Iran and Turkey are important players in Central Asia as both these
countries have common historical, geopolitical, ethnic, religious,
linguistic and cultural roots with CARs. Both the nations were quite
excited about the independence of Central Asia and were eager to play
major roles in the region. At the same time, there are several
contradictions in the domestic political setup and international relations of
both the countries. While Iran is a theocratic state with Shiite clergy on
the top of the official hierarchy, Turkey is a secular democratic country
with Sunni population. In the international arena, Turkey has been
following a pro-West policy and is a member of the NATO. While Turkey
is getting full support from the USA and the West, Iran is being isolated
by the USA and the West on account of its nuclear policy. The USA has
been characterizing Iran as a ‘rogue’ state due to its Islamic
fundamentalist policy and support for Islamic groups in West Asia.
Central Asia has now become an important region in the international
Scene. For reasons domestic and foreign, both Iran and Turkey are
incapable of playing hegemonic role even though both of them have been
competing to win over CARs to their programme of action.

Iranian civilization and Persian language and culture are integrally
connected with Central Asia and these were quite apparent till the Tsarist
occupation of Central Asia. Similarly, the Turks of Turkey have close
ethnic and linguistic linkages with nearly fifty million Turkic people of
this region. The Turkic people of the region are predominantly Sunni and
are followers of the Hanafi School of Islam like the people of Turkey. On
the other hand, the vast majority of Iranians are Shiites.
Through the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) and the Caspian States Cooperation Organization (CASCO), Iran maintained multilateral linkages with Central Asian Republics. CASCO was formed in 1992 with headquarters in Tehran. It is established for the purpose of cooperation among riparian nations on environmental dangers to the Caspian Sea and exploitation of natural gas and oil in the region. Economically, Iran is seemingly better placed than Turkey as they have more money from oil resources at their disposal to dispense in Central Asia. As the prolonged war with Iraq caused great damages to the infrastructure in Iran, it needed all its money for its own infrastructural development and as such not much money was left to aid Central Asia, particularly in the first half of the 1990s. As is observed by Khalid, “the picture of Iranian emissaries acting in Baku, Ashgabat, Dushanbe, Tashkent, Bishkek and Alma-Ata like the proverbial uncles from America is a fake one. All that there is to it is that Teheran does not hesitate to cause hardship to its own people in order to provide financial help to the Central Asians. In the long run this reckless policy may very well prove disastrous for the regime” (Khalid 1992:375). According to Anthony Parsons (1993), Turkey has the upper hand in the region since the people living in most Central Asia Republics are Turkish in origin and speak a language akin to Turkish. “Linguistically also the people of Central Asia and Caucasian states are related to each other because of the common origin of their languages which belong to the Ural-Altaic family of languages” (Sander 1994: 41). Secularism and its democratic character of Turkey is projected as a role model for Central Asia by the US and the West.

IRAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

Iran has been playing an important role in Central Asian politics since the independence of CARs. Centuries-old Persian relationship with Central Asia was responsible for prevailing a strong basis for mutual relationship. The contemporary bureaucratic leadership of Iran had good relationship with Soviet Russia and they cooperated in efforts for the ethnic harmony in Soviet Union. The disintegration of the Soviet Union worried Iran because it had to oppose the only super power, USA on its own in
international politics. During the Soviet era, US hegemony in the region was opposed by Soviet Russia and the Communist bloc. Immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Iran considered the then Russian leadership as a collaborator to United State’s interest in the region as Yeltsin-led Russia favoured USA in many international issues.

All the new Central Asian states are landlocked with no prospects of easy access to high seas. The most practical outlet to the high seas is through Iran and the Persian Gulf. So extension of railways and roads from Central Asian Republics to Iran is a major solution for the export of Central Asian resources like oil and natural gas to international market. Export of natural gas and oil through Iran is much profitable compared to the present day export through Russian pipelines. Iran shared one of the longest frontiers with the former Soviet Union and offers the landlocked Republics direct access to the international market through road and a 295 km long rail system connecting them with the Gulf.

As noted earlier, thousands of years, Central Asia was within the domain of Iranian civilization and Persian was its lingua franca. This area was ruled by the Samanids, who hailed from Iran and were the cultural ancestors of the Uzbeks. Cyrus the Great, the founder of the Persian Empire and Darius, his enterprising successor, ruled this region for a long period in the sixth century BCE. They left an indelible imprint on the Central Asian culture. “The Samanids considered themselves as Iranians and descendants of Bahram Chubin, the celebrated general of Sassanian King of this region. He belonged to the Arsacid dynasty of ancient Persia, which ruled Iran from 129 BC to 226 AD, and had direct access to this vast region” (Hunter 1992). Islam came to Central Asia in the 7th Century, but Persian language and culture prevalent in the region adopted Persian model of Islamic culture. There was sufficient cultural intercourse between Iran and Central Asia even during the subsequent period. Iran had stretched all the way into the Xinjiang province all along this period. “For the last two centuries, Iran’s involvement with Central Asia has been tightly circumscribed due to Czarist occupation of this area and the advent

After the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, there was a big change in the attitude of Iran towards Central Asia. Iran announced immediate recognition of the independence of Central Asian Republics. Iranian Foreign Minister declared that his country would not be exporting any Islamic fundamentalism to the Central Asian Region. In spite of these announcements, Iran made large donations to the groups and political parties in Central Asia amenable to its position. "The Revolutionary Guards of Iran lent support to some of the fundamentalist groups in the CARs. Teheran sent several hundred mullahs to this region for propagating radical Islam” (Singh 2004: 191).

In the beginning, there was a sustained campaign by Radio Teheran in Central Asian Republics. Iran announced that it had the responsibility of defending the rights of Muslims of the area. The campaign reminded the listeners of the ever-growing influence of USA and Israel in this area and demanded self-determination for the Muslims of this region. It wanted a socio-political and economic system based on Islamic tenets. The Iranian Foreign Minister observed that both the friends and foes of Iran liked to see the emergence of this country as the “Mecca of the aspiration of all the Muslims” and "a model for fifty Islamic countries." Radio Teheran started broadcasting Islamic programmes in eighteen different languages of the area. Iran organized cultural and trade exhibitions in the CARs for countering the increasing influence of Western and Turkish media. From the beginning of the Islamic revolution in Iran in February 1979, Radio Teheran continued intensive propaganda programmes containing inflammatory speeches of the Ayatollah Khomeini in the Central Asian language of Turkmen and the cassettes containing Islamic teachings were in wide circulation in the CARs. Iran setup several broadcasting stations along its border with the Soviet Union. Iranian radio stations of Gordian and in the boundary of Turkmenistan used to broadcast programmes for the Muslims of the area. After the death of Khomeini, Iran’s policy towards CARs gradually changed. The administration of post-
revolutionary Iran stressed on the economic reforms of the country. Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani wanted compromise with the West and wanted change in the economic policy. He wanted to go slow on religious extremism. The initial enthusiasm for the export of Islamic revolution beyond the country’s borders slowly gave way to seeking new arenas of interaction.

