RUSSIA'S POLICY TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA

Russia has historical, cultural and economic relations with Central Asia. By the end of the 19th century following the incorporation of Crimea, the Caucasus and the Central Asian region, Russia became a polyethnic, poly-confessional country with a population of 18 million Muslim populations equal to the number of Muslims in the Ottoman Empire. The consequence of the merger of Central Asia in the Russian state had both positive and negative sides. On the negative side, it was the absence of self-rule and civil administration and consolidation of feudalism in Khiva and Bukhara. On the positive side, it was characterized by end of internecine feudal wars, advance in economy through construction of railroad and abolition of slavery in this region (Kaushik 2003: 1). Thus, the merger of Central Asia with Russia can be considered as an objectively progressive and positive in character.

There were specific political and economic relations between the masses of the Central Asian region and the Soviet Union. Historically, Russian policy towards Central Asia was generally marked by liberal spirit of non-interference in the national life of this region. Due to the interaction with the progressive democratic representatives of advanced Russian culture, a democratic socio-political thought in Central Asia was developed and the world outlook of many representatives of national culture and science was nurtured in this region. During the period of Stalin, new ethnic boundaries were drawn in accord with the national principle finally constituting five union republics in three stages such as 1924, 1929 and 1934. The economic and strategic considerations of the central authority were also given due consideration (ibid: 2-3).

During the period of Soviet President Gorbachev, the Russia-Central Asian relations became unpleasant. In Kazakhstan, riots sparked off in the capital city due to the removal of the long-serving Kazakh party chief and his replacement by a Russian party official Kolbin. The Central Asian leaders demanded for greater use of national...
languages, employment opportunities, environment protection, abolition of cotton monoculture etc. and opposed an isolationist policy of the centre. They also got the support from the representatives of the Baltic republics. A separatist tendency developed among the leaders of the republics and disturbances in the Central Asian region started, which caused for ethnic exodus (ibid: 3-4).

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in December 1991, it was more due to the urge of the Pro-West democratic Russian elite to off load the burdensome Central Asian republics in order to achieve a speedy modernization than the secessionist desire of the Central Asian ruling elite. Strangely, 90 to 95% of the eligible voters in the Central Asian republics favoured the preservation of the USSR. Because, the Central Asian republics were heavily dependent on the subsidies from the Union in their budgets and their economies were closely interlinked with Soviet Union (ibid: 6).

After the demise of Soviet Union, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed in 1992. Its founding documents retained a single economic, legal, military and defence space. So, the CIS had a single currency-Russian rouble, all the objective factors then favored reintegration of the republics of Central Asia with Russia. Up to 1992, the Union industries were still functioning and the technical links were in fact within the framework of an all-Union division of labour. On the other hand, Russian leaders were striving hard to get rid off the acute economic crisis followed by the disintegration of Soviet Union. Furthermore, there was a sharp split among Russia's political elites. During 1993, Russia was suffering from the liquidation of the Union-Republican industrial giants and the closure of a large number of middle and small level enterprises occurred. The former single all-union power, transport and communication systems were collapsed. The Central Bank of Russia failed to supply adequate supply of roubles to the Central Asian republics. These were the reasons due to which President Boris Yeltsin regarded Central Asia as an economic over-burden for Russia (ibid: 9).
For long Russia has been so intricately associated with Central Asia that it would be difficult when it is able to cut off its interests from the region. The integration was so deep that Central Asian states seemed not ready for independence after the disintegration of Soviet Union. After the demise of Soviet Union, Russia has clearly seen the border of Central Asia as the outer limit of its own security frontier. Despite this Russia was not able to formulate a clear-cut foreign policy towards Central Asia during the time of President Boris Yeltsin. This period is being regarded as an “involuntary Russian disengagement from Central Asia”. Russia’s disengagement was in the fields of military, trade and commerce, culture, the transportation of natural resources (Jonson 2001: 1).

Although, Russia was a dominant power in Central Asia for more than a century, its influence was waning in its traditional sphere of influence after the sad demise of Soviet Union. Its influence was diminishing in the area of commerce, because Russia failed to create a common economic integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russia’s trade relation with the Central Asian countries was also decreasing. In the sphere of military relation Russia was unable to integrate the Central Asian countries militarily and its proposals for the military integration of the CIS were being rejected (Jonson 2005:1).

In the sphere of transport of natural resources such as gas and oil, Russia’s influence was also slowly declining. Through international consortia, the Central Asian countries gained the right for new pipeline systems to be built along with the routes that would bypass Russia (ibid: 2). Currently, the new actors such as the US, China, Iran, India and Turkey are present in this region in order to fulfil their geopolitical interests and Russia is regarded as one among these actors in this region.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the Central Asian states were freed from the control of Russia and started searching for the opportunity to maintain relations with external actors for reviving their economies. On the other hand, at supra state level the Central Asian Republics wanted to integrate within wider international cooperative
structure. The effort to establish the engagement of non-CIS powers in the region can also be seen as a part of the Central Asian leadership’s conscious balancing of interests and influence in the region (ibid: 2).

An important reason was the shock of disintegration, which had its negative impact on Russia’s economic and military powers. But, Russia’s foreign policy towards Central Asia became vibrant once again when Putin came to power. He started to follow a pragmatic foreign policy towards the ‘near abroad’ in spite of the limited economic and military resources of his own country. Rather the weakness of Russia was used as a strategy to strengthen its foothold in the Central Asian region. This above strategy was reflected in Russia’s new foreign policy concept of summer 2000, which was driven by a strong sense of pragmatism. In this new concept Russia was re-emphasising the CIS and the reintegration of economic union. In October 2000, Eurasian Economic Community was formed on the basis of the Customs Union.

Putin personally visited the individual countries of Central Asia as the confidence building measure tactics. He personally visited Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in May 2000. During his first term, Russia could revive the relation with Turkmenistan. Russia even got the right to set up its military bases in Tajikistan, which was decided at the CIS summit in June 2000. Additionally, Putin placed the Caspian at the heart of this pragmatic policy in order to regain Russia’s influence in Central Asia. For the instance, on April 21, 2000, the Caspian was one of only two topics discussed by the Russian Security Council. At the same meeting Putin announced the appointment of a special presidential representative for Caspian affairs, Victor Kaluzny, former minister of energy, who since being named has travelled to each of the littoral states. In July 2000 a joint company composed of Lukoil, Gazprom and Yokos was created to develop Caspian Sea resources (Cummings 2001: 147).

There are some important factors for Russia’s reengagement in this region. First of all, the radical Islamist mobilisation in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan
crystallised in 1999 was regarded as a threat to the national security interests of Russia. Secondly, the US presence in Central Asian during its war against the Taliban rule in Afghanistan had made Russia to take serious consideration. Because, Russia never wanted the US to engage in its traditional sphere of influence, which would be a matter of serious concern for Moscow in the context of it’s regaining of influence in this region. Thirdly, the external actors such as China, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had made Russia to take the renewed interest in Central Asia’s geopolitics. Fourthly, Russia wanted to take the advantage of the US’ military presence in Central Asia, because, it wanted to bring the Chechnya issue before the international community.

Russia, the true successor state of the former Soviet Union was in a declining state in the spheres of economy and trade, which had its adverse impact on its foreign policy towards neighbours. Russian leadership was in a state of illusion that, Moscow still had the potential to influence on its neighbours. But, the reality was altogether different. Due to Russia’s negligence, they started shifting their attention towards other regional and external powers such as China, the US, etc. for fulfilling their economic and security needs. Mainly, it was during period of President Mr. Boris Yeltsin, Moscow could not follow a pragmatic foreign policy towards its ‘near abroad’.

In the spheres of trade and economy, Russia could not able to follow an effective foreign policy towards its neighbours. Russia’s foreign policy was in a state of decline. It could not meet the requirements of the newly independent states. In the sphere of security guarantees, these states could not get the satisfactory guarantees from Russia. As a result, they relied on other security structures such as the Western led NATO etc. Thus, Russia lost its traditional sphere of influence during the period of Boris Yeltsin. In this regard it is quite important to briefly analyze Russia’s foreign policy towards Central Asia during the period of Boris Yeltsin.
Russia's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia under Boris Yeltsin

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, Moscow's policy was strongly affected by its own economic and political problems. This happened due to varied reasons such as economic instability, lack of vision of Russian leaders, instability in its borders, eastward expansion of NATO, etc. In the political sphere, relations between the executive and the legislature were aggravated in the shelling of the Russian parliament by Russia's own army in orders from president Yeltsin in 1993. Law and order situation was severely affected. The capacity of the state to extract revenue to maintain state operations declined sharply, not only because of economic contraction, but also as a result of systematic tax evasion and substantial corruption in tax administration (Jonson 2005: 4).

During the period of Yeltsin, Russia was no more a dominant power in this region. Its influence diminished in spheres of military, security, culture, trade and commerce. There are many reasons lay behind Russia's involuntary disengagement in Central Asia. In the area of trade and commerce, Russia could not establish a common economic structure within the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia's trade with Central Asian states fall shortly and these republics started diversifying their trade routes with other external actors (Jonson 1999:1-2).

In the area of security, Russia could not integrate the Central Asian states. Its proposals for the military integration of the CIS were rejected. Although, Central Asian states signed bilateral agreements with Russia on military cooperation and border defence, but, there was a trend towards a diminished Russian military presence. For an example: Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were the countries, those who most determined to reduce their military dependence on Russia. Despite close military cooperation with Russia, Kazakhstan was looking for alternatives for security guarantees. Another, important fact was that all the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan were the members of NATO's Partnership for Peace Program backed by the US (ibid: 2).
In the field of transportation of oil and gas, Russia's role was reduced to the rank of one among the many players such as the US, China, Iran, Turkey and India. Although, Russia maintained its control over the pipeline systems, the Central Asian states gained the right through international consortia for new pipeline routes which would bypass Russia. Additionally, railway and roads were being extended and linked to neighbouring countries, thereby helping them to diversify their contacts with the outside world (ibid: 2).

After being the part of the former Soviet Union for a long time, a tendency was developed among these newly independent states in order to get rid off their former master. Because, Russia neglected these newly independent states, while relying on the West. It was reluctant to provide economic and military securities to the Central Asian Republics. Russian President Boris Yeltsin tried to reform the economy of Russia as per the Western market economy. On the other hand, the newly independent states of Central Asia tried to diversify their trade routes with other external actors such as the US, China, Turkey, Iran, India, etc. Because, these states were rich in natural resources such as natural gas and oil. Thus, they had the potential to maintain their relations with the external actors for getting economic benefits. Moreover, these states wanted to integrate within wider international cooperative structures.

Russia neglected its traditional sphere of influence because of its own economic and military limitations. And there was lack of vision of Russian leadership, which constrained Moscow to formulate an effective foreign policy towards its neighbours. Russia was not in a position to recognize the geopolitical importance of Central Asia, which could have helped it to revive its own economy rather than relying on Western economy.

During the period of President Boris Yeltsin, Russia simply missed the opportunity to regain its foothold in the Central Asian region under the framework of Commonwealth of Independent States. For an instance, the creation of the CIS in 1991 seemed to offer the possibility of maintaining a common framework for the former
republics. Later on a consensus was developed in mid 1990s among the Russian elites regarding the status of Russia as a nucleus of CIS integration. There were lacks of common understanding among the CIS member states regarding economic and military integration and inside Russia also regarding its policy towards Central Asia along with other member states of the CIS.

