Chapter-VII

UZBEKISTAN AND GREAT POWER PLAY
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The end of Soviet rule in Central Asia created a power vacuum in the region. The rich resources and the strategic location of the region made it attractive for external players to establish their sphere of influences in the region. The major players engaged in the region are the U.S., Russia, China and E.U. Each of these countries is trying to create their own space in the region, increasing the competition among the various players in the region. In the nineteenth century, the region witnessed rivalry between Russia and Britain; both wanted the region to fulfil their imperialist designs. This rivalry between Russia and Great Britain in the nineteenth century came to be known as the 'Great Game'. Today, however, several countries are competing in the region unlike two players in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) today are not passive actors. These republics too are trying to get maximum benefit out of the situation rather than being pawns at the hands of great powers.

Uzbekistan, like the other CARs, has attracted international attention since independence. The strengthening of the Uzbekistan-U.S. ties after September 11 and the subsequent souring of the bilateral relationship has its impact on the regional politics too. The hiccups in the Uzbekistan-U.S. relationship have shaped Uzbekistan’s equation with other external players like Russia and China, two major players in the region. The dynamics of the Uzbekistan-U.S. bilateral ties has to be thus understood in the greater geo-political milieu. Moreover, various regional organizations also reflect the geo-political complexities of the region. Uzbekistan’s relation with SCO, CSTO and others also reflect the geo-political competition among the various external players.

The chapter discusses Uzbekistan’s changing relationship with Russia, China and E.U. It also deals with Uzbekistan’s relationship with Regional Organizations, which in turn reflects Uzbekistan’s equation with the major external players and the shift in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy orientation. Uzbekistan like the other CARs is also trying to extract the maximum benefit from the power politics involved in the region, which is evident from its relationship with the various external players from time to time.
Uzbekistan—Russia Ties

Uzbekistan, as part of the former Soviet Union had a history of long association with Russia, first with Tsarist Russia and then with the erstwhile Soviet Union. Since independence, the bilateral relation witnessed several ups and downs. High level visits from both sides have taken place from time to time. Russian President Boris Yeltsin visited Uzbekistan in October 1998 and both sides signed agreement to increase economic ties. In December 1999, Putin visited Uzbekistan as the Prime Minister of Russia. In May 2000 and August 2003, Putin as the President of Russia visited Uzbekistan. In June 2004, Putin chose Uzbekistan for his first foreign trip after assuming office of the President for the second term. Putin after assuming power brought about a radical shift in Russian policy towards Central Asia. Russia reasserted its influence in the region, which was neglected during Yeltsin period. President Medvedev, however, after assuming office visited Kazakhstan as his maiden official visit, which was not liked by Uzbek authorities. Medvedev, however, visited Uzbekistan in January 2009.

From Uzbek side too there has been some important visits. In March 1994, Karimov visited Russia, followed by in May 1998, May 2001 and April 2004. President Karimov again visited Russia in June 2005, immediately following the May Andijan incident, which was a turning point in the Uzbekistan-Russia bilateral ties. Again President Kaimov visited Russia in November 2005, May 2006 and February 2008.

Past linkages have its share of advantages and disadvantages. Economically, Russia is still an important player in the Republic. All pipelines connecting Uzbekistan with the international market passes through Russia, giving Russia leverage vis-à-vis other external players. Moreover, Russia is also a major player in the Republic’s energy sector. Gazprom, the Russian gas major enjoys the lion’s share in the Republic’s gas sector. Gazprom has major stake in Uzbekistan’s energy sector, both in extraction and transportation. Back in December 2002, Gazprom and Uzbekneftegaz signed the agreement of Strategic Cooperation, which provided for “long-term procurement of Uzbek gas in 2003–2012, Gazprom’s participation in natural gas production projects in the Republic of Uzbekistan on the PSA terms, as well as cooperation in the field
of Uzbekistan's gas transmission infrastructure development and Central Asian gas transmission through the Republic” (Gazprom 2009).