In the beginning, Iran has been confronted with socio-economic consequence of the Soviet Union’s collapse and differences in political makeup in an Islamic regime in Iran and secular states in Central Asia. Iran’s economy has not been in a position to provide high quality technology to Central Asia and because of the same reason Iran was unable to make big investments in these states. The difference between the Sunni and Shia faith, Persian and Turkish ethnic difference etc. are other factors which affect foreign policy formulation of Iran in Central Asia. There is also difference between Central Asian States and Iran over the legal status of Iran in appropriating the resources in Caspian Sea. Further, the tense relations between Iran and the United States is hampering Iran’s relationship with Central Asia and now the US factor has become an important element in the system of Iranian-Central Asian economic relationship. According to Guli Yuldasheva, the essence of Iranian foreign policy lies in formation of a multi-polar world order under the aegis of the UN, in which Iran and other Islamic countries will represent one of the poles. At the same time Central Asia is considered in Teheran as a continuation of the region of the Persian Gulf, which is a vitally important zone of Iranian economic interests as a whole (Yuldasheva 2009: 1).

The US economic sanctions, non-admission of Tehran to the energy projects of the Central Asian region, and formation of a negative image of Iran as a state sponsor of international terrorism hinder the development of full-fledged relations with Central Asian States. The US continues to be hostile to Iran and leads a propagandist campaign against Iran. Iran considers the US military-technical cooperation with Central Asian States, NATO’s movements towards the East, American desire to control and
dominate the Caspian region etc. are a part of the US global efforts to surround and isolate Iran (Dareimi 2003).

Iran’s foreign policy towards Central Asia is based on three factors: security, economic stability and territorial connection to the CARs. Its geographical location made Iran a natural player in this region and it preserved itself as a natural geopolitical power in Central Asia ever since it has been insisting on this status.

A regional rival of Iran in Central Asia has been Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has branded Iran as a dangerous revolutionary power. Iran is critical of the pro West policies of the Gulf monarchies. Iran has also been affected by developments in Afghanistan, civil war in Tajikistan and consequent exodus of refugees. Iran is in constant touch with rival factions in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The active participation of Iranian radicals in Tajikistan Civil War in 1992, and the supposed desire of conservative elements in Teheran to use this war as a door to penetrate into Central Asia had caused distancing of Uzbekistan from Iran and Uzbekistan came under the influence of the USA. Iran also regards Israel’s presence in Central Asia as a challenge to its regional interest.

The US and Russian attitude towards Iran also shaped Iran’s policy towards CARs. The US administration has been insistent on restraining Iran in intervening in Central Asian affairs. In January 1992, James Baker, the US Secretary of State, tried to convey this impression to his Central Asian hosts. He alleged that Iran was nourishing regional hegemonic ambitions and USA wants to limit or counterbalance the influence of Iran in this area. Pakistan and Israel were also encouraged by USA to play against Iran.

US President Bill Clinton persuaded the Kazak President not to export oil to Iran. The US administration felt deeply concerned about Iran’s re-armament plan, its civil nuclear programme, its opposition to the West
Asian peace process, its radical religious activities and its long time support to the Islamic groups. The Clinton administration imposed sanctions on Iran in 1995 and discouraged major pipe-line projects with international funding passing through Iran (NATO Review 1996). The US sanctions immeasurably hurt Iran’s global interests in general and those in Central Asia in particular. The US policy against Iran had isolated Iran in the region. The US has successfully excluded Iran from a number of lucrative gas pipeline deals giving preference to Turkey. The US also opposed construction of Turkmenistan and Kazakh pipeline to Europe though these pipe line routes are considered to be the cheapest. To utilize this opportunity, Turkey was ready to play an active role. However, the changing stands of Russia have brought Iran into the affairs of Central Asia. In recent years, Russia is inclined towards Iran, as Russia does not want US hegemony in the region. At the same time, in order to limit the hegemony of USA, Russia favours Iran in a big way and Iran’s activities in Central Asia changed accordingly.

Iranian President Rafsanjani visited Central Asia in June 1989 when the region was a part of Soviet Union and the bilateral economic agreements with Central Asian states were extended till 2000. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Iran renegotiated the terms of economic co-operation with all the CARs in order to meet the challenges coming from regional players and some outside actors in this area (Singh.2004: 199).

The influence of Iranian-American factor on the developments of Central Asian states has adversely affected the realization of vitally important pipeline and transport-communication projects which would provide an exit for the national raw materials and products from Central Asia to world markets (Yuldasheva 2009:2). There was fluctuation in the trade between Iran and Central Asian Republics as a result of pressure exerted by the USA on these states to isolate Iran. Yuldasheva observes that continuation of Western economic pressure on Central Asia and anti-Iranian US strategy created a favourable ground for preservation of the socio-economic and political instability of the Central Asian region.
Economic analysis of the situation in the region of Central Asia testified that indices of the direct foreign investment flow per capita are still the lowest among the countries with transitional economy.

The European Union is interested to include Iran and the Arab States to a new energy transit route known as Nabucco project. They are also interested to involve Russia and China in its Iranian project which contradicts US interest in the region. Iran, Russia and India are also considered as new areas of co-operation that connect Northern Europe to the Indian Ocean via Iran and the Russian Federation. Iran could be an energy exporter to Europe through Turkey, funneling Turkmenistan’s gas and oil with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan (Gollust 2008).

Despite US pressure for tougher sanctions against Iran, Teheran and Bern signed a 25 years supply agreement in March 2008, worth up to $ 42 billion. In spite of strong American opposition to Iranian participation in the Nabucco project, the US wants to keep its European allies in good humour as a part of their joint efforts with respect to Iran. The EU and USA have suggested new incentives for Iran to scrap its Uranium enrichment program (Gollust 2008).

Various anti Iranian restrictions in the oil-gas sphere and the instability in Afghanistan and other countries adjacent to Central Asia have changed the attitude of Central Asian states towards Iran and Russia. The US leadership of Barack Obama was inclined towards Iran to have dialogues with reference to nuclear armament programmes of Iran. It was believed that USA would try to accommodate the energy concern of Iran, if Iran drops nuclear armament programme. In the beginning of his presidency, Obama was confident that USA can persuade Iran to drop nuclear armament programme on the condition that Iran would be accommodated in Nabucco pipeline and other pipeline project through Iran and Turkey. But of late, things have moved towards more European and US sanctions against Iran under the auspicious of the UN due to Iran’s nuclear policy.
Iran tried to maintain multilateral relations with Central Asian Republics through regional groupings namely Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Central Asian States Cooperation Organization (CASCO). In February 1992, the ECO met at Teheran to evaluate the new political geography in Central Asia. The summit initiated to establish an investment and development bank to facilitate joint projects in crucial areas. It envisaged eliminating all trade barriers and reducing custom tariff. Iran tried to utilize this organization as a means to end its isolation and to safeguard its security. However, the ECO was a victim of the rivalry between Iran and Turkey and is projected as a "fundamentalist bloc" due to exclusive grouping of Muslim states (Singh 2004).

The ECO has considered Central Asia as a regional sub-system. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan were incorporated as members in 1992. The original members of ECO are Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. The ECO’s plans of action underline the need for mobilizing the natural and human resources based on a market oriented economy. However, these organizations were not working successfully, because the basic minimum level of economic, cultural and political common ground required for the successful working of regional organization does not exist among the states (Sengupta 2004: 273-75).