There were some lacunas in Russian policy regarding the integration of the newly independent states within the framework of CIS. First of all, Russia's involvement in separatist enclaves of some CIS countries such as Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova which was seen as attempts of Russia to influence the domestic politics of the CIS member states. In the mid to late 1990s, there was a general fear of Russian domination was created among these states. Additionally, Russia offered Russian citizenship to citizens of other CIS member states and reserved the right to intervene to evacuate them further emphasized Russia's privileged position within the CIS (Nygren 2008: 25).

Second problem was the survival potential of CIS. A typical prediction during Yeltsin's term was that the CIS had no future. Rather it was a vehicle for the peaceful disintegration of the USSR. Third problem was that the history of the CIS was full of many formal meetings and agreements without any positive outcome (ibid: 25). Fourth problem for the CIS during the period of Yeltsin was the creation of counter-alliances within the organization itself. For instance, in 1996, there were four alliances within the CIS such as the Central Asian Union, the Union of the four (Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), the Union of Belarus and Russia, and GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and with the inclusion of Uzbekistan, it turned into GUUAM (Skakov 2008: 142). It was created because of the Pro-Western orientation in order to avoid Russian hegemony.

Russia's policy towards Central Asia during the President Boris Yeltsin was shrouded with mere confusion. He and his foreign ministry could not formulate an effective foreign policy to reintegrate the former republics of erstwhile Soviet Union.
Due to which, these newly independent states started maintaining relations with the other regional and external actors. On the other hand, the disintegration of Soviet Union has made Central Asian region a ground for competition for natural gas and oil resources of this region. Due to the growing importance of Central Asian region in the age of scarcity of oil and gas resources in the world market, this region gained the global attention. This is the reason due to which the external actors focused attention on Central Asia. They formed the basis for growing foreign interest in the region and provide the Central Asian states with the potential for an independent foreign policy and a new reorientation.

Towards the end of 1990, Russia’s foreign policy started focusing on Central Asia under Russian President Mr. Vladimir Putin. ‘His agendas were to stabilize and enhance his own power, regenerating the economy, consolidate executive control over the state and restoring its capacity to maintain order, restore the role of the state in the economy and limiting the influence of oligarchic circles that had grown up under Yeltsin’s administration, sorting out the relationship between the executive and the legislature at the centre. And to reassert the control over Russia’s regional authorities and preventing the loss of further territory or spread of insurgency in Chechnya and North Caucasus’ (Jonson 2004: 4-8).

**Mutual Interests of both Russia and Central Asian States**

Despite its limited economic and military capabilities, Russia still remains the most important neighbour and partner for all the Central Asian countries in the spheres of military, economy and trade. Rather it is the only guarantor of regional stability and security in the region. Though, the external powers such as US, Turkey, etc. portray Russia as a weak country to provide security to the Central Asian Republics, Russia still has the capability to regain its importance in its traditional sphere of influence.
Economic Factors for Integration

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the trade relations between Russia and the Central Asian countries had slowly declined. Nevertheless, Russia still remains their main trade and economic partner. The main reason is the geographical position of the Central Asian region. These Countries do not have direct access to the sea and the regional infrastructure and the greater part of the import and export transactions of the Central Asian countries are with Russia and other CIS countries.

In 1997, the share of trade with Russia along with other CIS countries in the trade of Kazakhstan was 53 per cent of exports and 69 per cent of imports; for Kyrgyzstan 78 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively; for Tajikistan 34 per cent and 60 per cent; for Turkmenistan 68 per cent and 87 per cent; and for Uzbekistan 23 per cent and 32 per cent. For comparison, only 18 per cent of Russian exports go to the CIS countries and 29 per cent of its imports come from these countries. In future, the development regarding the infrastructure such as road and pipelines which would connect the trade routes of these states with the external market may hamper the trade relations between Central Asian states and Russia (Syroezhkin 2004: 106-7).

Common Security Threats to Both Russia and Central Asian Republics

The Common security threats are regarded as the levers for Russia to strengthen its position in Central Asian region. Both Russia and the Central Asian states share common security problems due to the border contiguities, ethnic compositions, religious composition, political system and culture. On the other hand, Russian speaking populations are still in the Central Asian states and it is the duty of Russia to protect the Russian minorities in case of any ethnic violence in this region. In order to maintain regional stability, the New Security Concept was drafted by the Security Council of the Russian Federation and approved by a Presidential decree on December, 17, 1997, indicated that "the analysis of threat to the national security of the Russian Federation reveals that most of those threats are currently and in the foreseeable future of a non-military nature, emanating predominantly from inside the country and concentrated in the
political, economic, social, environmental, informational and spiritual fields” (Jonson 2004: 44).

It listed a number of security threats to the Russian Federation in terms of traditional and non-traditional security threats. First of all the attempts were made by other external powers such as the US, China, Iran, Turkey which could diminish the role of Russia as a powerful centre within an emerging multipolar world. Secondly, armed conflicts or existing and potential local wars in the Central Asian region might affect the security environment of Russia. Thirdly, proliferation of nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction made Russia unstable. Fourthly, maintenance or deployment by the great powers or by their coalitions of armed forces in the regions close to Russia’s borders might affect its security environment.

Non-traditional security threats such as the problems of Islamic fundamentalism, narcotic trade, crime, ethnic conflict may have spillover effect on Russia because of its border contiguities with the Central Asian region. Thus, the task of Russia is to resolve the regional security problems in order to meet its economic and geopolitical interests. There is need to check the problem of Islamic fundamentalism. Because, Russia along with Central Asian states are the victims of this menace.

Russia’s policy towards Central Asia was changed in a positive manner when, Putin came to power. The main aim of Putin’s policy was to reengage Russia in Central Asian region for maintaining its foothold in the new era. Putin followed a pragmatic foreign policy towards Central Asia, despite Russia’s own economic and military limitations. Rather these limitations were taken into account while formulating the strategy for Russia to reassert itself in Central Asia. The primary agenda was to resolve the security problems of Central Asian region, such as Islamic fundamentalism and inter regional conflicts. Secondly, Russia wanted to resolve the security problems of Central Asia through the integration of CIS. Thirdly, Russia aimed at economic integration of Central Asian states under the banner of CIS (Cummings 2001: 143-9).
The main concern for Russia was to tackle the Islamic fundamentalism, which was quite active in Central Asian countries. Russia was also a victim of separatism in the Chechnya region. It wanted to integrate the problem with the Central Asian security issues. The issue of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism was an existential threat to both Russia and Central Asia and it was the main area of concern for Russia. As it has been already mentioned that Russia was not in a position to give enough support to its neighbours, because of its own economic and military limitations, it was trying to reintegrate to the CIS countries in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to make it a strong multilateral organization in order to fight with this menace. Because, the growing activities of terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ur-Tahir made Russia to take the initiative to redefine the term, ‘international terrorism’ in order to make the international community feel about the negative impact of this menace. Furthermore, Russia has been facing this problem in Chechnya. On the other hand, Russia was criticized by the West and the US for its poor human rights record in Chechnya while dealing with the Chechen separatists (Jonson 2004: 63-6). In this context, Russia formulated its new foreign policy doctrine 2000, which has to be analyzed.

Russian New Foreign Policy Doctrine 2000

On 28 June 2000, President Vladimir Putin approved Russian Foreign Policy 2000. It emphasized Russia’s limited foreign policy capabilities. It was rather a pragmatic foreign policy of Russia, which noted “the limited resource support for the foreign policy of the narrowing down the framework of its information and cultural influence abroad”. Additionally it argued that a “successful foreign policy must be based on maintaining a reasonable balance between its objectives and possibilities for attaining these objectives”. Concentration of politico-diplomatic, military, economic, financial and other means on resolving foreign political tasks must be commensurate with their real significance for Russia’s national interests (The Foreign Policy Concept of Russian Federation approved by the President of Russian Federation V. Putin June 28, 2000).
This foreign policy denotes the challenges of Russia, being a weak-state, after the disintegration of Soviet Union. In the essay, “Russia in the threshold of new millennium”, Russian President Vladimir Putin has underlined Russia’s economic backwardness in relation to the advanced western states. In his address to Federal Assembly, he warned that “the growing rift between the leading states and Russia is pushing us towards becoming a third world country.” This weakness compelled Mr. Putin to accept its foreign policy objectives, which must be correspondingly modest or pragmatic. In this regard Putin’s objective is to ensure that the Federal Centre has effective control over territory of the Russian Federation. It means curbing the region’s tendency towards centrifugalism, so that the Russian Federation can be seen as a single, coherent, political, legal and economic space. Strengthening the statehood of the Russian Federation takes precedence over any foreign policy objective as “to ensure the reliable security of the country to preserve and strengthen its sovereignty and territorial integrity” (Smith 2000: 1).

In the sphere of economic integration, on December 22 1999, Mr. Putin as the Russian Prime Minister argued in favour of CIS integration, but made it clear that integration must not result in resources being sucked out of Russia. In March 2000, it was stated that the debt of other CIS members to Russia was $7 billion except Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In this context, Putin did not wish to increase the burden, because of Russia’s own economic limitation. He argued that “a stronger Russia could cause other CIS members to gravitate towards Moscow”. He suggested for the creation of a space of common law, followed by the development of Custom’s Union (ibid: 2).

On October 10, 2000, the Eurasian Economic Community was founded by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia. This agreement is a continuation of cooperation that started with signing of agreements between Russia and Belarus in 1995. Later on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan joined this formation. On February 26, 1999, these five states signed the Agreement on Customs Union and United economic space (Original website of Eurasian Economic Community).
The creation of this multilateral economic forum is a transition to the following higher level of integration. The nearest purpose of this new organization is shaping full-fledged customs union. Eurasian Economic Community is an open organization. Its purpose is to increase the level of living of their people by efficiently using economic potential of member-states. The Conversion of Customs Union into Eurasian Economic Community has allowed the member-states to emphasize the problems on a way of the integration. The problems, they have to deal with are the speedy forming of united economic space; the common market of goods, services, capital and labor; forming united transport, energy and information systems; co-ordination of external policy; the joint protection of external borders (Smith 2000: 3).

Putin's effort regarding the formation of a common economic space reflects the pragmatic policy of Russia's foreign policy regarding the integration of CIS member-states. The main objective of this economic forum is to resolve the economic problems in multilateral level, where all the member-states can get the space to discuss about the economic issues and can take effective actions to resolve their economic problems.

Later on this forum has paved the way for the formation of another multilateral economic forum such as CIS free-trade zone, which was signed on December 2002 by the 'CIS Big Four' including Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. They agreed to create a 'joint economic space' with the purpose of creating a new economic alliance to replace the CIS. Such a treaty would open a new stage in the development of trade relations within the CIS. The ultimate goal was to create a regional integration organization where economics would prevail over politics (Nygren 2008: 38). This was the outcome of Putin's idea on common economic space within the CIS. He wanted to re-integrate the newly independent states of former Soviet Union under the banner of CIS, where he emphasized the role of Russia for the process.

In his speech in January 26, 2001, Russian President said, "Our unquestioned priority is the CIS countries. Russia, as everybody understands, is a natural nucleus of
integration processes within the Commonwealth. And integration as a process is not an end in itself, we don’t need it in that capacity, we don’t need it as a slogan or a catch phrase. It should bring real benefits to our country and our citizens. This has been the keynote of the regular meetings of the Supreme Council of the Union State and the Council of CIS States. As the results of these summits have shown this approach is more effective in dialogue with our partners, not only is it acceptable to them, they are interested in it themselves” (Putin’s Speech On January 26 2001).