In June 2004, LUKoil, (Russia), signed a $1 billion, thirty-five year Production-Sharing Agreement (PSA) with Uzbekneftegaz, the Uzbek National Holding Company to develop Uzbek natural gas deposits- at the Kandym, Khauzak and Shady fields in southern Uzbekistan (Blagov 2005). As per the agreement, LUKoil owned 90 percent share in the venture while Uzbekneftegaz obtained only 10 percent share (ibid). Earlier in April 2004, Gazprom inked a deal with Uzbekistan for providing $200 million in initial investment to develop Uzbekistan’s natural gas deposits (ibid). In February 2005, Gazprom and Uztransgaz (a sub-holding company of Uzbekneftegaz) signed a medium-term Agreement to transport natural gas through Uzbekistan from 2006-2010. The Agreement was primarily to transport Turkmen gas through the Central Asia–Center and Bukhara – Urals gas transmission systems, which passes through Uzbekistan (Gazprom 2009).

The Uzbek gas supply to Russia increased from 9 billion cubic metres (bcm) in 2006 to 13 bcm of gas in 2007 (Socor 2007). According to some reports, in 2006, Uzbekistan produced 62 bcm of gas and exported 12.6 bcm, of which 9 bcm was sold to Gazprom (Baigin 2007). According to an agreement between Uzbekistan and Gazprom, Russia also increased the price it pays for Uzbek gas, from $60 in 2006 to $100 per 1000 cubic metres in 2007, though the price was still below the price Russia gets in the European market (Socor 2007). Zarubezhneftegaz, a subsidiary of Gazprom got a five-year exploration license and exclusive rights to twenty-five years of Production-Sharing-Agreement with Uzbekneftegaz and Gazprom got exclusive right to export the gas (ibid). In January 2007, Zarubezhneftegaz began exploration and development work on several gas deposits on the Ust-Yurt plateau in the Karakalpakia region of Uzbekistan (ibid).

Analysts argue that Russian desire to dominate the transport route supplying gas to European market makes Uzbekistan a strategically important country for Russia.
"Kremlin intends to include Uzbekistan -- alongside Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan -- in a Russia-led group of gas exporting countries that dominate European markets to Russia’s unilateral advantage. This is made possible by Russia’s monopoly on transit from Central Asia to Europe. The Central Asia-Center gas pipeline, running from Turkmenistan via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to central Russia, is also designated officially by Moscow as the "Single Export Channel" for Central Asian gas. By dint of its location, Uzbekistan is key to the success of Russia’s efforts to monopolize the export of gas from Central Asia. That effort is, in turn, a component of Russia’s economic and political strategies to gain leverage over Europe. This consideration seemed entirely absent from the debates and policy calculations in Washington and Brussels that led to the loss of Uzbekistan as a strategic partner in 2005." (ibid).

In December 2009, a Gazprom delegation led by Alexander Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Managing Committee visited Uzbekistan. During this visit, Gazprom and Uztransgaz signed a contract to purchase and sale Uzbek gas for the year 2010 (Gazprom 2009). According to the agreements, Gazprom agreed to buy Uzbek natural gas at a price it gets from European gas markets and Gazprom would additionally receive 15.5 bcm of Uzbek gas in 2010 (ibid).

The bulk of Uzbekistan’s trade is with Russia, making it an important player. However, in the years immediately after independence, there were signs indicating loss of Russia’s predominant position as the major economic player. The bilateral relation also received a blow after Uzbekistan opposed Russian proposal of keeping a major portion of Uzbek gold reserves with the Russian Central bank in order to continue in the rouble zone.

But since 1994, Russia has continued to be the main export destination for Uzbekistan. In 1994, the Uzbek export to Russia was worth US$ 773.9 million, which increased to US$ 1172.4 million in 2006 and further to US$ 1478.7 million in 2008 (Asian Development Bank 2009). Except for 1999, Russia has also been the main import destination of Uzbekistan. From US$ 917.4 million in 1994, Uzbekistan’s import from Russia has increased to US$ 1194.9 million in 2006 and to US$ 2200.8 million in 2008 (ibid). Uzbekistan is one of main source of migrant workers to Russia. Both sides signed three deals on migration in 2007.
However, today, Uzbekistan is diversifying its economic partners by engaging with China, Korea, the U.S and other countries. The U.S. is among the top ten partners of Uzbekistan, though the bilateral trade figures have not increased substantially in the last eight years. In 2008, South Korea and Uzbekistan signed agreement for cooperation in natural gas and cotton. Uzbekneftegaz and Petronas (Malaysia) signed a Production Sharing Agreement for three gas fields in Ustyurt Plateau in May 2008. In the last couple of years, Uzbekistan is also exploring means to build economic cooperation with countries like UAE and Indonesia.