The Central Asian summit held at Bishkek in June 1999 adopted effective measurers for creating a free trade zone which would function as a mechanism of stage by stage formation of a single economic space in the region. The summit emphasized on the need to create conditions for effective multilateral trade and economic co-operation, by making preliminary agreement on measures for regulating bilateral and multilateral relations. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have organized a Central Asian battalion for coordinating local peacekeeping activities in the region. Similarly, Eurasian transport corridor has increased the trade among Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. There were also efforts to set up regimes for controlling
organized crime, drug trafficking, terrorism and illegal migration and supporting environmental protection.

Iran was responsible for the establishment of CASCO in 1992. It was aimed at cooperation among the riparian states on issues such as environmental dangers to the Caspian sea and exploitation of its resources like gas and oil. Iran wanted regional economic cooperation to serve the economic intent of all the member states. Iran tried to discourage the CAR’s excessive reliance on the West and the multinational corporations. But the US sanctions on Iran and its open patronage of Turkey and establishment of multiple energy export pipeline on the Caspian sea are adversely affecting the working of CASCO.

Thus, due to major power rivalries in Central Asia, Iran could not make much headway in developing multilateral ties with the countries of Central Asia. The attitude of USA and Turkey had also made Iran to toe country-specific foreign policy in Central Asia. In such a context, Iran cultivated relationship with each and every Central Asian states depending on the cultural, historical and economic background of the specific countries. For example, take the case of Tajikistan. Iran shares the closest historical, cultural and religious heritage including the Persian language with Tajikistan. Both the countries tried to strengthen their ties in the initial phase of the post-Soviet period. Iran became quite active in Tajikistan when it was in the throes of civil war in April 1992 as a result of the victory of Mujahidin in Afghanistan. Iranian clerics arrived in Tajikistan in large numbers and tried to unite Iran Shia and Tajikistan Sunni faiths.

Iran also tries to rehabilitate Persian culture and language. Theodore Karasik notes that Persian language text books, classical Persian books and works of well-known political authors of Iran were freely supplied in the book shops opened by Iranian Ministry in Dushanbe. Several mosques and Islamic educational institutions in Tajikistan was financed by Iran, which was projected by Tajik intelligentsia as the model Muslim nation”(Karasik 1993: 31).
During the civil war, Iran funded several political parties and militia in Tajikistan including Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). It gave political asylum to several political leaders including Qazi Akbar Turjanbe of IRP and Yusuf Shedmon of the Democratic Party. Iran provided humanitarian aid to the people of Tajikistan throughout the civil war. In October 1992, Teheran expressed its concern over ongoing violence in the trouble-prone country and worried that the intricate situation might provide an excuse for foreign intervention in the Republic. In June 1992, Tajik President Abdur Rakhman Nabiyev visited Iran. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two countries and they agreed to set up a body to deal with the issues of political crises in the region and problems around the world. Provision was also made for periodic exchange of visit of the foreign ministers of the two countries and the establishment of a joint economic commission. According to the joint communiqué, both sides agreed not to resort to force or threat for the settlement of possible disputes. They agreed to have bilateral cooperation in the fields of trade and commerce, oil, gas, banking, industry and other areas. Both sides expressed their desire to augment their contact in the fields of science, religious affairs, art, literature, medicine, health, mass commutation and tourism. The Tajik President also signed several agreements during his visit to Teheran in June 1995 (Singh 2004).

Iran took initiatives in conducting peace talks between Tajik government and the United Tajik opposition (UTO) held in Teheran. Iranian President visited Dushanbe in April 1997 to encourage a peaceful settlement of Tajik civil war. The agreement on Tajikistan was signed in Moscow in 1997. A coalition government was formed in Dushanbe and Turjanzade, leader of Islamic Renaissance Party, joined the coalition government under pressure from Iran. An agreement was signed between Iran and Tajikistan, in which Iran agreed to provide assistance to Tajikistan in expanding education and technology. As per the agreement, a joint Tajik-Iranian educational institution will be constructed in Dushanbe funded by Iran Education Ministry. The agreement also proposes to increase the
quota of Tajik students at Iranian institutions of higher learning on natural sciences, health care and energy (Singh 2004).

Turkmenistan’s relationship with Teheran is a high profile one since the beginning. It has the record for the highest number of bilateral meetings with Iran at the top most level. Saparmurad Niyazov had visited Teheran just before the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In 1992, he attended the summit meeting of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). He signed agreement for the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. He again visited Teheran in August 1992 (Singh 2004). The Iranian President visited Turkmenistan in October 1993 and in his talk laid stress on the need to maintain stability in Central Asia and he offered full cooperation in this direction. The common border between Iran and Turkmenistan was opened in his presence in October 1993. Turkmenistan agreed to set up nine committees to explore the possibilities of expanding mutual co-operation in various fields such as political affairs, transport, oil and gas, culture, science and technology, education, industry, mining, communications and energy.

Since the beginning, there is high level of economic cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan. Iran has been trying to link Central Asia in a network of road and railway system. Turkmenistan could utilize Saraksh-Mashau railway link to access ports of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Imam Khomeini in the Persian Gulf since 1996. It links the Iranian railway network with that of Turkey and Julfa railway system of Azerbaijan and other Transcaucasia states. The completion of this railroad had provided connection from Urumchi in Western China across Central Asia and Iran to Istanbul and further to Europe. Several agreements of this type were signed between Iran and Turkmenistan for the exploitation and production of oil and natural gas in Turkmenistan and their export to Iranian sea port (Singh 2004). Turkmenistan has been following Iran’s guidance in managing its natural gas and oil. Iran had also financed a part of the cost of the pipeline from Turkmenistan to Europe through Iran and Turkey. The trade turnover between Turkmenistan with Iran has been on the increase from 1993. In 1993, the import was US$45.9 million and export
was US$25.4 million and in 1999 the import was US$ 66.2 million and export was US$ 163 million. In 2000 import was US$ 90.9 million and export was US$343 million. In 2001, import was $ 121.4 million and export was $ 301.6 million. Further, Iran favoured relations with Turkmenistan due to the concentration of sizable Turkmen minority on its territory known as Turkmen Sahra. Both the countries are quite practical in their relations. Iran is an Islamic country where as Turkmenistan is secular as per the constitution. Turkmenistan is having good relations with Turkey, Islamic Republic of Iran and the Jewish state of Israel. Turkmenistan had granted the contract for the management of Turkmenbashi oil refinery to an Israeli company (Roy 1999). Iran remained silent on Turkmenistan’s close relationship with Israel, though Israel is a proclaimed enemy of Iran and other Muslim countries. This stance of Iran has helped to take economic advantage of co-operation with Ashgabat. Turkmenistan is also vitally interested in partnership with Iran for the development of national gas reserves, which could be transported profitably to the world market through Iranian territory. Iranian pipeline projects help reducing Russian monopoly in the sphere of Turkmen gas export. According to the results of 2004, of the $ 6.4 billion of the general trade turnover of Turkmenistan, $ 750 million reflected trade with Iran, compared to $400 million of Iranian trade turnover with Kazakhstan (Yuldasheva 2009). Due to the US factor, the import-export balance of Turkmenistan with Iran was fluctuating till the year 1997 and there after it showed a steady growth. The export import balance of Turkmenistan with Iran is given below.