Security Measures under CIS

In the sphere of security cooperation, Russia’s new foreign policy was manifested in two directions: the development of a CIS anti-terrorist program and the development of the CIS Collective Security agreement. The main reason behind it was to check the Islamic fundamentalist groups in Central Asia and Chechnya regions. In this regard, the CIS anti-terrorist program was agreed on at the CIS Council of heads of state summit in Moscow in January, 2000. In the March, same year, Putin attended a special meeting of CIS interior ministers, where he proposed for a joint CIS terrorist data bank. Furthermore, he warned that international terrorism sees the former USSR as a key target and urged the creation of a joint anti-terrorist centre. This was done at the CIS council of heads of states’ summit in June 2000 (Smith 2000: 2).

In the same year, the then Russian Security Council Secretary Sergey Ivanov urged his colleagues in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Tajikistan to fight the spread of narcotics, illegal migration and terrorism. He could not rule out ‘pre-emptive strikes’ against terrorist groups in Afghanistan. In May 2000, the Presidents of the CSTO countries agreed to increase cooperation in response to the growing threats of international terrorism and extremism and adopted some documents that opened the ‘possibility to use of force and collective means’. Putin said that ‘a mechanism has been worked out to make this treaty a viable instrument capable of responding to the changing world not only today but also in the future’. Furthermore, a joint statement said the adopted documents opened the ‘possibility to use force and collective security means’. In October, the six CST presidents expressed concern for the increased threat posed to
Central Asia by international terrorism and political and religious extremism emanating from Afghanistan. They also decided, in principle, to create a joint rapid deployment force of four battalions that could counter threat of external aggression or terrorism (Nygren 2008: 33-4). Russian new foreign policy appeared to aim at solidifying the CIS in order to combat the perceived radical Islamic threat. Putin in this context emphasized the need to counter terrorism in both multilateral level within the CIS and in bilateral level with individual member states.

The emergence of Collective Security Treaty Organization

All the member states met in Minsk in May 2000 to discuss its future ‘new geopolitical realities’ in order to check the Islamic threats in the alleged states. The CSTO was seen as helping to counter the threat of spill over of the conflict from Afghanistan and in helping to ensure that the conflict from Afghanistan and Tajikistan remained localised. In this regard, the Southern Shield military exercises in 1999 and 2000 were largely aimed at countering an incursion into Central Asia by Taliban like forces. The growth in such a threat led to the increased cooperation in 1999-2000 between CSTO members and Uzbekistan, because, the latter was a victim of Islamic fundamentalism from the Islamic group such as IMU. And, the CST signatories intended to improve the efficiency of Collective decision making and the CIS air defence program (Smith 2000: 3).

The common security problems of both Russia and Central Asia is the area of concern for Russia and has compelled Moscow to formulate an effective foreign policy towards its ‘near abroad’ in order to check the problems such as Islamic fundamentalism, inter-ethnic conflicts and regional instability, which has already been discussed. The Summer Shield-2000 exercise which took place in March-April 2000 in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan aimed at countering terrorism showed the cooperation between Moscow and the Central Asian Republics. In this regard, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan shared Moscow’s view that they were all facing a significant threat from Islamic fundamentalism. Moscow could achieve progress in improving military cooperation in March 2000, when Russian Air Force Commander Anatoly Kornukov visited Uzbekistan,
Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and signed an agreement on cooperation in air defence. He also signed a similar agreement with Kazakhstan in May 2000 (Jonson 2004: 64-70).

This pragmatic policy of Putin could open the door for Russia to maintain economic and security relations with the Central Asian countries. In this context, it is quite important to discuss about the bilateral relationships between Russia and individual Central Asian Republics in order to analyze the “New foreign policy doctrine 2000” under the leadership of Vladimir Putin and how it could help Russia to reengage itself in its traditional sphere of influence. Along with the restructuring of multilateral organizations such as CIS and CSTO, Putin emphasized on Russia’s bilateral relations with the Central Asian republics in the spheres of security, economic, trade and energy. He aimed at resolving the regional security problems with these newly independent states at bilateral level.

**Russia’s Relations with Individual Central Asian Republics**

Russian President Putin’s personal visits to these states can be considered as a beginning of a new era in Russia-Central Asia relations. Rather, it was a strategy of Moscow to bring all these states under its purview. Russia under Yeltsin lost Central Asia due to negligence, but Russia under Putin started reengaging with Central Asian states at bilateral level, which needs to be discussed.

**Russia-Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan is the prime concern for Russia, because of its geo-strategic location and abundant energy resources. It shares a long border with Russia and China. But, Russia sought to use Kazakhstan’s economic debts and geographic isolation as a break on Kazakhstan’s economic development forcing it to develop a multi-vectored foreign policy and investment strategy in order to survive. But, Putin could realize the problem and adopted a positive approach in Russia’s policy towards Kazakhstan in the spheres of economy and security.
In Soviet history, several ethnic groups were deported to Kazakhstan, many of which left after 1991, while Kazakhs abroad returned home. Today, Russians are concentrated in the north and the Kazakhs in the south. The population amounts to some 15 million. Islam was introduced among the nomads only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the country is fairly secularized. In 1924, a Kazakh-Kyrgyz Autonomous Republic within Russia was created and in 1936 Kazakhstan became a Soviet Republic (Nygren 2008: 175). In terms of security, all nuclear weapons were removed from Kazakhstan by the mid-1990s. One of the uncontested issues in the Russia-Kazakhstan relationship has been the many Russian military installations left in Kazakh territory after the demise of Soviet Union (ibid: 176). Kazakh President Nazarbayev was willing to follow Russia’s lead. Kazakhstan signed an agreement on Collective Security Treaty with Russia in May 1992. And, it has remained as a partner of CSTO since its formation. With the initiative of Kazakhstan on May 25, 1992, the first bilateral treaty between Russia and Kazakhstan titled, “The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance” was signed between Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Russian President Boris Yeltsin and expressed the hope that other CIS states would take the Treaty as a model to be followed (http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/940328.htm). In February 26, 1993, in Moscow, both the leaders reiterated the commitment to implement the bilateral treaty, which was previously signed on 1992 and further agreed to sign a treaty on military cooperation in order to set up a united defence space. Further, they agreed to enlarge the ambit of the Collective Security Treaty.

In 1997, both the countries signed agreements on further leasing of defence facilities. After this incident, Kazakhstan was said to be Russia’s most reliable partner in Central Asian region (RFE/RL Newsline 31 October, 1997). In 1998, Yeltsin and Nazarbayev signed a declaration of eternal friendship and alliance which provided for mutual military assistance in the event of aggression by a third party. In 1999, Nazarbayev claimed that there were no outstanding issues to be resolved between the two. With the beginning of the second Chechen war in 1999, Kazakhstan was eager to help Russia and established additional border checkpoints at ports and railways stations and suspended ferry traffic with Azerbaijan to control Chechen refugees (RFE/RL Newsline 26 February, 1999).
During the period of Russian President Putin, Russia-Kazakh relationship was also stable. At a summit in June 2000, Putin characterized Russia's relation with Kazakhstan as 'progressively developing at a very high level' in both political and economic spheres. When Putin visited Astana in October the same year, Nazarbayev said that their views coincided on 'the entire spectrum of political issues', and Putin endorsed the consensus to the shared aspiration to seek mutually acceptable solutions to all problems that arise (RFE/RL Newsline 20 June, 2000).

After the incident of September 11, 2001, Russia's relation with Kazakhstan was stable, despite the latter's announcement to support for the US and the world community in combating international terrorism in Afghanistan. In October 2002, Putin characterized the relations between the two countries as 'a strategic partnership' and called Kazakhstan 'Russia's closest and most consistent ally' (RFE/RL Newsline 23 October, 2002). In February 2003, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev attended the formal inauguration in Moscow of '2003-the Year of Kazakhstan in Russia', a project to boost economic, scientific, educational and cultural relations. Putin then described Kazakhstan as a 'reliable' and 'strategic' partner while Nazarbayev emphasized the new 'oil alliance' between the two countries (RFE/RL Newsline 19 February, 2003).

In the sphere of multilateral regional security structures and programmes, Kazakhstan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) led by Russia and China and participated in NATO's Partnership for Peace program (PfP) led by the US. Despite its participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, Kazakhstan never neglected Russia in terms of its bilateral relation in the areas of economy and security. And, its foreign policy is much more independent on Russia, placing priority on receiving foreign investment from the external powers such as US, European countries, and Asia’s economic powers such as China both in the spheres of energy and number of economic clusters.

In the energy sector, there are some problems between Kazakhstan and Russia regarding the securing of the transit rights to move its oil and gas across Russian territory to Europe. The difficulties in establishing a commercially satisfactory relationship from
Russia during the negotiations over a Caspian Pipeline Consortium left the Kazakhs and their Tengiz Consortium partners very concerned about the economic consequences of Kazakhstan's dependence on transporting oil and gas across Russia (ibid: 15).

Despite these above mentioned problems, Kazakhstan has always followed a soft approach towards Russia. Joint ventures with Russia are often quite rational economically, as the Kazakhs have inherited a transit system that provided better north-south linkages between Kazakhstan and Russian cities than east-west linkages. Under the leadership of Putin, Russia and Kazakhstan forged a good relationship and the latter agreed to ship Kazakh oil through the proposed Burgous-Akeksandropolis pipeline and Kazakh President believed that he had secured CPC expansion as well. But, in May summit, Putin's statement clarified that Russia was simply considering CPC expansion and had not yet fully committed to it. Additionally, that said one should not diminish the importance of shared values between the Kazakhs and Russians in their economic dealings and state-building preferences (ibid: 15).

Both the countries want to attract FDI, but also in a way that protects state management of development of strategic natural resources. In this context, Kazakhstan's President Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev seems to be following Moscow's lead, and is extracting concessions from foreign companies working in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector. Kazakhstan has found its synergies with Russia in the development of other economic sectors especially in agro-business and light industry. Kazakh leadership has its own agenda. Kazakh President wants commercially attractive prices for shipping his oil and gas through Russia. A fact is that Kazakhstan main import partner is Russia in 2006 i.e. 36.7% comparing to China and Germany (ibid: 16). Russia's strategic relation with Kazakhstan would help Moscow to fulfill its economic needs, because, Kazakhstan has abundant hydrocarbon resources. Russia under Putin emphasized strategic relationship with Kazakhstan for containing US and the West during the period of the war against international terrorism in Afghanistan.
Russia-Turkmenistan

It is the only Central Asian country, with whom Russia has had the greatest difficulties in creating a stronghold. Russia’s relations with Turkmenistan during Putin’s period stressed on politicized citizenship issues and negotiations on gas deliveries. Mainly, Turkmenistan’s neutral status has made it keep aloof from the ongoing power struggle, which has been going on in Central Asian region after the disintegration of Soviet Union. Though it was not a signatory to CSTO, it remained within the ambit of CIS. Along with Russia, it has maintained its close ties with Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India. Turkmenistan foresees no direct security threat for next 10 years. Because, the pursuit of bilateral agreements with Russia enabled Turkmen President Niyazov to meet his security interest while keeping a safe distance from potential ethnic conflicts that could engulf the CIS throughout Central Asia (Nygren 2008: 202-3).