In spite of close economic cooperation, the Uzbek-Russia bilateral relationship has not always been smooth. In the years following Uzbekistan's independence, few incidents reflected the uneasiness on both sides. In February 1994, Ostankino's Channel One (ORT) and Russian television (RTR) went off the air in Uzbekistan and in March 1994, Russian television officially stopped functioning in Uzbekistan (Pannier 2005a). In October 1996, the Uzbek media protested against negative coverage of Uzbekistan in Russian newspapers ("Nezavisimaya gazeta" and "Izvestiya") in late September 1996 (ibid). The articles in these papers criticized Uzbekistan for corruption and political repression and also hinted at Uzbek government's support for Afghan leaders, which Uzbekistan claimed reflect Russian efforts to play "big brother" role in the region (ibid). In February 1998, Russia expressed dis-satisfaction on the coverage of the meeting of the Heads of State from four CIS Customs Unions countries by the Uzbek Television Broadcast (ibid). The Uzbek media was said to have reported that "as a result of political games, several CIS states could easily become dependent on their elder brother" (ibid), much to the chagrin of Russia.

Spat between the two in the nineties was visible in several other incidents. In May 1995, there were reports about Uzbekistan’s displeasure with Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev's remarks that Russia would use force to protect ethnic Russians abroad (ibid). After independence, a large number of ethnic Russians migrated to Russia, fearing backlash from the new government in Uzbekistan. In 1996, there were newspaper reports suggesting that a large number of Russian from Uzbekistan were migrating to Russia. Reports indicated that the Russian Embassy in Tashkent issued between 130-150...
citizenship certificates daily back in 1996 and more than 170,000 in the days following independence till 1996 (ibid). About 500,000 have left Uzbekistan for Russia as in 1996 (ibid).

Moreover, in November 1998, Uzbekistan withdrew its contingent from the CIS peace-keeping force in Tajikistan, further reflecting its desire to move out of Russian influence. The Uzbek dis-satisfaction with Russia was visible again in February 1999 when President Karimov during his meeting with the Russian Federation Council Chairman Yegor Stroyev remarked: “Russia does not have a clear policy” for countries in the Central Asian region and also pointed out that “when the Taliban captured the northern part of Afghanistan and were pointed toward us, no one from the CIS helped us” (ibid). Also, in April 1999, President Karimov was unhappy with the Russian base in Tajikistan and was reported to have said that increased militarization of Central Asia would destabilize the region (ibid). Uzbekistan’s relation with Russia received a blow after Uzbekistan joined GUAM, making it GUUAM in April 1999, a U.S. supported group. At the same time, Uzbekistan in 1999 walked out of the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), rejoining it in 2006.

Post September 11, brought about a radical change in Uzbekistan’s relation with the west, especially with the U.S., which gave Uzbekistan the opportunity to keep Russia at a distance. Uzbekistan ignored Russian opposition to the U.S. base in Uzbekistan and allowed the U.S. to use the base at K2. The U.S. military presence in Russia’s backyard raised suspicion among Russian policy makers and academicians. However, Russia eventually supported the U.S. presence as part of the larger understanding between the U.S. and Russia. But soon Russia became uncomfortable with the prolonged U.S. military presence in the region (K2 and Manas bases).