The American leadership postponed the license payment for oil company Mobil for participating in exchange operation with Iran, thus complicating the oil export from Turkmenistan (Lelyveld 1998). Construction of main gas pipeline to Iran, involving a consortia headed by the English-Dutch oil concern “Royal-Dutch Shell” was frozen due to US sanction against Iran. The first structure of pipeline from Turkmenistan to Iran through Turkey had already been finished. The execution of the rest of the project was stopped for financial reasons.
Uzbekistan started its relationship with Teheran from February 1992 on a bilateral basis. Islam Karimov, Uzbek President visited Teheran in November 1992. The two countries agreed to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and expressed their willingness to help to resolve Tajik civil war and help its reconstruction. However, Uzbekistan suspects that Iran was helping United Tajik Opposition. Islam Karimov alleged that Iran was responsible for civil war in Tajikistan and has been creating political instability in the region (Pannier 1998).

Uzbekistan was also apprehending the growth of Iran’s influence in Persian speaking population of Samarkand and Bukhara. As a result, Tashkent did not allow Iran to open its cultural centre in the heart of the capital city. Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov was highly critical of Turkmenistan President Niyazov for promoting Iran in various ways including helping fundamentalist forces in the region. He also hailed US embargo against Iran along with Israel. He did not attend the meeting of OIC in 1997 because it was held in Teheran (Singh 2004). With the taking over of Afghanistan by Taliban, the circumstances forced Uzbekistan to have good relationship with Iran because Iran was also the target of the Taliban forces. Taliban was inimical to Iran because Iran was Shiite whereas Taliban was Sunni Wahabis. Iran and Uzbekistan were brought together by a new grouping called “six plus two” forum organized by the United Nations bringing together all of Afghanistan’s six neighbours – China, Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan along with USA and the Russian Federation. This grouping gives enough opportunity to develop bilateral cooperation. Iran and Uzbekistan have common interest in exporting cotton from Uzbekistan to the world market. As Uzbekistan is a landlocked country, it needs the help of Iran to export its main agricultural product-cotton to the world market. Nearly 60% of cotton export from Uzbekistan is through Iran’s sea port Bandar Abbas.

Iran-Kazakhstan relations were quite matter of fact in nature. The Kazak President visited Iran in November 1992. The two nations expressed their desire to use peaceful means to resolve regional as well as bilateral
disputes. They wanted immediate end to civil war in Tajikistan. The Iranian President expressed his support to Kazakh proposal in promoting cooperation and mutual confidence in Asia. President of Iran returned his visit to Kazakhstan in October 1993 and signed nine agreements with President Nazarbaev in the field of transport, communication, agriculture, banking, energy, trade and industry, customs and consular affairs. The two countries expressed their desire to observe the principle of non-interference in affairs of each other and agreed to cooperate for ending the conflict in Bosnia, the Nagorno - Karabakh crisis and the civil war in Tajikistan (Singh 2004).

During the visit of Kazak Prime Minister to Teheran in 1994, several agreements related to visa arrangement, joint formation of trade and industry, banking and free trade zone were signed between Kazakhstan and Iran to promote international and bilateral shipping of goods and passengers. Iran had also agreed to buy five million tons of Kazakhstan oil per year for transport it to Gulf for export. Several Iranian companies had started investments in business in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. Direct air links were established between the two countries in 1993 (Singh 2004). Iran is engaged in the construction of a pipeline from Western Kazak oil field to Pacific Rim through Xinjiang which will provide a sea outlet in the Persian Gulf via Turkmenistan.

Kazakhstan wants to cooperate with Iran in the energy sector despite opposition from the USA. From Kazak point of view, Iranian transit route for energy resources is a direct exit to sea ports and hence a direct route to the customers of Kazak oil. These routes are the most profitable exit way of Kazak oil to the Persians Gulf. It is also the most realistic intermediate route of raw materials supply to the markets of South Asia and Asia Pacific. But the process of negotiation and realization of the agreements between Kazakhstan and Iran are complicated due to technical reasons and due to the negative US position on them.

The foreign policy preferences of Astana can easily be understood by the trade turnover indications of Kazakhstan, Iran and Russia. When US
pressure on Kazakhstan was quite high during 1994 to 1999 period, there was a tendency in Astana towards weakening its relationship with Russia and Iran, as shown in the lowest trade turnover indices to these states. In 1994, Kazakhstan trade with Iran was as low as US $ 10.6 million as against import of US $ 11.8 million. Similarly, export-import balance between Kazakhstan and Russia in 1994 was US $ 1292.8 million and US $ 138.3 million respectively. With reorientation of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy, trade indices of these states gradually showed improvement.

Kazakhstan favours pipeline projects to the territory of Iran in view of the huge profits it would get if it excludes Russian territory for transportation of oil and natural gas to the world market. The attitude of USA towards Iran had adversely affected the development of the pipeline project through Iran. According to Kazakhstan the Iranian transit route is the most profitable supply routes, not only to the market of the Persian Gulf, but also to those of South Asia and Asia Pacific states.

Iran and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement for air and road links between them on August 1992. Iranian President visited Kyrgyzstan in October 1993 and signed twelve agreements as well as an MoU which provided the framework of mutual cooperation. The Speaker of Kyrgyzstan Parliament visited Iran in 1994 and discussed co-operation in the field of economy and technology within the framework of Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Iran was highly critical of the opening of Kyrgyz Embassy in Jerusalem. Iran also criticized the visit of President Askar Akaev to Israel in 1993.

Iran has been treated as a ‘rogue state’ by the US for quite some time now. The US and its allies were able to pass a resolution in the UN Security Council condemning Iran’s alleged effort to make nuclear weapon and its denial to wind up its nuclear research. An embargo is imposed on Iran by the Security Council. All the nations of the world had to boycott cooperation with Iran under compulsion from the US and its allies on this account. Though Russia is also bound by UN Security Council Resolution, Russia is trying to help Iran in developing nuclear
energy in the name of peaceful use. In fact, Russia’s support to Iran is prompted by Russia’s intention to keep the USA out of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

A bilateral agreement was signed between Russian Federation and Iran on 17 August 1992 on the peaceful use of nuclear energy making provisions for the delivery of WER 440 reactors. On 8 January 1995, Viktor Mikhaliov, the Russian Atomic Energy Minister at the time and Reza Amorollahi, the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and the country’s Vice President, signed a $800 million contract in accordance of which the Russian Federation was to complete the construction of the first 1000 MW light water reactor at the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (NPP) in four and a half years (Ter-organov 2008).