On June 8 1992, in Ashgabat, an agreement was signed between the two countries for the formation of a national army for Turkmenistan under joint command. The control of air force and air defence systems of Turkmenistan is to rest entirely with Russian armed forces with some limited control by Turkmenistan. The armed forces of Turkmenistan have employed many Russian military officers who represent the Russian Defence Ministry. And the Turkmen military officers are trained in the military schools of Russia, Turkey, and in the defence department of Iran and Pakistan (http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/3-2002/dp/aft/).

Turkmenistan is a passive member of CIS, but not a member of CSTO. It is not a member of any of the economic integrationist organizations in the arena of CIS. It also left the CIS visa-free regime in 1999. Turkmenistan has been a member of NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme since 1994. It also concluded an agreement in 1998 with the American oil company Mobil. Turkmenistan refused to help the anti-terrorism coalition in Afghanistan but allowed humanitarian aid to be transited through its territory (Nygren 2008:202).
Under Russia’s ‘New Foreign Policy Doctrine 2000’, Putin emphasized the geopolitical interests of Russia in order to explore the natural gas resources of Turkmenistan. In the sphere of trade, Turkmen gas deliveries to Russia could be raised by 10 billion cubic meters to 50 billion-60 billion cubic meters of gas. Russia would receive 30 billion cubic meters in 2001 and 40 billion cubic meters of gas in 2002. It was also agreed to set up the first session of the inter-governmental Turkmen-Russian commission on trade and economic cooperation during the period 2000-05 (ibid: 204-5).

Though, Turkmenistan is a neutral country, it is mutually beneficial with Russia in the spheres of economic and trade along with energy. As one of the littoral states of Caspian Sea Basin, Russia has stakes in Turkmen’s energy resources. Thus, Russia has to maintain cordial relations with Turkmenistan for meeting its geopolitical interests. Under the Presidentship of Putin, Russia could manage to maintain cordial relations with Turkmenistan, which proved Russia’s effective energy policy in Caspian region.

Russia-Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan’s relation with Russia became bitter, when violent clashes took place in Ferghana valley in 1989. Many Russians emigrated in the early years of independence because of the violence and the Uzbek nationalist surge with its demand of citizens to learn the Uzbek language. Ethnically inspired conflicts usually emanated from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The role of Islam has been a persistent problem in creating an Uzbek national identity. The former Communist Party leader Islam Karimov had since been repeatedly re-elected and in 2001 he was elected president for life. After the disintegration of Soviet-Union, Uzbekistan distanced itself from Russia and became the most anti-Russian state in Central Asia (Nygren 2006: 196).

In order to avoid the influence of Moscow on its foreign policy Uzbekistan left CIS Collective Security Treaty in 1999. In this year, it also left GUUAM (Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). Due to the exclusion of Uzbekistan, this
multilateral organization was renamed as GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova). Uzbekistan started maintaining a cordial relation with the US in the spheres of economy and security. On the other hand, Russia during the period of Putin was trying to bring Uzbekistan under its influence, because of its geo-strategic importance and close ties with Moscow’s Cold-War adversary, the US. Russia has stakes in the natural resources of Uzbekistan. Russia and Uzbekistan have convergence of interests on the Issue of Islamic fundamentalism. But, the perceptions of security problem are different for the two countries. While Russia’s perception of security problem is external, Uzbekistan’s perception is internal in nature such as the threats from Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the mass unrest in this region. Rather, Russia perceives growing role of external actors such as the US and NATO in its traditional sphere of influence as security threats.

There were some significant bilateral treaties, which were signed by both the countries after the disintegration of Soviet Union. On May, 1992, Russia and Uzbekistan signed the “The treaty on the fundamentals of Inter-state Relations, Friendship and Cooperation”, in which the Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed that “territories of Russia and Uzbekistan will form a common military strategic area”. Furthermore, the Russian-Uzbek military and defence cooperation was further strengthened when the then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin visited Uzbekistan on July 28, 1995. After prolonged discussions with Islam Karimov on military-technical cooperation, both the leaders stressed the importance of the CIS collective security system on this basis. Both the leaders stressed the need for ‘strengthening cooperation and coordination of activity in the interests of ensuring peace and stability in Central Asia’

On October 11, 1998, both the leaders discussed issue of the bilateral military cooperation and the security and stability in Afghanistan especially after the Taliban take over of the regime, which would have serious repercussion for Russia and Central Asian region (Smith, 2000: 15). In 1999, Putin as the Prime Minister of Russia signed an agreement with Uzbekistan on military cooperation during his visit to Tashkent. It was
the first step of Vladimir Putin to strengthen Russia's relation with Uzbekistan because of the growing strategic relationship between the US and Tashkent.

In April 2000, Uzbekistan was presented as Russia's 'strategic ally' and Russia pledged to help Uzbekistan against attacks by international terrorists (RFE/RL Newsline 11 April 2000). In May the same year Putin paid an official visit to discuss military and energy cooperation with Karimov. Uzbek President Islam Karimov made it clear that Uzbekistan would not re-join the CST and that no Russian troops would be deployed on Uzbek territory. In August, Russia also offered assistance in fighting IMU and also warned against Islamic extremism emanating from Afghanistan. Putin expressed concern at the ongoing fighting (RFE/RL Newsline 17 August, 2000). Russia tried to use the regional security problem as a strategy to develop its relation with Uzbekistan.

In September 2000, Karimov recognized Russia's interests in Central Asia and also noted that 'they also need to be discussed with leaders of the Central Asian states. We need to know what Russia will be doing tomorrow in our region and how it will defend its interests. Russia has to pursue a serious and well-thought-through policy in Central Asia' (RFE/RL Newsline 28 September 2000). At the CIS summit in December, Putin and Karimov promised to resolve the problems in their bilateral relationship and Karimov recognized that Russia would remain a priority partner for Uzbekistan (RFE/RL Newsline 4 December 2000).

In the sphere of energy, an agreement to supply gas to Russia was signed, when Putin visited to Uzbekistan as the Russian President in May 2000. The marked development in Russia-Uzbek relation under Putin could make Uzbekistan pivotal in the development of Russian policy towards Central Asia. In May 2000, Putin acknowledged that Uzbekistan could become Russia's foothold in developing international contacts with Central Asian region (Smith 2000: 15). In April 2001, Russia held talks with Uzbekistan on several defence-related issues on military-technical cooperation, regional security, the threat from IMU and Taliban of Afghanistan. In April, Anatoly Kvashinin, the head of the
Russian General Staff, visited Uzbekistan to assist in its defence against an expected onslaught of Islamist warriors and during a state visit in May, both Karimov and Putin recognized that relations was improved between Russia and Uzbekistan. Karimov termed Russia's presence 'a fundamental guarantee of security and stability in the region' (RFE/RL Newsline 7 May 2001).

After September 11, 2001, Karimov and Putin discussed the situation in Afghanistan on several occasions, and Russian generals were sent to Uzbekistan to help coordinate defensive measures. So, even if Uzbekistan was the first to welcome US deployments in Central Asia and to offer airfields, and even if Karimov was considered to be the most anti-Russian of Russia's Central Asian neighbours, he nevertheless accepted the need for a Russian presence in the intensified anti-terrorist struggle (Nygren 2008: 198).

In summer 2003, some new developments changed the relationship. The Russian Federal Security Service made a joint operation with Uzbek police in Moscow in which more than 100 terrorists' suspects were arrested. Half of them were said to be members of the Uzbek Hizb-ut-Tahrir network and was engaged in recruiting mercenaries and arming terrorists. Thus, Uzbek President Karimov reoriented Uzbekistan towards Russia to counter Islamic fundamentalism in his country (REF/RL Newsline 10 June 2003).

In March 2006, Uzbekistan joined the Eurasian Economic Community, patronized by Moscow, and signed new bilateral agreement in which Russia assured Uzbekistan that it would intervene if Uzbekistan regime faced domestic or foreign threats. In the same year, Uzbekistan returned to the CSTO after 7 years after the suspension of its membership in the Russian dominated regional organization. Furthermore, the series of incidents such as the colour revolutions in Central Asia and Caucasian region, Andijan event made Uzbek President to give the order for the withdrawal of US forces from its Karshi-Khanabad base during 2004-05. And these events gave a chance for strengthening the Russia-Uzbek relations (Ilkhamov 2007: 8-9)
In 2004-05, Uzbekistan produced 59-62 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually. Uzbekistan is a top priority for Russian interests because of its natural resources and advantageous geostrategic location. It is positioned at the nexus of several zones of global geopolitical interests including Russia, US, China, Iran, etc. Uzbekistan's main export partner is Russia (23%) in 2006 comparing with the other Asian and European countries such as China, Poland and Bangladesh. Main export partner is again Russia (27.8 per cent) comparing with the Asian and European countries (ibid: 9).

On energy issue, in summer 2002, discussions took place on Russian investment in developing Uzbek oil and gas deposits. In December, 2002, Karimov and Gazprom head Aleksey Miller signed a ten-year contract to supply Uzbek natural gas to Russia beginning in 2003. In summer, Karimov and Miller met again to discuss joint gas-related projects. The Uzbek government planned to construct a new gas export pipeline to avoid Turkmenistan, and Putin promised to cooperate with Uzbekistan's move (Nygren 2008: 200).

In spring 2004, the Uzbek state-run Gas company signed a 15-year production-sharing agreement with Gazprom on gas extraction at the Shakhpakhty gas field, and in June Russia's LUkoil signed a US $1 billion production-sharing agreement for 35 years with the same Uzbek company to develop the Kandym gas field. Putin suggested that this was a pure business deal for the Russian companies (RFE/RL Newsline 17 June 2004). In August, Karimov praised the Russian business presence in Uzbekistan: 'It is pleasant to note that today Russia regards Uzbekistan as a reliable and loyal partner. For our part, we regard Russia as the state that has been present in the country for a long time and this presence will further develop and strengthen (RFE/RL Newsline 27 August 2004).

In summer 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed cooperation agreements on trade and cooperation in energy and agriculture. There was also another gas deal signed with Gazprom, according to which Turkmen gas would be transited via Uzbekistan to Russia. In 2006, the prices of Uzbek gas sold to Russia increased for US $44 to US $60 while Uzbek gas would be sold to others for US $100-120. It was also announced that Gazprom would invest US $1 billion in Uzbek gas projects (RFE/RL Newsline 19 May 2006).
Uzbekistan is quite important for Russia in order to satisfy its economic and geopolitical needs. It has both oil and gas reserves. Uzbekistan is also a riparian state of CSB. It is the country which has a strong army. Because of its proper infrastructure in the area of transportation of oil and gas along with a strong army, Uzbekistan never relied on Russia in spheres of trade and economy along with security. Rather it maintained strategic relations with the US and NATO. During the period of Putin, Russia could maintain its cordial relation with Tashkent in the areas of security, economy and energy which would help Moscow to bring the regional hegemon of the Central Asian region under its political and military spheres. For an instance, Uzbekistan joined Shanghai Five in 2001 and this multilateral organization was renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which aimed at containing the influence of the US in the Central Asian region.