The Andijan incident in May 2005 dramatically changed the power equation in the Republic. The demand for an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident and the subsequent closure of the U.S. base at K2 damaged the Uzbekistan-U.S. relation, which got an unprecedented boost after September 11. Cracks in the Uzbekistan-U.S. relation became evident even before 2003. The U.S. government’s criticism of the lack of reforms
and on the poor human rights record was gradually creating rift between the two countries. The U.S. assistances to Uzbekistan, which was the highest in the region after 2001, were curtailed eventually, especially in 2004.

President Karimov moved closer to other external players like Russia and China after Uzbekistan-U.S. relations deteriorated. Russia supported Karimov government on the Andijan issue, bringing the two countries together. It also helped Uzbekistan to show the international community that it was not alone. Moreover, Russia has always been silent on the lack of reforms in the country and on the poor human rights situation, both of which are the main irritants hindering Uzbekistan closer ties with the West.

However, Uzbekistan-Russia bilateral ties started improving even before the 2005 incidents. Back in June 2003, a Russian military delegation visited Uzbekistan and the armed forces of the two countries signed agreement on military and technical cooperation (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst 2003). In June 2004, during Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov’s visit to Uzbekistan both sides signed an agreement on Strategic Partnership (ibid). The agreement was ratified by the Uzbek Parliament in August 2004 and the Russian State Duma ratified it in December 2004. The Uzbek-Russian Business Council was set up in 2004. Russia joined the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) in October 2004, a regional structure started by the five CARs after independence. Russian membership reflects Russia’s growing closeness with the region. Later on, in October 2005 at the St. Petersburg summit, CACO was merged with the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), again indicating Russia’s strengthened position in the region.

The bilateral ties nevertheless became more evident in 2005. In September 2005, both sides conducted their first ever joint military exercises, talks of which began in 2004. The Uzbek-Russia bilateral exercises marked a new geo-political alignment in Uzbekistan and in the region. It gave a political message-reassertion of Russia’s influence in the region. According to analysts, the exercises were “pretty significant politically, but from a military point of view these exercises are on a fairly limited scale---this is not
seriously going to improve the Uzbek capability or teach the Russians particularly anything useful, but it is a very important political gesture" (Pannier 2005b).

Uzbekistan-Russia bilateral ties reached new heights with the signing of the Treaty of Alliance on 14 November 2005. The Treaty served the interest of both parties-it dealt with the “security concerns of the Uzbek regime” and provided Russia “an opportunity to reassert its influence in the geo-strategically important region” (Bakshi 2005). Two important aspects of the Treaty were- the provision for military bases and that the act of aggression on one would be viewed as an act of aggression on the other. Russia also agreed to help the Uzbek government during any political unrest and would supply Uzbekistan “with various types of crowd dispersing equipment” (Laruelle 2008). Along with the security pact, both sides also signed a document for cooperation to combat drug trafficking and terrorism (Blagov 2005). Article 2 and 3 of the Treaty states-

“If an act of aggression is committed against one of the sides by any state or group of states, this will be viewed as an act of aggression against both sides....the other side...will provide necessary assistance, including military assistance, as well as giving aid through other means at its disposal” (Article 2).

“In case of emergence of a situation, which, according to the view of one of the sides, may pose a threat to peace, disturb peace or touch upon the interest of its security, as well as emergence of threat against one of the sides of the act of aggression, the sides would immediately would bring into force the mechanism of corresponding consultations for agreeing positions and coordinating practical measures for regulating such a situation” (Article 3).

Article 4 of the Treaty outlines the provision of military bases, which says, “‘the use of military facilities’ on the territories of the signatories to each other ‘when necessary and on the basis of separate treaties’ in order to ensure security and maintain peace and stability” (ibid).

The Treaty led to the beginning of a new relationship between the two countries-“the signing of the treaty marks the completion of a process that was about a year in the making, in which Tashkent's strategic orientation turned away from Washington and focused on Moscow” (Blagov 2005).
The Alliance Treaty has also been criticized. Critics have pointed out that "Russia's position vis-à-vis the Karimov regime continues to diverge from the Western stance" (Torbakov 2005). The Treaty was also criticized for encouraging unhealthy competition between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, as Kazakhstan a main ally of Russia in the region would be suspicious of the growing Russian proximity with Uzbekistan, which in turn would also affect Russia's strategic interest in the region (ibid). Another criticism for the Treaty was that Russia would be unnecessarily dragged into any civil war that takes place in Uzbekistan- "having signed the pact with Karimov, Russia automatically made a possible civil war in Uzbekistan its internal problem" (ibid).