In addition to these agreements, both sides signed a protocol to the contract on further negotiation between Teheran and Moscow about wide ranging cooperation in the nuclear sphere. In this agreement, Russia agreed to train Iranian scientists at their nuclear research centre to provide assistance to Iran in mining Uranium ore and supply it with gas centrifuges for Uranium enrichment. Several Iranian nuclear scientists were trained at higher educational establishments in Russia, including at the Novorouezh NPP training centre, to operate the future NPP. Thus, Russia is helping Iran to develop its nuclear capability, despite opposition from USA and NATO forces. However, Russia claims that the agreement with Iran was flawless and in accordance with the requirements of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Since 2001, a ‘smile offensive’ has been the order of the day in Iranian strategy. The strategy consists of instituting a comprehensive programme of high level exchange with its South Caucasian and Central Asian neighbours including Afghanistan and the invocation of major trade, transportation and energy deals in order to create allies for Iran in the region. These deals encompass oil, gas and electricity because some of these states depend on imports. Iran too faces an energy crisis due to its lack of refining capacity.
Iran imports energy products from Turkmenistan even as it exports to states like Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia who all depend on import of energy resources. The point of this strategy is to create enduring political and economic ties so that its northern neighbours, including Turkey will think twice before allowing America to deploy any form of military power in the Caspian region lest those states should lose valuable political and economic ties with Iran (Blank 2007).

The Barack Obama Administration has expressed its option to have dialogue with Iran regarding the nuclear research programme of Iran. During a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Luvrov, the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, sought Russia’s cooperation in bringing around Iran to discuss the issue of nuclear programme of Iran and in return, the US was ready to talk with Russia regarding NATO’s proposal to install missile interceptors in Poland and Czechoslovakia which was considered as a hostile action against Russia (Weite 2009). However, the firm stand taken by the Iranian leadership have upset US plans to contain the nuclear programmes of Iran and therefore the US has to take initiative to pass resolution to continue embargo against Iran in June 2010.

TURKEY AND CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia constitutes the richest reservoir of opportunity from Turkey’s viewpoint. Turkey was among the first to recognize the independence of all the Central Asian Republics in view of the potential advantages involved. The Turkish Daily Milliyet hailed the independence by describing it as “a good thrill for Turks to realize that they are no longer alone in the World.” A new power equation has been brought up in the region following the independence of Central Asian Republics. Soon there was scramble among international Islamic movements to occupy a space in the region. Among the Islamic forces, Iran and Turkey are important players and compete with each other to dominate Central Asia and the Caucasus. Turkey since the time of Kemal Ataturk remains secular for a long time. Kemal Ataturk disregarded the sustained influence
of Islamic fundamentalism and adopted Western ways of development. The secular leadership in Turkey also kept away from Pan-Turkish propaganda by Islamists of Turkey.

From the Western point of view, Turkey would act primarily as a counterweight against Iran which was engaged in promoting radical Islam in Central Asian Republics and Azerbaijan. Secondly, Turkey would act as a role model in establishing market economy and secular democracy in newly independent Central Asian Republics. Thus Turkey secured the support of the West and USA in its bid to fill the power vacuum in Central Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union led Turkey to believe that it could become the leader of newly independent Central Asian and Caucasus Republics (Hunter 2001). Turkey’s politicians, intellectuals, the media and public started to believe that there should be establishment of a community of Turkic states. They thought that Turkey will be a role model for new Turkic states with free market economy, secular government, respect for Islamic tradition and a democratic system.

After the meeting with the Turkish Prime Minister in Washington on 13 February 1992, President George Bush signalled Turkey “as the model of a democratic, secular state which could be emulated by Central Asia” (Bal 2004: 327-346). However, the Western gambit failed to a large extent because Turkey did not have the resources to play such outsized role and the countries in the region would not accept it.

**Ethno-Linguistic and Religious Affinity with Central Asia**

The Turks of Turkey have close ethnic and linguistic linkages with the people of Central Asia. The Muslims of Central Asia and Caucasus belonged to Turkic race. The people of this region except those of Azerbaijan are mainly Sunnis like Muslims in Turkey. “The Azeris are Shias like Iranians. The people of Turkey and Central Asian and Caucasian states are related to each other because of common origin of their languages which belong to Ural-Altaic family of languages. The dialects of Turkey and Central Asia and Azerbaijani people have
undergone many changes with the incorporation of various new words from languages like Arabic, Persian and Russian. With the incorporation of various new words, changes in the accent, these languages are not easily understood among the speakers of various states” (Sander 1994: 41).

In spite of similarity in ethnic-linguistic and cultural characteristics, there were no contact between the Turks in Turkey and their ethnic kinsmen in Central Asia and the Caucasus and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union for several decades. The Turkic people of this region remained isolated from their regional neighbours in Turkey after the conquest by Russia in 19th century. “The practical segregation intensified because of the Ottoman Empire’s tilt towards the West till the beginning of the eighteenth century.” (Alam 2005: 12).

The emergence of the newly independent Turkic nations in Central Asia excited the emotion of the people of Turkey due to the common history and heritage of the people of the region. Turkey sought to unify all Turkic people scattered in vast territories extending from the Adriatic Sea to the borders of China. Even during the last phase of Ottoman Empire, there were appeal for the union of all Turkic people. Ziya-Gokalp, a leading pan-Turkist proclaimed that “the country of Turks is not Turkey, nor yet Turkistan. Their country is a broad and everlasting land of Turan” (Uriel 1950: 126). Young Turks led by Enver Pasha tried to unify Turkic people of the region during World War I, but Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Turkish Republic, did not support the idea. However, in the 1930s, Ataturk recognized the unity in the identities of the people of Turkey and the Central Asian region.

The negative attitude of the members of the European Union towards Turkey in giving membership in the European Union also played an important role in bringing up Turkish sentiments in the 1990s. The emergence of newly independent Central Asian Republics of Turkic origin have paved the way for the change in Turkey’s foreign policy towards Central Asia. The resurfacing of Pan-Turkic sentiment in the early 1990s was partly because of the rise of ethno-nationalism. The
events in the Balkans and the Caucasus provoked strong public reaction and put pressure on Turkey. These events made ethnicity a key factor in moulding Turkey’s foreign policy towards Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Thus, initially Turkey had a better leverage in its relation with Central Asian Republics due to its ethno-cultural linkages with these countries.

**Reaction of Central Asian Leaders towards the Turkish Model**

In the initial years of independence, Turkic leaders of Central Asia were quite inclined towards Turkey and they openly advocated pro-Turkish views and emphasized ethno-linguist continuities between the two regions. Uzbek President Islam Karimov expressed that it was willing to accept Turkey as a model due to commonality of the history, region and culture of Uzbekistan and Turkey. Askar Akaev of Kyrgyzstan remarked, in a speech, that “Turkey is a morning star that shows the true path to the other Turks”. Islam Karimov also advocated the idea of a Turkish Common Market and said that if unification was possible for Slavs, it could be possible for the Central Asians as well (Bal 1998: 118).

Another reason for allout support for the Turkish model by the Turkic leaders of Central Asia was their belief that through Turkey, Central Asian Republics would receive American backing for their entry into various international, political and economic organizations. Besides, Turkic leaders of Central Asia were brought up in secular state institution of the Soviet Union and hence they had a natural affinity towards secular Turkish model.