Russia-Tajikistan

Tajikistan suffered from a civil war raged for many years. After getting independence and election of Rakhmon Nabiev as president in 1991, demonstrations followed. In 1992, civil war was escalated. In September, a coup forced Nabiev from the capital, and in December, Russian and Uzbek forces helped to push the Islamic opposition forces into Afghanistan. The former Communist Party leader Emomali Rakhmonov came to power with Russian assistance in 1994, and military campaigns followed in the mountains bordering on Afghanistan. The civil war raged from 1992 to 1997, causing at least 60,000 victims and almost one million refugees. Most Russians left Tajikistan and many Tajiks also left for Russia. In May 1993, Russia and Tajikistan signed a friendship, cooperation and assistance agreement and also agreed on Russian military and border guards. A cease-fire agreement was signed in September 1994 under UN observation. In May 1995, under Russian supervision, an agreement between the conflicting parties in Tajikistan was signed. This did not help, and civil war continued. As a result, the Russian 201st Army had to get involved in this war (Nygren: 2008: 188).

In January 1996, Russia started pressurizing Tajik leadership into a compromise with the opposition. In 1998, there was another armed uprising in the north. This was an immediate danger to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Therefore, Russia got the
support of these republics in its effort to intervene in Tajikistan (ibid: 189). In 1999, Islamic warriors entered from Afghanistan in the south and crossed Tajikistan into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Since then, the three Central Asian states have been cooperating with each other in anti-terrorism measures. A large 20,000 Russian peace-keeping force and border troops to guard the southern border to Afghanistan remained in Tajikistan (Jonson 2004: 46).

Tajikistan is more influenced by the developments in Afghanistan in the 1990s and has also seen as the most likely inroad to Central Asia of Islamic fundamentalism and its warriors. In 1996, the Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov envisaged a ‘domino theory’ for Central Asia. This theory prescribed, ‘if Russian forces were to leave, a wave of destabilization could sweep across all Central Asia’. The same year, he also noted that the situation in Tajikistan had ‘a direct effect on the strategic interests of Russia’ (Nygren 2008: 189). When the Taliban took control of Kabul in September 1996, there was immediate anxiety in Moscow and Dushanbe, particularly since the Tajik opposition was based within Afghanistan. Russia feared that the Taliban victory would spark a wave of regional instability in Central Asia, and in December the same year, a cease-fire was concluded among the warring parties in Tajikistan followed in June 1997 by a peace accord. Russian troops remained in Tajikistan. However, in January 1998 a bilateral agreement on defence cooperation was signed. In summer 1998, Russia defended the Tajiks while fighting in Afghanistan advanced to the Tajik border. Russian President Boris Yeltsin promised that Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan together were ‘fully capable of resisting the Taliban’ and a joint statement calling for the ‘close interaction’ of signatories to the CSTO in protecting the Tajik-Afghan border was issued. In November 1998, there was also fighting in the north of Tajikistan and both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan strengthened their forces along the Tajik border (ibid: 190).

The Tajik government was grateful for the Russian support. When Russia again claimed that it could not hand over control of the border warning of ‘a serious threat for the entire region’, Tajikistan agreed, calling Russia ‘the only reliable partner and guarantor of stability and security in Tajikistan (RFE/RL Newslinel February 1999). In
spring 1999, a joint protocol on military cooperation allowed Russia to maintain a military base in Tajikistan, the exact terms yet to be appreciated and a declaration allowed Russian troops in Tajikistan. In September the same year, the strategic partnership was confirmed and Russian and Tajik forces held joint exercises to deter an armed invasion (REF/RL Newsline 8 February 1999).

As the Prime Minister of Russia, Putin made his first official visit to Tajikistan in 1999. In spring 2000, both the Tajik President Rakhmonov and Putin were concerned at the escalating armed clashes close to the Afghan-Tajik border. Military exercises with some 13,000 troops from Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were held in Tajikistan simulating the intrusion of a terrorist group. In summer 2000, it was announced that the CIS peace-keeping activities in Tajikistan were to be replaced by efforts to combat ‘international terrorism’ and ‘extremism’ when the current peace-keeping mandate ended in September (REF/RL Newsline 22 June 2000). Rakhmonov also praised the ‘strategic partnership’ with Russia and warned that as long as the conflict in Afghanistan was not solved, there would be ‘no stable system of security in Central Asia’ (REF/RL Newsline 31 July 2000). In September, the Russian 201st army division and border guards in southern Tajikistan were placed on alert several times as fighting between Taliban forces and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan advanced close to the Tajik border. Russia and Tajikistan also held joint exercises close to the Afghan border (Nygren 2008: 190).

After the September 11 incident in America, the 201st Russian Motorized Rifle division in Tajikistan was put on ‘red alert’ and Tajikistan was said to be ‘in the forefront’ of the struggle against international terrorism (RFE/RL Newsline 17 September 2001). By the end of the September 2001, Russia accepted that the US forces could use the Russian airbase near Dushanbe for strikes against the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. In October same year, Rakhmonov and Putin discussed about joint efforts in the anti-terrorist campaign led by the US in Afghanistan. In January 2002 Tajikistan was characterized as ‘Russia’s direct strategic partner’ (RFE/RL Newsline 14 January 2002). It was also reaffirmed that the Russian force deployed on Tajikistan’s southern border would remain there ‘at least for the next 10-15 years’ (RFE/RL Newsline 24 January 2002).
situation in Central Asia drastically changed, but as far as Tajikistan was concerned, Russia was its most evident provider of security. Despite some persistent anxiety about the US military presence in Central Asia, it was evident that Russia's relations with Tajikistan improved after 11 September.

Both Russian and Tajik defence troops held some joint military exercises to tackle Islamic fundamentalists, which was originated from Afghanistan. In October 2002, some 5,000 Tajik defence troops and two regiments of Russia's 201st Motorized Division again held joint exercises to strike back at foreign terrorists. In March 2003, joint military exercises one year earlier in southern in Tajikistan, and in June, military exercises one year earlier in southern Tajikistan, and defence troops were held. In August 2005 and April 2006, there were again military exercises held related to the incursion of international terrorists. Border-related exercises against terrorist incursions where Afghanistan figured prominently had become the main objective of the joint defence efforts. Terrorist bombings in the first half of 2006 were proof of the need for such exercises (Nygren 2008: 191).

Along with the bilateral military relationship with Tajikistan, Russia showed its interest to expand the military cooperation by involving the CIS countries. In April 2003, Putin decided that CIS citizens could serve in the Russian armed forces, and in Tajikistan this was seen as a direct request. This was related with the issue of whether or not to establish a permanent Russian military base in Tajikistan which had formally been agreed on in 1999. But it was never implemented. In summer 2003, the Tajiks expressed interest in changing the status of the 201st Motorized Infantry Division into a regular army base. After a lengthy discussion on extradition issue, in spring 2004, the Tajik government officially supported the idea of creating a Russian military base with the reservation that it should have 'a very clearly defined framework for functioning' (RFE/RL Newsline 19 May 2004).
In June 2004, during a presidential meeting in Sochi, Putin and Rakhmonov reached a ‘political decision’ on the permanent Russian military base in Tajikistan with only ‘a few technical issues’ to be resolved. In October 2004, the new Russian military base to house Russia’s 201st Motor Rifle division with its 6,000 men was opened by Sergey Ivanov. Putin also attended the opening and stated, ‘it serves the basic interests of our peoples and acts to strengthen the peace and stability of Central Asia and the security of the entire CIS’. Rakhmonov called it ‘a momentous event in the history of relations between Russia and Tajikistan’ (Nygren 2008: 192).

Tajikistan is estimated to possess gas reserves of one trillion cubic meters but has few resources to develop them itself. In May 2003, Gazprom signed a 25 year cooperation agreement according to which the company undertook to explore and develop new gas fields in Tajikistan (ibid: 193). Tajikistan is the only Central Asian country, which has relied on Russia for resolving its security problems. The security problem is emanated from Afghanistan. In this regard, Russia provided its military support to Tajikistan. The main reason was that any disturbances in Tajikistan would have spill-over effect on the neighbouring states. Russia also suspected the role of Taliban in assisting the Chechen separatists. Under the Presidentship of Putin, Russia also showed its eagerness to involve all the CIS member-states in the sphere of military cooperation to tackle Islamic terrorism. It was an effective step taken by Russia to reintegrate all the states of former Soviet Union. Along with military cooperation with Tajikistan, Russia also involved its energy barons to explore the gas resources of Tajikistan. It has shown the Russia’s pragmatic policy towards Central Asia.

**Russia-Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan is the second most Russia-dependent state in Central Asia. It is considered as the most democratic, and ruled by the former Communist Party leader Askar Akayev since 1990. Both Russia and Kyrgyzstan are members of Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the two regional security organizations formed after the disintegration of Soviet Union. Both the countries had bilateral ties in the field of security during the Russian President Boris Yeltsin. In 10th June 1992, both the countries signed a
treaty on 'Friendship, Cooperation and 'Bilateral Assistance Treaty.' This treaty reaffirmed Russia’s role as the guarantor of Kyrgyzstan’s security. In the beginning of 1996, a new impetus to the bilateral military cooperation was given, when director of the Russian Federal Border Service met President Askar Akayev on 5th March, 1996. After discussing various issues related with defence cooperation, both signed two documents one on the presence of Russian border troops in Kyrgyzstan and another on extending the mandate of the Kyrgyz battalion currently serving in Tajikistan (Russia-Kyrgyzstan factsheet).

Kyrgyzstan is the second most Russia-dependent state in Central Asia. It is strategically important Central Asian state in terms of Russia-US rivalry in this region. The US was allowed to station its troops in Manas airbase, which is a matter of grave concern for Russia. Despite strategic relations with Washington, Kyrgyzstan has maintained its strategic partnership with Russia due to the cause of terrorist threat from Afghanistan. In July 2000, Akaev and Putin signed a declaration on eternal friendship and a ten-year economic cooperation programme. Akaev emphasized that Kyrgyzstan always regarded its 'strategic partnership' with Russia as a foreign policy priority and expressed gratitude for Russia’s military assistance to chase Islamic militants out of Kyrgyzstan in 1999. Putin, in turn, expressed appreciation for making Russian an official language in Kyrgyzstan (RFE/RL Newsline 3 July 2000).

After September 11, 2001, Kyrgyzstan joined the bandwagon of fighting against international terrorism, while officially asking for help to deal with the Uzbek Islamist movement. Although discussions on the subject were all but new, military cooperation was increasingly emphasized after 11 September. In June 2002, the IMU prepared new incursions into Kyrgyzstan from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Sergey Ivanov held talks with Akaev and several bilateral cooperation agreements were signed, including one that permitted Russia to maintain its military installations up to 15 years. In July, Russia provided equipment to modernize the Kyrgyz air defence. When Putin visited Kyrgyzstan in December, Akaev confessed that Kyrgyzstan aspired to become Russia’s main strategic partner in Central Asia (RFE/RL Newsline 6 December 2002). Russia used Kyrgyzstan’s weakness to establish its foothold in the region.
Kyrgyzstan is also an active member of Collective Security Treaty Organization. It has supported Russia in order to strengthen this multilateral structure against the expansion of NATO in Central Asian region. In 2003 and 2004, the new CST based it forces at the Kant airport of Kyrgyzstan. The air base was enlarged in men and planes (Nygren 2008: 184). Russia and Kyrgyzstan held a joint antiterrorism exercise in the Central Asian republic in early October, 2006. Russia also established its air base in Kant to check the Taliban forces (Ria Novosti September 21 2006).

