnic and linguistic links, they also have their limitations. Pakistan can, in the long terms, develop organic links based on religious and cultural ties. Viewed in the broad regional perspective, the establishment of cordial and cooperative relations among bloc of Islamic countries stretching from Arabian Sea to the Urals would not only facilitate their collective development, but also enhance Pakistan's sense of security by providing it with a counterweight to hegemonic pressures from the east.

India probably suffered a lot from the collapse of the USSR and it is renewing its relations with Moscow and working vigorously to revitalize its ties with the individual Central Asian countries. India as an extended neighbour of Central Asian republics has major strategic and economic interests in this region.

The subject of Indo-Central Asian relations is not a new one. Close historical bonds have always linked these two with this region being accepted as India's "extended neighbourhood." It is pertinent to remember that the centuries old relationship between the two regions has evolved through cultural interaction. Several facets of cultures, civilizations and intellectual histories of the regions suggest that they evolved not in isolation, but through reciprocal cultural enrichment. In modern times, however, the importance of Central Asia to India is not only civilizational and historical but also geopolitical and economic. Central Asia is of great strategic importance to India as there is an enormous scope for pragmatic and profitable engagement between India and Central Asia. India's geostrategic interests in the region with special reference to problems of political Islam, security, drugs and arms trafficking greatly pave the way for closer relationship between India and Central Asia. From security point of view, peace and stability in Central Asia and Afghanistan seems to be the most important factor for India's security.

India has vital interests in the security and political stability in Central Asia. Given the Kashmir angle, India cannot be walled off from the political developments, which takes place in the Central Asian region. Any advance by Islamic extremist groups in the Central Asian republics could invigorate similar elements active in Kashmir. From geographical point of view, India’s strategic concerns are tied up with the regions bordering north and northwest. Pakistan in its northwest continues to be antagonistic towards India. Pakistan is already sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. For India, the Kashmir issue pertains not to four million Muslims living in Kashmir valley alone but to the peace and security of 130 million Muslims elsewhere in India. Therefore, the geostrategic importance of Central Asia is very important for India.

The instability in Afghanistan has also adversely influenced the peace and security of India. Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to be the key actors creating destabilization in the Central Asian republics as well as in India. The insurgency in Kashmir went into higher gear with greater cross-border support for terrorist operations. Afghanistan provided terrorists with arms, training facilities and financial support. These considerations demonstrate that India cannot afford complacency about Islamism at home or abroad, if not identical phenomenon. India believes that Pakistan will not make much

headway in Central Asia by playing the Islamic card because of the rivalry of other Muslim states and Russia with Pakistan.\textsuperscript{111}

The US State Department, in its report on terrorism, also focused on Pakistan and Afghanistan for sheltering terrorists. It is quite clear that the violent and turbulent situation created by Pakistan and Afghanistan jointly disturbed the peace and stability in India as well as in Central Asian region. Both are victims of cross-border terrorism and consider it as a threat to regional peace and stability. In this respect, convergence of their interests in combating terrorism is the most appropriate logical step keeping in view the above possibilities. The then Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narsimha Rao pulled off a successful visit to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 23\textsuperscript{rd} April–2\textsuperscript{nd} May 1993, even as western and Islamic influences buffeted the two former Soviet republics. Rao and Karimov (Uzbekistan's President) expressed apprehensions about rising radicalism and cross-border terrorism. This treaty enlightened Uzbekistan to enjoy a most favoured nation status with regard to India.\textsuperscript{112} A crucial step was taken during the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov's visit to India in May 2000.\textsuperscript{113} Most of agreements signed during the visit were concerned with combating terrorism.\textsuperscript{114} Earlier, similar views on terrorism were shared by Kyrgyzstan with India during Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev's


\textsuperscript{113} The Hindu, May 1, 2000.

\textsuperscript{114} The Hindu, May 3, 2000.
visit to India in April 1999. In this context, the visit of External Affairs Minister of India, Jaswant Singh to Tashkent in May 2000 was intended to consolidate these developments.