The Turkish leadership considered Iran as a source of serious trouble in the region and America regarded Pan-Turkism as a useful alternative to Khomeini-type Islamism. As the Turkish government was not in a position to provide the economic support to Central Asian governments, they used their technical know-how to provide support to Central Asian economy. The Turkish building companies have been in demand in number of Arab countries, especially in Libya. Their architects, engineers
and contractors by the 1990s found good job opportunities in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

During the Cold War, Turkey was aligned to the West and was a member of NATO. Turkey was worried over Stalin’s claim on Turkish territory in the post-Second World War period and this forced Turkey in to an alliance with the West. So, for more than four decades, the guiding factor in Turkish foreign and national security policies was the perceived threat from the USSR. During the Cold War period of super power rivalry, Turkey had a critical geo-strategic position in the Western alliance and NATO. Turkey acted as a distant out-post at the European periphery and a barrier to Soviet expansionism in West Asia. Turkey linked its security and foreign policies with the West, particularly the United States. However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and termination of Warsaw Pact and decrease in the military relevance of NATO, Turkey’s importance to the West diminished considerably. Now, with the emergence of Turkish states in Central Asia, Turkey has a big role to play in the region.

Iran- Turkey competition

Many Western analysts predicted a competition between Turkey and Iran in playing hegemonic role in Central Asia. Iran represented an anti-Western theocratic regime. But Turkey represented democracy, secularism, free market economy and pro-Western leaning. The Western countries thought that Muslim Republics may follow the Iranian model and would cause the rise of Islamic militancy in Central Asia. So, they supported Turkey in the competition against Iran. The Central Asian Republics also were interested to have links with Turkey. Turkey followed market oriented economy while Central Asian Republics were following a controlled economy inherited from the former Communist regimes in these Republics. Turkish experience differed from the Islamic formula that was being proposed by Iran and Saudi Arabia.
Uzbek President Islam Karimov supported Turkish model and Mohammed Salih, the leader of Uzbek opposition Erk party, said similar positive words about the Turkish model. The Turkish model was considered as a bridge between the Islamic world and Western world. Turkish President Turgut Ozal frequently stressed on the idea that the Twenty-first century would be a “Turkic Century”, while Prime Minister Süleyman Damirel underlined the existence of the Turkic world that extended from China to Adriatic Sea. President Ozal proposed a Community of Turkish States like the Organization of American States (Gozen 1996).

Though, in the beginning, the Central Asian leaders expressed their desire to follow the Turkish model, after some time, they became aware of limitation and constraints of Turkey. In the mean time, the leaders of Central Asian Republics had interaction with leaders of various countries of the world and came in contact with various socio-economic development models. These alternative connections made them realize that they could choose from different models of development other than the Turkish or the Iranian model. After the interaction with Turkish leaders, they realized that Turkey was in the midst of several domestic political problems and is not in position to provide funds for the development of Central Asian Republics. Though Central Asian Republics were having ethnic and linguistic relationship with Turkey, they are not ready to merge their identity under the banner of Turkish groups. The leaders of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan showed signs of becoming the leaders of Central Asia. Besides, Russia disliked the domination of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia which was considered as the zone of influence of the Russian Federation. Vladimir Putin had expressed his intention of keeping control over former Soviet territory under a policy known as the ‘near-abroad doctrine’ in a way similar to the ’Munroe Doctrine’ of the United States. Besides, as time passed and the West had interaction with Central Asian Republics, the enthusiasm displayed by the Western powers supporting Turkish model declined.
There was also a danger of revival of pan-Turkistan for the West, Russia and China (Colakoglu 2007).

Turkey had succeeded in establishing extensive political, economic and cultural relationship with Central Asian and Caucasian countries. Even though Turkey could not be the main influence in the region, it had a considerable presence in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. According to some political analysts, the West used Turkish model as a facilitator following the end of the Soviet Union for Muslim Republics to attract their attention to the West and to keep them away from Iran. After realizing the ground conditions, the West ended its support to the Turkish model. During his trip to Turkey in November 1999, US President Bill Clinton stressed that Turkey had a significant role to play in the volatile region. Clinton paid his attention to the need of a facilitator between Europe and the Islamic world and implied that Turkey was a bridge between the Christian and Muslim cultures. The US had begun to regard Turkey as a strategic ally to tackle the problems in a region from Balkans to Central Asia and West Asia because of Turkish geo-strategic position in the region. The US wants to co-operate with Turkey as an ally in fighting Islamic militancy in Central Asia and West Asia.

Turkey was responsible for participation of Central Asian and Caucasian states in the international forums such as the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) with the US and Organization of Islamic conference (OIC). Turkey guided five Turkic states to join the Economic Cooperation Organization, which was originally established to promote political and economic cooperation between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Turkey was the first state to extend diplomatic recognition to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. The first Turkic summit was held at Ankara, the Turkish capital, in 1992, in which the Heads of Turkic states participated.
Economic Factors

As feelings of nationalism and brotherhood with the Turkic states were strong among the people of Turkey, Ankara engaged high level economic and trade relations with Central Asian Republics. The Economic Corporation Organization (ECO) and the Black Sea Economic Co-operation Organization (BSECO) were involved in a number of schemes designed to promote the economic development of the region. Turkey has been engaged in bilateral economic ties with former Soviet Republics. In spite of several obstacles, the economic and commercial relations between Turkey and Turkic states has increased during this period. The economic and the institutional dependencies of Central Asia and countries of the Caucasus created during the seventy years of Soviet rule are other factors determining the relations between Turkey and Turkic Republics. There is a fierce competition among the various countries for economic ties with these energy rich countries (Alam 2005).

Turkey is the founder member of ECO, which is a successor organization to Regional Corporation for Development which was established in 1985 and admitted all independent Republics of Central Asia to its fold in 1992. Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are members of the ECO. With the additions of new members, the ECO had become an organization consisting of an area of 8 million square kilometres with 325 million people inhabiting the area. The objectives of the organization stipulated in the Treaty of Izmir included expansion of mutual trade and promotion, condition for sustained economic growth in the region and conditions cultural and spiritual affinities. It also reserves as an instrument for development of economic, social ad technological cooperation among the member states. It also provides a forum for sorting out regional disputes and for peaceful cooperation between the member countries. Turkey gives much importance to ECO. It believes that the ECO will play an active role among the member countries. It wants to develop infrastructure like road and railway networks so that the cooperation among these nations will develop in a big way.
Turkey’s trade share with other ECO countries is only 3% of its total foreign trade and a little more than 1% with all the Central Asian Turkic countries. Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is another initiative of Turkey with countries surrounding Black Sea. It aims at ensuring that the Black Sea becomes a region of peace, stability and prosperity by taking into account the existing ties, geographical proximity, historical ties and complimentary attributes of the economy among the member states. However, this organization did not directly connect itself to Central Asian Republics, though, it is an important organization as far as Turkey is concerned.

Turkey signed economic and commercial agreements with Kazakhstan (1991), Kyrgyzstan (1991), Turkmenistan (1995), Uzbekistan (1995) and Azerbaijan (1992). The Central Asian Republics had problems in making payments for their trade with Turkey. Turkey founded Turkish International Co-operation Agency (TICA) to promote Turkish private sector doing business in former Soviet Republics. In addition to TICA and Turkish Exim Bank, foundation of non-governmental bilateral business councils such as the Foreign Economic Relations Board has promoted economic and cultural relations with the Turkic states.

The Central Bank of Turkey has established correspondent relationship with the central banks of the Turkic Republics. In association with TICA (Turkish Agency for Technical and Economic Cooperation), it has also organized to train the employees of the central banks of these states.