In the spheres of economic, trade and energy issues, Kyrgyzstan is regarded as an honest partner of Russia. In 2000, Kyrgyzstan offered Russia several state-owned firms including gold and uranium processing plants in payment of its debts (REFIRL Newsline 23 October 2000). In March 2001, Akaev proposed Putin to pay Kyrgyzstan’s US $150 million debt to Russia by offering part ownership of Kyrgyzstan’s 20 largest industrial enterprises. An agreement was reached that approximately one-third of Kyrgyzstan’s debt to Russia would be repaid between 2003 and 2015. In September 2001, some 27 Kyrgyz industrial enterprises were transferred to Russia in partial repayment of Kyrgyzstan’s debt, and Russian participation in developing gold deposits and in the construction of two hydroelectric power stations were agreed on (REFIRL Newsline 12 September 2001).

Russia has successful bilateral relation with Kyrgyzstan in the spheres of security, economy and trade. Kyrgyzstan is regarded as the honest partner of Russia and Kyrgyzstan’s democratic culture has added to an impetus in this bilateral relationship. Russia under the President Putin has successfully used the economic, security and energy levers to maintain a cordial relation with Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan’s active participation in CSTO’s military exercises on the advent of NATO is also very significant in terms of Russia’s reengagement in Central Asian region in the Post-Soviet scenario. Kyrgyzstan has always supported Moscow’s stance in resolving the regional security problems in the Central Asian region.
Russia's relations with individual Central Asian Republics have improved gradually during the period of Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has strived to forge Russia's relation with these newly independent states in the spheres of political, security and economic. Putin has taken effective steps to reintegrate the CIS and CSTO to bring these states under Russian control. Unlike, Boris Yeltsin, he has emphasized on Russia's relation with the Central Asian Republics both in bilateral and multilateral spheres. On the other hand, the leaders of Central Asian Republics have welcomed Russia's positive response. They have cooperated with Russia despite their relations with other external actors. Because, Russia is with them forever, while the external powers have limited goals in the Central Asian region. Furthermore, both Central Asia and Russia share common problems in matters of economic and security. Thus, their relations with Russia are quite important for reviving their economics and resolving regional security problems.

Along with Central Asian region, Russia has to reengage itself in Caspian Sea Basin, which is not free from the influence of external powers. Many multinational companies are engaged to exploit the natural resources of this region. Many pipelines are proposed by these external powers to connect the vast natural resources of CSB to the world market in the age of scarcity of oil and gas. In the Caspian geopolitics, Russia has become one of the players. It is striving to protect its geopolitical interests in this region. Earlier, the Caspian Sea was under the control of Soviet Union and Iran. After the disintegration of Soviet Union, the numbers of Caspian littoral states has been increased. The newly independent states of former Soviet Union such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have joined both Russia and Iran as the littoral states of CSB.

The new littoral states have to satisfy their economic needs through exploiting the natural resources of CSB. They are struggling for their shares in this region. On the other hand, Russia wants to dominate over this region. It wants to control over the existing pipelines to regulate the political behaviors of these new littoral states. Moscow wants to keep the region free from external influences, which is not possible now. And, these newly independent states have the freedom to formulate their energy policies. They are not ready to accept the unilateral decisions of Russia regarding the legal status of Caspian Sea and the pipelines in the current
geopolitics. They have their own choices regarding with whom they have to maintain relations in the matters of Caspian pipeline politics. Thus, the Caspian geopolitics has become complex. In this context, Russia has to follow an effective energy policy to fulfill its geopolitical interests, while maintaining a balance approach towards the interests of other littoral states along with the external actors, those who present in this region.

Russia’s Caspian Policy under Boris Yeltsin

In the 1990s, Russia lost Caspian Sea Basin under the leadership of President Boris Yeltsin. Though, there were sets of interests decided by Russian government, Russian leadership could not fulfill these interests due to the lack of effective policies. There were three sets of interests, such as to guarantee Russia’s security on Central Asia and Caucasus. Second set emphasized on promoting Russian economic objectives in the Caspian region. Last one to was to preserve influence in an ever more diversified geopolitical environment, characterized by such powerful external as well as regional powers such as the US along with several European countries, Turkey, Iran, China, etc.

But, Russia could not formulate an effective Caspian policy, while incorporating all these sets of interests due to the lack of consensus on foreign policy priorities among Russian political elites. Russian government could not coordinate policies pursued by different agencies or powerful individuals in the realm of unreformed security and defense structures. And, the growing influence of economic lobbies over the government constrained Russia to formulate an effective policy towards Caspian. Furthermore, there was lack of expertise in the formulation of foreign policy and economic limitations, which could protect Russia’s geopolitical interests in the Caspian region.

Russia’s Caspian policy was driven by its geopolitical interest in this region. It had the focus to monopolize the resources of CSB for fulfilling its economic interests. The main motive of Russia was to control over this region as it was under the erstwhile Soviet Union. The Russian foreign ministry recognized Caspian Lake as ‘Russian lake’. It even mentioned that Russia must have the veto power in any developmental projects in the Caspian Sea Basin.
Russia’s Role in Caspian legal status dispute

In the early 90s, Russia’s Policy towards Caspian was to control over the resources of this region. It regarded Caspian’s goal as the mean to control over the region. Thus, Russia prescribed of condominium principle for defining the legal status of the Caspian under which all the littoral states of CSB had to exploit the resources jointly. Russia argued that the principles which were stipulated in the Soviet-Iranian treaties of 1921 and 1940, on common use of sea, should be extended to resource use. Every member could use the veto power over the development of Caspian deposits. During that period, both Iran and Soviet Union were the only littoral states.

The real problem started, when the number of littoral states increased, after the demise of Soviet Union. Thus, the responsibility of Russia has been increased in the matter of division of Caspian resources in order to avoid the inter-state conflicts. During the period of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia followed an active policy in Caspian geopolitics. Russia had three options to divide Caspian Sea basin such as consortium, division and a combination of the above two approaches. The first approach is unacceptable, because of the possibility of future conflicts among the littoral states, where as the other two approaches can be followed. In this context, there is the issue of whether the division is to be total, or whether it should only apply to the seabed, while leaving the seabed for common use by all the littoral states and secondly, there is the size of the share of the Caspian that is to be allocated to each country to be agreed (Namazi and Farzin 2001: 239). The problem is Caspian Sea is a closed sea and there are no definite international norms can be applied in this case. Thus, the littoral states, especially the newly independent states can conclude any bilateral or multilateral treaties with external powers to fulfill their economic needs. In this context, it is quite important to mention about the position of these new littoral states on the division of Caspian Sea basin.

Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan favored a sectoral division of the Caspian. This envisaged the division of both seabed and water resources and the delimitation of state borders along each of the national sectors, with exclusive fishing rights and the right for increasing their
border guards and naval forces as per the 1940 treaty. But, Russia and Iran opposed this principle for sectoral division, because they feared for the future conflicts over the resources between the littoral states. It would also affect the ecology of Caspian Sea Basin. Iran also objected this principle, because, it would get only 11 per cent of the whole of area in this division. Another approach is to divide the Caspian Sea according to the median line, which has the same distance from both opposite shores. But, this approach would cause for unequal divisions among the littoral states. For an instance, if this approach is adopted, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan would get maximum shares (ibid: 240).

Despite, the opposition from Iran and Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan started following the sectoral division principle. They signed numerous contracts with international oil companies on the exploration of their offshore hydrocarbon deposits. In July 1998, Russia decided to change its stance and suggested for common water use principle. Under this principle Russia agreed that littoral states could have ownership of resources which were extracted from their sector of the Caspian Sea bed, while the principle of free navigation and common ecological standards could be preserved (ibid: 242).

Russia continued to view the five-party consensus as the only legally acceptable mechanism for defining the final status of the Caspian Sea. Because, bilateral agreements were viewed more as a tool for settling disputes over offshore oilfields between Russia’s own part of the Caspian and those of its immediate neighbours, which could prove as an opening for the development of its own resources in the North Caspian (ibid: 242).

These principles were first upheld in the Russia-Kazakhstan, “Agreement on division of the Northern Caspian Sea bed”, which was concluded in July 1998. Later on in January, 2001, a similar agreement was reached between Russia and Azerbaijan. These agreements created resources in the Caspian Sea bed and helped Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan proceeded with their production plans (Chuffrin 2004: 9).
In these agreements, Iran and Turkmenistan continued to raise serious objections to these agreements, questioning their legality and claiming that the accord violated their individual sovereign rights. Iran clearly declared that all littoral states should enjoy common use of Caspian biological and mineral resources. And the Caspian Sea should be divided into five equal sectors. But, Iran’s declaration had been rejected by Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, because, in this proposals Iran would only get the benefits. Iran would get the benefit by controlling the sea shelf from 13% to 14% on the basis of second principle (ibid: 9-10). Here, Russia’s policy towards Caspian was dominated by its economic interests in this region. Moscow’s priority was to extract maximum benefits from the contracts, which it concluded with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, while neglecting Iran and Turkmenistan’s view for the division.

In the sphere of competition over Caspian’s resources, Russian companies could not raise their capitals in the major projects because of the domestic battles for privatization in Russia. The lack of economic focus and expertise in Russia’s Foreign Ministry limited Russia’s influence in Caspian Sea Basin. Thus, Russia’s newly emerged private sector could not compete with Western oil companies in winning the contracts for developing Caspian hydrocarbon deposits. And, Russia was not able to employ effective political instruments to preserve Soviet era economic dominations on oil transit routes for Caspian energy resources (Antonenko 2004: 245).

**Russia’s pragmatic approach under Vladimir Putin**

The role of Russia in the Caspian region was completely changed during the period of Putin. As per the decisions of the Security Council meeting, Russia had to intensely involve in this region in the sphere of regional issues. Thus, it was imperative for Russia to resolve the regional issues, which included legal status of Caspian and disputes among the Caspian littoral states. In these issues, Russia wanted to interfere in a very positive manner to resolve these issues by involving all the Caspian states.
In the bilateral level, Russia managed to normalize relation with the new littoral states of this region. It signed a number of important economic and security agreements with Azerbaijan. Moscow maintained its relation with Kazakhstan to create a favorable environment for the development of North Caspian oil resources. Russia expanded its strategic partnership with Iran and tried to resolve the dispute between Iran and Azerbaijan over disputed Caspian oil fields. In this context, Russia tried to act as a mediator. Moscow also tried to mediate in the dispute between Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Iran in the matter of legal status of Caspian Sea.

In June 2000 the new Russian Foreign Policy Concept put the resolution of the legal status of Caspian at the core of Russian's foreign policy priorities on the regional level. 'Russia will work for the elaboration of a status of the Caspian Sea as would enable the littoral states to launch mutually advantageous co-operation in using the region’s resources on a fair basis and taking into account the legitimate interests of each other' (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 28 June 2000).

From April 2000 onwards the negotiations over the legal status of the Caspian became the focus of intense diplomatic efforts by the Russian presidential envoy and the President himself. In this regard, Russia’s strategy included three main components clearly defining Russia’s position on the Caspian legal status and developing new proposals for settling outstanding territorial disputes among littoral states. It also pledged to work bilaterally with each of the littoral states through active ‘shuffle’ diplomacy by the presidential envoy on Caspian affairs to promote compromise on areas of disagreement. It decided to apply a step-by-step approach through bilateral arrangements to achieve the final five-party consensus (Antonenko 2004: 248).

On 21 April 2000, when Putin was working as acting President, authorized and chaired a special meeting of the Security Council, with the object of reassessing Russia’s policy in the CSB. The main task in front of Putin was how to reconcile national
economic and security interests in the Caspian zone. In this meeting, Russia’s economic interest was emphasized rather than the political and security interests (ibid: 250).