1. Economic Issues

History illustrates the value of Central Asia as a transit route for the continent. Throughout history, India and Central Asia lived in a mutual economic symbiosis. India could obtain economic benefits by developing economic and trade relations with Central Asian countries. To obstruct the interference of other countries, India has reacted quickly to both Iran and China and expand its own trade and economic ties with Central Asian countries, and to cooperate with Russia against any Pakistani on Islamic influence. Both India and Central Asia have economic complementarity in terms of resources, manpower and markets. Central Asia is a huge consumer market, hungry for a range of goods and services. For India, economic cooperation is possible through joint venture in banking, insurance, agriculture, information, technology and pharmaceutical industry. Certain Indian commodities, for example, tea, drugs, pharmaceuticals and fine chemicals have established a foothold in Central Asian market. India has to strive hard to increase its exports to Central Asia in order to maximize mutual benefits through bilateral trade and cooperation. The government of India is

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115 The Hindu, April 14, 1999.
making an effort to create the right kind of atmosphere for companies to enter this market.

India's diplomatic and economic ties with the region have been growing by bilateral economic and political ties. Three party agreement on international transit of goods between Turkmenistan, India and Iran signed in February 22, 1997 at Teheran which would enable the movement of goods from Indian ports to Bandar Abbas in Iran and then to the Central Asia region by road and rail.

Good relations with Central Asian countries would guarantee stable energy supply, which could help India to meet the increasing domestic energy need. According to statistics, the annual growth rate of Indian petroleum products consumption is 6 percent. By the year 2001, India will need 115 million tons of petroleum products; by 2010, it will need more than 200 million ton of petroleum products. In fact, only 30 percent of its consumption would be self-support. Such huge energy shortage will force India seeking stable, economical and reliable energy resources. In this sense, oil and gas in Central Asia will be very important for India. India imports nearly two thirds of its petroleum requirements and is emerging as one of the largest markets for oil and natural gas. Central Asia, on the other hand, is emerging as one of the largest suppliers of these hydrocarbons. What India wants most is to built a

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118 Rajesh Kumar Mishra, op.cit., n.112.
119 Meena Singh Roy, op.cit., n.109, pp.22.
120 Ma Jiali, "Central Asia: Geo-Strategic Situation and Big Powers Politics", Contemporary Central Asia, Vol.111, No.1, 1999, p.43.
short-cut pipeline from Central Asia to its territory. The only existing pipeline passes through Russia, a dependence which is exploited by it and resented by the Central Asian republics. It is further complicated because of chaotic conditions in Russian republic of Chechnya through which it passes.\textsuperscript{121} Another pipeline, which is favoured by the United States, will go under the Caspian, via Caucasus under sea pipeline but due to the disturbed conditions in Caucasus (consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), the future of this is also not certain.\textsuperscript{122}

There is a proposal for laying a gas pipeline from Iran to India through Indian Ocean, since its passage through Pakistan will be problematic because of the nature of Indo-Pak relations. There have been some feasibility studies for a 8,000 k.m., 8.5 billion dollar pipeline to transport Turkmen gas to China, Korea and Japan.\textsuperscript{123} Although there are difficulties of a mountainous terrain, yet in future, transport on pipeline between India and China can not be ruled out.

Recently in 1999, at a meeting between Turkmen President and Indian Foreign Minister in Ashgabat, a decision was taken to set up a Joint Working


Group on energy resources, which will be opened to third countries having similar concern.

A technical cooperation programme has also begun. India's main emphasis should be on manufacturing and industrial activities. Commercial farming is another important area where India and Central Asian republics can co-operate on one hand, and Central Asian countries among them on other hand. The prospects in infrastructure building and construction activities has long term possibilities. This sector is the key to the Central Asian market. Six Indian firms/companies are accredited with Kazakhstan and nine joint ventures are registered. Once the transport corridor is established, there is a great scope for oil exploration and energy market. In August 1999, a memorandum of mutual understanding was signed for the project, for the construction of project plan with modern technology for use of coal waste.¹²⁴

On the basis of the above points, it can be summed up that India has major geostrategic and economic interests in this region. The future prospects for cooperation between Central Asia and India in the field of energy security seem to be very crucial. Therefore, economic diplomacy should remain India's basic policy thrust towards the region. India needs no clash but a compatibility of interests with these new states from the above mentioned relationships between India and Central Asia. It has been wrongly pointed out that, India is only interested for economic benefits from Central Asian region like US, China, but not concerned for their regional cooperation.

As the potential partners of the Central Asian countries, each of these states has both advantages and liabilities. Some of them deep-rooted in geopolitical, ethno-cultural and historical factors, others by contrast are derived from the character of regional and international politics. The contradictory global interest of all powers will ultimately have their impact on the process of regional cooperation in Central Asia.