In 1995, the Turkish Ziraat Bank helped to establish the Azerbaijan-Turkish Commercial Bank in Azerbaijan with a 46 per cent share. Another bank in Azerbaijan-the EGE International Bank, Baku was set up in 1999 in which the Universal Holding of Turkey has a 90 per cent share. In the Turkey–Kazakhstan International Bank, established in 1992, Turkey’s Emlak Bank has a 35 per cent share. And for the establishment of the Kazakhstan–Ziraat International Bank (1993), Ziraat Bank provided a 94 per cent share and for the Demir-Kazakhstan Bank (1998), Turkey’s Demirbank’s share amounted as high as 99.97 per cent. Demirbank also
helped establish the Demir-Kyrgyz International Bank in Kyrgyzstan in 1997 with a 60 per cent share. In Turkmenistan, Ziraat Bank provided 50 per cent of the share to establish the Turkmen–Turkish Commercial Bank in 1993. And in the same year, Halk Bank International, Turkey, put forward 25 per cent of the share for the establishment of the Turkmen-Halk Development Bank. Ziraat Bank provided 50 per cent of the share to establish Uzbekistan-Turkish Bank in Uzbekistan 1993 (Alam 2005).

Turkey and Turkic Republics have signed several agreements to avoid double taxation in the industrial structure. Turkey could import industrial raw material from Turkic states which are abundant in natural resources. The Central Asian Republics cooperated with Turkey for the development of small scale industries. In the field of agriculture also Turkey had developed close cooperation with Turkic states such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. A large number of firms- public and private- made considerable investments through FDI partnership in these economies. US $1 billion in aid is pledged to five Turkic Republics as loans, credits and investment guarantee earmarked for technical aid and supplies.

In April 1993, Turgut Ozal, the Turkish President, visited Central Asian Republics, mainly Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan along with an entourage of business people who were interested in sectors like infrastructure, telecommunication and transportation mechanism in these countries. 2500 Turkish companies were operating in wide range of projects in Central Asian Republics. Their investments had reached $ 8.4 billion with $4 billion in construction services. The trade volume rose from $ 145 million in 1992 to over $5.6 billion in 1999.

Turkey played an important role in improving communication and transportation facilities of Turkic Republics. Turkish Airlines have direct flight to Baku, Tashkent, Almaty, Ashgabat and Bishkek. Now all these states have developed their own national carriers and started frequent flights to Istanbul. But the land transport from Turkey is in a round about way to Central Asia, because Turkey is not having a direct proximity to
any of the Central Asian Republics. Turkey has opened a border crossing at Sarp into Agar Stan region of Georgia. Through this route, trucks from Turkey can go through Georgia into Azerbaijan; from there the trucks could be ferried to Turkmen Bashi port in Turkmenistan. From there, all cities in Central Asia could be reached (Turan & Bal 2004).

**Energy Trade**

Turkey is one of the most important potential markets for the oil and gas products. Turkey currently depends on imports for 62% of oil and gas it consumes. It is estimated that Turkey will have to import around 28 million tons of crude oil in the year 2010 and 30-40 bcm of natural gas. So, Turkey would like to import energy resources from the Caspian basin and Central Asia. It would also like to use its geographical position to transport Caspian energy resources to Western markets and to extract revenue for the overland transit. Currently, the foreign policy of Turkey towards the region is formulated on the basis of transport of energy through Turkey to world market. USA and the Western powers preferred pipelines through Turkey for the transportation of oil and natural gas. Caspian and Central Asian energy resources have become an international issue of competition among the various players in the region.

Turkey along with Western powers favour the construction of pipeline from Azerbaijan capital Baku and via Tbilisi, the Georgian capital to Ceyhan, the South Eastern part of Turkey on the Mediterranean coast. This pipeline is known Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC). Russia insists that the pipeline from Baku should go to the Russian Port Novorossiysk and the Black Sea for the transport of South Caspian oil. Iran on the other hand wants alternative pipelines through Iran which is commercially and otherwise more viable than the other routes. However 1760 km BTC pipeline is being built at the cost of US $ 3 billion. Turkey is more competitive than Iran due to the strategic support from USA and the Western allies who wanted to keep Russia and Iran out of the transportation of routes of Caspian energy resources.
There was steady increase in the trade between Turkey and Central Asian Republics. The export from Turkey grew from US $ 185.64 million in 1992 to US $ 557.26 million in 2001. Turkey’s import increased from US $ 8.593 million in 1992 to US $ 282.38 million in 2001. The imports are mainly raw material and exports are manufactured goods. However, the Turkey’s trade share with Turkic Republics is minimum and around two per cent (Alam 2005).

**Cultural Ties**

The Turkish agency for Technical and Economic Cooperation (TICA) established in the 1992 is the most important agency in Turkey to spread cultural and linguistic relations with CARs. The Turkish Ministry of Education has prepared history textbooks to be used in the Central Asian Republics. TICA is also engaged in preparing a ‘Turkic dictionary’ and developing university curricula (Kramer 2000: 111-112). Riding on its close ethno-linguistic affinities with the Turkic states, Turkey persuaded these Republics to adopt Latin alphabets, replacing Cyrillic ones in the script, just as Turkey had itself adopted the Latin script following drastic reforms during the early years of the Republic. On the other hand, other Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia and Iran are trying to popularize the Arabic or Persian script in the Muslim Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Even so, many Turkic governments have adopted the Latin alphabet. On the initiative of the Turkish Government, a television channel called Avrasya has started broadcasting in the region to promote Turkish. Observes have pointed out that this sort of competition is indicative of a struggle for cultural supremacy and political influence in the region. Turkey seems to have an edge over other competitors because of the fact that some of the Turkic states of Central Asia have adopted the Latin script on the pattern of Turkey (Alam 2005).

TICA gives assistance in the field of economy, culture and technical knowledge to Central Asian Republics. It undertakes to develop projects and programmes in sectors such as agriculture, education, small and medium enterprises, energy tourism, civilization and insurance. It also
provides scholarships to the students of Central Asian Republics and Azerbaijan. There are students exchange between Turkey and Central Asian Republics arranged by TICA. According to the report in Turkish Daily *Milliyet* of May 2000, about 3000 students have finished their education and return to their countries. By the end of 1999 around 20000 students from various Turkic Republics were receiving education in Turkey. Turkey is cooperating with government of new Republics in setting in vocational schools and provides resources, the necessary finance, man power and equipment needs of these schools. Several high schools and Turkish educational instruction centres have been opened by Turkey. Turkey has also helped to establish several institutions for higher education namely, the Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University, Bishkek; the Turkish- Kazakh Hoca Ahmer Yeseri University, Turkmenistan and the International Turcoman State University.

Private agencies from Turkey have also established various institutions in Turkic states. The International Centre for Foundation for Education and Culture (KATEV) was founded by Suleyman University. Similarly, an Institute for Business Administration is opened in Azerbaijan Capital Baku in 1991 by the Foundation for Research for Turkish World. This foundation has also opened several institutions in the Turkic world. The Kafka University in Azerbaijan and Alo-Too University in Kyrgyzstan are other such institutions. The Universities in Turkey have opened study centres in Central Asian Republics with the cooperation of the universities there in the field of science and scientific knowledge (Kurtulus 2000: 41-48).