In October 2000, this vision was reconfirmed at the first meeting of the interdepartmental commission on the problems of CIS within Russia’s Security Council. In this meeting, Russia’s presence and the reengagement in the CSB were emphasized. Furthermore, it supported Russia’s constructive interaction with other external and regional actors which were present in this region. It asserted Russia’s interests in the development of extensive ties with the new Caspian littoral states in the matters of strengthening their independence and sovereignty along with the development of natural resources of CSB. This meeting also took some major decisions to analyze the failures of Russia’s Caspian policy during the period of Boris Yeltsin and sought for effective actions for overcoming those lacunae. A list of specific policy objectives was set to improve co-ordination between the military and business in government for facilitating Russia’s Caspian policy. In this regard, Viktor Kalyuzhny, former fuel and energy minister, was nominated for the post of special presidential envoy in Caspian region to oversee implementation of these objectives (Ibid: 251).

On April 23, 2002, while participating in the first Caspian Summit, Mr. Putin said in his statement, “The Caspian Sea - the great Russian poet Lermontov called it also the "Old Man Sea" - occupies a special position in the life of our countries. Today there are five of us, we represent the five states, but the Caspian was and remains one. And it would be a mistake, I think, to divide it into five seas. This is our joint common possession. On us it depends, what the Caspian is to be: a sea of cooperation or a conflict of interests. It is our duty - with regard to the lawful interests of each other - to ably and thriftily dispose of the resources of the Caspian. In addition, we are responsible for the preservation of its unique ecosystem” (Speech by Russian President Putin at Meeting of Heads of Caspian States on April 23, 2002).
Mainly, Putin's Caspian policy was driven by the economic and geopolitical interests of Russia in the CSB. Putin emphasized on active diplomatic efforts to tackle regional issues, which included high-level summits with leaders of all the Caspian littoral states. He emphasized on development of Russia's relations with the US in the issues of Caspian. Under his leadership, Russian companies were involved and backed by the government in many commercial projects in this region. Russian government endorsed the concept of multiple pipelines rather than its monopoly over the transportation over the Caspian resources. It supported the development of a north-south transportation corridor, which had to run from Europe through Russia, the CSB, Iran and India, regarding this as a means of strengthening regional cooperation as well as diversifying regional economies.

Bilateral agreements between Russia and new littoral states

In October 2000, both Russia and Kazakhstan signed a declaration named 'Co-operation in the Caspian Sea'. In June 2002, both of these countries signed the agreement dividing responsibility over the development of oilfields located on their border in the North Caspian region. This agreement determined the exact co-ordinates of the modified median line on the bottom of the Caspian Sea dividing the Russian and Kazakhstan sectors of the North Caspian. Furthermore, both the sides agreed to explore the oilfields in their respective geographical sectors (Antonenko 2004: 250).

Following the same principle, Russia concluded another agreement with Azerbaijan. In January 2001, when Putin visited Baku, Russia and Azerbaijan signed a declaration on co-operation in the Caspian Sea region, which reaffirmed the principle of the division of the sea shelf and the common use of water resources. In April 2002, Russia and Azerbaijan signed a protocol which determined the points of demarcation of the Caspian Sea shelf along the Russian-Azerbaijan border. This followed the principle of 'sectoral division of sea bed-common water use', as agreed in the declaration of January 2001. The two Presidents signed a final agreement on the demarcation of the Caspian Sea shelf and its resources along their joint border in September 2002, using the method of a modified median line. Russia had to manage its relations with Iran and Kazakhstan after violating the condominium principle. It supported another principle of modified median
line, which would result in each party receiving a very different share of Caspian resources. Due to the opposition from Iran, Russia chose to support the modified median line principle. Under this scheme, Russia would have only 18.5 per cent of the Caspian Sea, while Kazakhstan would have 29 per cent, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan over 19 per cent, and Iran only 14 per cent (ibid: 250).

The modified median line proposal made Iran the greatest loser. Thus, Iran proposed either the condominium principle or a division of the seabed on the basis of an equal 20 per cent share for each of the littoral states. Thus, Russia supported Iranian proposal for 20 per cent equal shares. It was also concerned that a re-division of fields already under development could lead to major conflicts between the littoral states, with disturbing consequences for the Caspian region as whole. To avoid this problem, Russia proposed a new principle of 'resource sharing' which provided for a 50:50 principle for dividing the exploration of disputed fields among the two parties. This principle would give Iran and Turkmenistan rights for the development of parts of fields which were currently the subject of disputes with Azerbaijan (ibid: 250). The Caspian legal status issue has not been solved till date. Russia along with other littoral states has managed to create an environment which is conducive for energy trade. Moscow can manage to normalize its relations with Iran and Turkmenistan, which was bitter earlier.

The Role of Russia in Caspian diplomacy

After 1990s Russia was not in a position to monopolize CSB, because of its own limitations. As the number of Caspian littoral states was increased and these newly independent states of Caspian region wanted to diversify their relations regarding the transportation of CSB to the world market, Putin started to follow a pragmatic Caspian policy in this new geopolitics of Caspian region. He could realize that a zero-sum game with the US was both dangerous and ineffective for both Russia and other littoral states of CSB. Thus, Russia's pragmatic policy in this new great game phase was to promote the interests of Russian companies in all major Caspian projects in order to revive its economy. It had to allow foreign investment in Caspian projects undertaken on Russian territory. It aimed to use high-level political contacts to reassure Azerbaijan and
Kazakhstan that Russia would not use transportation routes through its territory as a means of exerting political pressure on these countries and undermining their economic interests. In other words, Russia wanted to bring these newly independent states of this region into confidence in the spheres of regional stability and economic development through the exploitation of Caspian resources.

In November 2001, following the Russian President’s visit to the US, Viktor Kaluzhny said in an interview that Moscow was happy with the signs that the US policy was no longer oriented towards pushing Russia out of this region. He emphasized that US policy had shifted from a position of exclusion of Russian interests in the Caspian region to that of co-operation. From 2000 onwards, the US and EU oil companies began increasing their investment in Russia, which in turn contributed to a more stable economic and political environment (ibid: 255).

As per the decision of Security Council Meeting of 2001, it was decided that there should be proper coordination between Russian government and private companies to follow the pragmatic policy towards Caspian region. Russian government started promoting the companies to invest in this region for the economic benefits. First of all, Russian government acquired a 24 per cent stake in the CPC project and Russian companies such as LuKArco and Rosnef-Shell Caspian Ltd acquired 12.5 per cent and 7.5 per cent respectively. And this project expected to bring US $300 million annual revenue to the Russian government state budget in 2008 (ibid: 255).

In January 2002, Azerbaijan and Moscow signed an agreement for Azerbaijani oil via the Baku-Novorossiysk transport corridor. It covered 5 million tones of oil per year. It was feasible because the Russian authorities succeeded in maintaining the northern route in operation, despite instability in North Caucasus. Despite its low volume of capacity, Putin proposed an economic solution to Baku under which Moscow would supply natural gas for the domestic market in Azerbaijan, which in turn would make additional oil available for export via Russia’s northern route (Margelov 2002: 198).
On BTC pipeline, Russian government continued to maintain that the venture was not economically viable and in November 2001, Russian Deputy Minister Viktor Khreshtanko announced that Russian side does not have any economic interest in this project. In 2002, Lukoil was developing the Azeri-Chirag Guneshli complex, unexpectedly sold its shares to Japanese Inpex. In 2001, Lukoil extracted over 78 million tones of oil, of which 2.2 million was extracted out of Russia. It achieved an increase of 44% in its hydrocarbon resources, mainly through the exploitation of fields in the North Caspian Sea and in the Timano-Peera region of Siberia. Lukoil worked closely with Russia in negotiations with Kazakhstan in the exploitation of the three hydrocarbon deposits located in the modified median line. It facilitated Russia-Azerbaijan relations. It has been participating in developing the Hov-Araz-Sharq offshore oil fields in the sector of Caspian claimed by Azerbaijan (ibid: 199).

Due to the pragmatic policy of Russia, Russian government could promote its oil companies in the Caspian region. Russia’s Caspian policy emphasized the economic and geopolitical interests in the CSB. Russia under Putin has accepted Russia’s limitations and put his efforts to compete with the external actors in a civilized way. He has implemented the Security Council 2001 decisions in a proper way to bring the newly independent states of post-Soviet Union into confidence in the ongoing geopolitics of Caspian region.

The Role of Russia in Regional Security Issues of Caspian Sea Basin

Regional security issues are the main concern of Russia in order to resolve these issues and make CSB safe-heaven for exploiting the vast natural resources. Thus, Putin emphasized on these regional security issues for the economic benefits of both Russia and other littoral states of Caspian region. He aimed at resolving these security issues by involving all the concerned states of Central Asia and Caspian for larger economic benefits. The main objectives of Russia’s Caspian security problems include preventing the region from Chechen rebels operating in Chechnya. In this regard, Russia’s North Caucasus is a vulnerable region, where they can destabilize the security and stability. Moscow has to contain any regional conflicts in this particular region. Russia would have
to preserve former Soviet military infrastructure in the region, including key air defence, space and early warning facilities, as well as to maintain a Russian military presence at bases in Georgia and Armenia. Russia has to protect its oil reserves and transportation routes from external intervention. Last but not least, Russia has to address soft security threats emanating from the region such as illegal migration, drug trafficking and smuggling of contraband goods in Russia.

Russia-Central Asia Relations in Caspian Geopolitics

Russia under the President Putin tried to reengage in Caspian region to maintain its foothold in this region. He tried to maintain Russia’s relation with individual Central Asian Republics in both bilateral and multilateral spheres. The Central Asian Republics such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, those which are rich in natural oil and gas resources welcomed Russia’s approach, because, they wanted to utilize the resources for reviving their fragile economies.

Russia concluded a long term agreement with Kazakhstan on the annual transit of 3,3,00,000 barrels a day of oil. In December, 2003, a bilateral protocol was signed supplementing this agreement and increasing the amount of oil for transit up to 5,00,000 barrels a day. Despite the presence of external actors in Caspian basin, Russia conducted intensive negotiations with its potential partners in the “gas alliance” from Central Asia. By the beginning of 2003, a number of agreements were signed on gas prices, volume of gas sales to Russia and terms of Russia’s assistance to Central Asian gas exploration and production, as well as in modernization of gas pipelines (Chufrin 2004: 17).

Special agreements were reached on new terms of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmen gas transit across Russia to consumers in third countries. For all practical purposes, it meant that the “gas alliance”, consisting of Russian and post-Soviet Central Asian producers, consumers and transporters of gas, began functioning. Russia’s attempt to formulate “gas alliance” is intended to protect its interest in Caspian Basin. Rather

82
Russia wants to preserve its status quo in its traditional sphere of influence on the onslaught of western companies. After the formation of this gas alliance, the gas supplying countries of Central Asia and Caucasus sought for Russian assurance regarding attractive prices for their gas sales. This position was clearly formulated by Turkmenistan’s President during first Caspian summit (ibid: 17).

In January 2002 during the meeting in Moscow between the President of Turkmenistan and President of Russia inculcated an idea of forming “gas alliance” with post-Soviet gas producing countries as its participants. In March 2002, the joint declaration was signed in Alma Aty (Kazakhstan) on Russia’s initiative, by the Presidents of Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. According to the main provisions of this declaration, its co-signatories pledged to develop cooperation among their countries on bilateral as well as on multilateral levels, with a view to develop their natural gas resources, promote construction of gas pipelines and to coordinate their policies on export and import of gas (ibid: 18).

Moscow and Turkmenistan signed 25 year cooperation agreement in April 2003 under which Russia would help in the modernization of the existing pipelines and assist in exploration for new gas deposits. After 2008, Russia also intends to buy 70-80 billion cubic meters of gas annually from Turkmenistan with a possible increase up to 100 billion cubic meters in 2010, thus replacing Ukraine as Turkmenistan’s largest export market. Russia also gave importance to Uzbekistan, because it has the geostrategic importance in Central Asian region. Uzbekistan is also rich in gas resources. It began to explore its gas resources which reached 60 billion cubic meters per annum. It also announced plans to radically upgrade its gas transportation system. Because, Uzbekistan is relying on traditional Central Asia-Centre pipeline which had been constructed during the time of former Soviet Union (Chufrin 2004: 19).

The cost of modernizing this export route is estimated at about US $2 billion and will involve expansion of new pipeline networks, reconstruction of existing compressor
plants and construction of a new compressor plant at the Gazli underground gas storage facility. The main Russian gas company, Gazprom has announced plans to participate in this modernization programme and to acquire up to a 44% interest in the Uzbek gas transportation system. Furthermore, Lukoil overseas another Russian company decided to join Uzbekneftegaz (Uzbekistan) in a consortium to invest up to US $1 billion in production from new fields in Khauzak and Shady in Uzbekistan (ibid: 17).

In another event, Russia and Kazakhstan formed a joint company, Kazrosgaz, to produce and export Kazakh natural gas to the world market, mainly European market and to transport gas from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan across the territory of Kazakhstan. Additionally, under the inter-governmental agreement signed in 2001, gas produced from the Karachagnak gas deposit will be processed at the Orenburg gas plant in Russia. In 2002 and 2003, annual sales of Kazakh gas to Russia totaled more than 6 billion cubic meters and are expected to grow. Western companies also planned to invest in this field to construct a gas processing plant. If the local plant is built, the Orenburg plant will experience shortages of gas for processing (ibid: 20).

Russia’s Caspian Policy under Putin is an effective strategy to reintegrate itself in the Caspian Sea Basin. It has dual tasks in this region, one is to fulfill its geopolitical interests and other is to contain the US influence in this region. These attempts made by Russia in order to integrate the Caspian littoral states in CSB through its proposed pipeline projects and gas alliance has indicated the effective energy policy of Russia. On the other hand, the US proposed pipelines are proved as costly and less profitable. And Western companies are reluctant to invest in these projects. Thus, Russia is in a positive side in order to influence the Central Asian states in the ongoing pipeline politics in the Caspian Sea Basin.

After the September 11, 2000 incident, the US established its bases in two of the Central Asian countries, such as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan, the powerful country in this region was the first country which offered its base to the US in its war
against the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. It was the country which had opposed Russian dominance in its political sphere. On the other hand, Russia in order to get the opportunity to bring its Chechnya issue in front of the world community. It gave its consent to the US for the deployment of its bases in the Central Asian region.

Initially, it gave its support, but there was debate over the issue in Russian parliament regarding the US deployment of forces in Russia’s traditional sphere of influence. Though, Russia participated in the US war against terrorism in an indirect way such as providing the support to the Northern Alliance forces through the help of weapons, it did not like the US dominancy in its traditional sphere of influence. It wanted the time limit for the US deployment. The US at the advent of its military operation in Afghanistan deployed its forces in two Central Asian states: Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in order to facilitate its military operation against the Taliban forces.

The US intended to extend NATO forces to South Caucasus. The leaders of these newly independent states (NIS) intended to get the military and economic support of the US in order to resolve their military and economic security problems. The Central Asian states on the other hand, were depending on the external actors in order to get rid of Russian domination in the spheres of trade and economy and military security. Russia was not in a position to provide these states enough economic and military assistance as it was giving during the time of former Soviet Union. Thus, a new security environment has been created after the involvement of the US this region in order to replace the existing regional security framework i.e. Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO).

The involvement of America and NATO in the traditional sphere of influence of Russia was highly criticized in the Russian parliamentary debate. This move of the US was regarded as an ‘irreparable damage’ to Russia’s strategic advantage in this particular region. Though, Russia initially gave its positive nod to the US military deployment in Central Asian region, it started planning to transform the CIS treaty into a better-structured military-political alliance as a move to upgrade the level of military cooperation among its members. Russia
decided to strengthen the role of CSTO in the Central Asia and Caspian security affairs and step up military-technical cooperation with the regional states and to increase deliveries of Russian armaments to them at reduced prices.

During the past few years, Russia has upgraded its naval force in the Caspian Sea. In October 2003, Mr. Vladimir Putin inaugurated a Russian air base in Kant (Kyrgyzstan) and formally declared it to be part of the CIS Rapid Deployment Force (RDF) (Chufrin 2004: 7). It was clear that Russia’s deployment was intended to counter the US/NATO forces in Central Asian and Caspian region. In addition, the up-gradation of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) another regional security structure with the initiation of Moscow intended to counter the US presence in Central Asia.

On February 28, 2007, Nikolai Bordyuzha, secretary general of the CSTO addressing a meeting of students from the Russian-Tajik University in Dushanbe (Tajikistan), there he emphasized the role of CSTO as an organization that seeks to create an integrated security system dealing with military and terrorist threats, as well as coping with the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters. Further he stated, “The CSTO may be considered as an analogue of NATO, but this comparison is very primitive, as the North Atlantic bloc strives only for military purpose, but for us this task is important but not paramount. We want to create an integrated system without applying or increasing military power” (McDermott 2006). It has indicated the Russian motive towards the growing influence of NATO in Central Asian region. In this regard, Moscow wanted to reintegrate the Central Asian Republics in this regional security structure, which was dormant during the period of the then President Boris Yeltsin. Additionally, the participation of Central Asian Republics in NATO’s Partnership of Peace Programme (PiP) has compelled Moscow to upgrade the CSTO as an effective multilateral security organization.

Another advantage for Russia is its historical, cultural and economic linkages with Central Asian Republics. Though, Russia is now regarded as one of the regional actors in Central Asian region, it has the best knowledge about the security situation of Central
Asian region and has the potential to resolve the security problems of Central Asian Republics. Last but not least, Russia has the second chance to re-emerge in the Central Asian region through an effective foreign policy to integrate these Newly Independent Republics in the spheres of military security and economic and trade, which is promulgated in Russia's Foreign Policy Doctrine, 2000.

Furthermore, the colour revolutions led by the US in the post Soviet space have compelled the Central Asian Republics to depend on Russia. These Republics are no longer relying on the US in the spheres of military security. And, they have realised that Russia is forever with them. A fact is that Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov gave the time limit to the US forces for the withdrawal from K2 bases (Socor 2006).

On April 19, 2006, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev threatened on national television to close the US-led Manas air base by June 1, unless the US agreed by that date to sign a new agreement on terms demanded by Kyrgyzstan. Bakiyev told, “Our partners in regional and other organizations have expressed certain concerns over the presence of the US forces on the territory of Kyrgyzstan”. He further demanded for the change in the basing agreement which Kyrgyzstan signed during the September 11, 2001 (ibid).

Russia under the leadership of Vladimir Putin has successfully reengaged itself in its traditional sphere of influence, which it had lost during the period of then President Boris Yeltsin. It is due to the pragmatic policy of Russia, which can bring the republics of the Central Asian region under its military and economic ambiance. Putin has successfully used the economic and political levers to develop Russia's relation with Central Asian region. He has emphasized on the restructuring of CIS and CSTO to integrate the member states in the vast Soviet space.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union, it is not possible for Russia to maintain its hegemony in the Eurasian region, which Putin has realized. And, the newly
independent states of the Central Asian region are independent to formulate their foreign policies for regaining their economic and military strengths. They needed the external support, because Russia was not in a position to give them enough assistance, as it was providing during the period of Soviet Union. Thus, a new geopolitical set up has been emerged in this region, where many new regional and external actors have involved. The main objective of all these actors is to exploit the vast natural resources of Central Asia. In this context, Russia has to go for peaceful competition with the US, which is present in this region for achieving its geopolitical objectives. Because, any direct conflict with the US would disturb the balance of power in this region and it would adversely affect Russia. Thus, Russia cannot avoid the involvement of any actor in its traditional sphere of influence. Rather, Russia has to involve these actors for resolving the regional security problems such as Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, separatist movements, which would benefit all of them, while exploiting the natural resources of this region.

In the sphere of Caspian diplomacy, Russia has followed a pragmatic Caspian policy to resolve the legal status of Caspian Sea. Due to the effort of Putin, all the new littoral states of Caspian got the space for dialogue for resolving the disputes over the legal status. Though, the dispute has not been solved, all the littoral states are yet trying to get the benefit from Caspian resources. Russian Caspian policy in this regard, can avoid any direct conflict over the resources. Russian government has successfully involved all its energy companies in the global competition over the Caspian resources.

In the spheres of military security, Russia could maintain strategic relationship with the Central Asian republics, those who started maintaining their relationship with the external actor such as the US. Vladimir Putin personally visited these republics and discussed about many regional security issues with the Presidents of these republics. Many agreements and treaties were signed due to the visit of Putin. It could open the door for Russia’s reengagement in the Central Asian region.
The September 11, 2001 incident followed by the US war against Taliban forces in Afghanistan gave Russia the opportunity to bring the Chechnya issue near the world community. In the new foreign policy doctrine, which was formulated in 2000, Russian President Putin emphasized on Islamic fundamentalism and branded it as international terrorism. He successfully convinced the world community that Russia was a victim of this menace. Russia supported US war against Taliban forces in Afghanistan. It even allowed the stationing of the US forces in the Central Asian region. The main motive behind this move was to tackle the extremists groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Additionally, a CSTO anti-terrorist structure was formed due to the effort of Putin to tackle this menace. Russia also stationed its troops in Kant air base of Kyrgyzstan nearer to the Manas air base, where the US troops were stationed. Thus, Russian new doctrine foreign policy was proved to be effective during the ‘new great game’ phase. It gave an opportunity to Russia to reassert in the Central Asian region.

Russia under the leadership of Putin has emphasized its strategic relationship with China, another significant actor in Central Asia. Under the banner of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, both the powers are dealing with the regional security problems of Central Asian region. This is an important regional security organization which has involved the regional actors of Central Asian republics on the advent of NATO and the US. Many joint military exercises were conducted by both Russia and China to deal with the regional security problems.

In the new ‘great game’ phase, Russia is emerging as an important power to deal with its Cold War adversary. Though, Russia does not have the super power status after the disintegration of Soviet Union, yet it has become successful in challenging the influence of the US, while involving the Central Asian republics in the great power rivalry. Due to the pragmatic foreign policy of Russia towards its near abroad, it can reintegrate these newly independent states of this region under the banner of CIS, CSTO and SCO. Russia has accepted its own military and economic limitations and has used these limitations as strategies to control over its traditional sphere of influence. These are the effective steps of Russia, which have been taken by President Putin, while
formulating Russia's pragmatic foreign policy towards Central Asian region. On the other hand, one cannot underestimate the fact that Russia is an emerging power in the new geopolitical set up of Central Asia. Likewise, America has also strengthened its position in this region to diminish the influence of Russia. Its military presence in Central Asia has created an opportunity for the newly independent states of this region to diversify their relations with other external and regional powers in the areas of security and economy. In this context, the role of America has to be analyzed.