Efforts are made by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (TDRA) and The Foundation of Religious Affairs (TDV) to promote Turkish Islamic position in the new Republics and to prevent the penetration and dissemination of Wahabi type of Islam. They provide various types of voluntary aid, export of Holy Quran and other religious books. Religious preachers are sent and scholarships are given to Central Asian students to study in Turkey in different disciplines (Hiro 1995: 68). These organizations seek to increase the level of Islamic knowledge and promote the philosophy of Islamic religion. They also give aid for
Muslim-Turkic people to restore and build mosques. The TDV have opened their religious high schools and five divinity faculty in several countries of the region.

In June 1992, the Cultural Ministers of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met for the first time in Ankara. On 12 July 1993, the agreement on foundation of TURKSOY was signed between all the founder members in Almaty. The administration head-quarters of TURKSOY is in Ankara. Regular meetings of Cultural Ministries and officers and consultation with the all the Central Asian Republics are held regularly to expand and enrich the common cultural heritage of the Turkic world. The Heads of the State of all member countries support the functions of these organizations.

**Conclusion**

Following the disintegration of former Soviet Union there was a widespread propaganda that the Central Asia would provide a fertile ground for the Islamic Republic of Iran to establish fundamentalist Islamic regime in the region. It was also predicted that there would be rivalry between Iran and Turkey to bring the region under their hegemonic influence. Though, both Iran and Turkey tried their level best to dominate the region, the entry of major powers in the arena proved everybody wrong. After 18 years of independence, these prophecies of the western policy analysts did not come true. There are various reasons for the failure of prophecy. The most important reason is attributed to the lack of resources in Iran to sponsor Islamic revolution and terrorism in Central Asia. Another reason is the divergent brand of Islamic practice in Iran and Central Asia. Majority of Muslim in Iran are Shiite whereas majority of the Central Asian Muslims are Sunni and belongs to Turkic race. Besides, due to the Soviets past, the leaders of CARs are secular and they resist the import of the theocratic model of Islamic regime of Iran.

Isolation of Iran in the international arena is also responsible for Iran’s failure in influencing the affairs in Central Asia. On the other hand its geo
political location made it a natural player in the regional politics of Central Asia. As Iran is unable to lead the region due to the presence USA and Russia in the region, it is now giving importance to economic interaction with the CARs. As years passed, Iran’s moves are limited by the strategic depth of Pakistan and Turkey in this area, as these two countries are having strong ties with the USA. However, Iran’s improved capacities for the expansion of rail, road, and energy transportation linkages are superior to those of Turkey and Russia in the region. Iran’s agreement to Central Asian countries to provide easy access to the Persian Gulf for oil and gas pipeline has increased its importance in the region.

Russia is continuing its good relationship with Iran in the region. The isolation caused by the US sponsored embargo alleging nuclear ambition of Iran is getting neutralized by the pro-Iranian policy of Russian Federation. Russia is inclined towards Iran to contain the unipolar hegemony of USA in the region. Iran has showed calculated restraint and respect for the territorial integrity of newly independent Central Asian Republics. Iran is making improvement in its position in Central Asia due to its energy resources, for its access to high technology and balanced foreign policy posture with most of the important powers. The various anti Iranian restriction in the oil and natural gas sphere as well as continuing instability in Afghanistan and other countries adjacent to Central Asia have altered the external political preferences of majority of Central Asian States in favor of Iran and Russia. These policies clearly contradict the US interest owing to its economic and political motives. Iran’s relation with Central Asian Republics is going to make a definite progress in the days to come.

The tough Iranian position on nuclear issue and its inflexibility in solving regional security have brought Iran to the edge of war with US. Any confrontation between Iran and US under present circumstances would involve various countries in Central and South Asia, Caucasus and West Asia. This situation would have potential for turning the conflict into another world War. However, the situation depends on all the regional
participants including the United States, Russia, Iran, China and the Central Asian Republics.

The new US administration led by Barack Obama has been trying to bring Iran to the dialogue table for mutual understanding on various issues including Iran’s nuclear armament programme. With the involvement of China, Iran, Russia and India, a new multi polar structure of international relations are slowly coming up. In such a situation, Iran could become a stable but not a dominant player in Central Asia.

The disintegration of Soviet Union and the emergence of five Muslim countries with sizable Turkic population in Central Asia and the Caucasus have created numerous opportunities and challenges to Turkey. Turkey is poised to play an important role in the region and Turkey’s foreign policy has been moulded to take up the new challenges. Turkey is an important player in the much talked about “new great game”. The other players namely Russia, the United States, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, India and Pakistan have been involved in this great game to woo these countries. But, in the beginning Turkey had an edge over others. The US and Western powers favoured the role of Turkey in the region and projected ‘Turkish Model’ as the most suitable for Central Asian Republics. Turkey’s policy makers follow Western style secular democratic form of government and market economy. It has all the necessary ingredients to serve as an attractive role model to these Republics. Western powers believe that the adoption of Turkish model would also inhibit Islamic forces from gaining upper hand in the region.

The developments in Chechnya in Russia and Taliban forces in Afghanistan along with the background of a vast majority of Muslim population make the region vulnerable to Islamic terrorist forces. Turkey capitalizes on this fear to advance its own interest and position in the region. Turkic leaders of the region were highly enthusiastic about relation with Turkey due to their ethno-linguistic and historical connections. As a result, Turkey formulated several high and lofty foreign policy objectives for this region. Turkey also projected to push its
economic and trade interest in the region. However, Turkey could not materialize its hope of uniting the region under the banner of Pan-Turkism.

The adoption of Latin alphabets to Turkic language at the instance of Turkey has helped Muslim Republics to move to Western ideology and technology. It is believed that switching to Latin alphabets will eventually remove most of the dialectical differences between Turkic languages and forge even closer links at cultural, economic and commercial level. Turkey felt a sense of political victory over its regional rival Iran, when Azerbaijan decided to pursue this path in December 1991, followed by Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Tajikistan opted for Persian alphabets and Uzbekistan remains undecided.

The most important dimension of Turkey’s role in Central Asia and Caucasus is in the field of education and culture. Turkish government agencies like TDRA and TDV have helped to contain the influence of other Muslim countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia. TICA is engaged in encouraging economical and cultural cooperation between Turkey and Turkic Republics. It has offered several scholarships to students of Central Asia and Azerbaijan. TURKSOY promotes cultural co-operation between Turkey and Central Asian Republics.

Economic considerations have encouraged Turkey to gain access to huge energy resources of the Caspian basin. Although, Turkey is not having direct access to any of the Central Asian Republics, it continues to enjoy a hospitable environment for political, cultural and economic interaction with Turkic States.

Though economic and political shortcomings in domestic affairs prevent Turkey from playing a leading role in Central Asia, it is going to remain as an important player in Central Asia and the Caucasus. As long as US hostility towards Iran remains as it is, Turkey will be called upon to play an important role in protecting the US and Western interests in Central Asia. Turkey has also cultural, historical and ethnic ties with the Balkans,
West Asia, Caucasus and Central Asia and these regions are open to Turkish influence. So, Turkey is definitely going to play as a regional actor in Central Asia after Russia, China and the US.