Moreover, scholars have also raised doubt on the very need of an Alliance Treaty with Russia and saw it more as an effort by Karimov to save his regime from attacks than to protect the Republic. Uzbek scholar Tolipov (2006) called the alliance between Russia and Uzbekistan as an "alliance against a mythic threat". He further stated that- (ibid)

"from a strategic point of view, the purpose of the Alliance Treaty is dubious. There is no enemy and no threat to make such an alliance so urgent or expedient.--- Even the challenge of the so-called color revolution like that in Georgia, Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan does not yet pose a threat to the vital interests of the country, although it could pose a potential threat to the existing political regime. The recent color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, even if one agrees that they were inspired by the US, did not constitute a threat to vital interests of the respective states, nor were they an aggression by an enemy on their territory. There was no reason for the leaders of these countries, for the purposes of national security, to devise an alliance with Russia. On the other hand, traditional Russian friends in Central Asia including Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan did not go so far as to proclaim an alliance with Russia, although they appear to be de facto permanent Russian allies. ----- Uzbekistan's seeming defensive action against the alleged Western offensive is aimed not at the protection of the country but solely at the protection of the regime".

A new phase of bilateral ties started after 2005. In January 2006, Uzbekistan joined the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), a Russian led economic group in the region. Russia was one of the first countries to congratulate Karimov on his re-election in December 2007 (Saidazimova 2008). The 2007 Presidential election in Uzbekistan was criticized as President Karimov contested the election even though the Constitution prohibits a person from contesting the office of President for third term. Karimov visited
Russia in February 2008, his first foreign trip after assuming power. Both sides discussed bilateral issues and regional security (ibid). Both sides appreciated the growth of the bilateral ties. Putin said- (Mukhametshin 2008)

"Russia regards Uzbekistan as one of the most important strategic partners in Central Asia. We will continue our close cooperation on all essential international issues, including Afghanistan, our joint work within the framework of the regional integration institutions, such as CIS, Eurasian Economic Community, Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and other respected international organizations. As far as Russia is concerned, we are ready to make use of all the opportunities to enhance our multi-faceted cooperation for the benefit of Russia and Uzbekistan".

President Karimov expressed similar sentiment and remarked- (ibid)

"the objective and the main task of the current talks and the Uzbek delegation’s visit to Russia is, first and foremost, to take a critical look at what has been done in terms of cooperation and, most importantly, to set priorities of our activities in the short-and long-term. President Karimov stressed that “Uzbekistan considers Russia is not only as a reliable strategic partner, but an ally in accomplishing challenges the Republic is facing”.

However, it is not to suggest that Russia and Uzbekistan relationship are all well since 2005. Suspicion exists on both sides in spite of the bonhomie that was created after 2005. Yury Fedorov, a senior regional analyst at the London-based Chatham House is of the view that- (Saidazimova 2008)

"Moscow does not consider Karimov a trust-worthy partner. Relations between Russia and Uzbekistan are not sincere. Strategically, Moscow does not trust Karimov because of those foreign-policy zigzags Uzbekistan has made in the last decade. On the other hand, I think Tashkent sees Moscow as an unwanted partner it has to deal with in the absence of other allies”.

In the past few years, differences between the two sides have become evident, adding to the geo-political complexity in the region. One interesting development in the Republic is improving Uzbekistan-U.S. relations since 2008. Several high-ranking U.S. officials have visited Uzbekistan since 2008. Some incidents between Russia and Uzbekistan reflect the coldness in the bilateral relationship. No one from the Uzbekistan government was present at the inaugural ceremony of the three medical facilities at Tashkent on 12 May 2008, which was inaugurated by Yuri Shafranik, the board of chair of the Union of Russian Oil & Gas Producers who was accompanied by Russian Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Farid Mukhametshin (Eurasia Insight 2008). Soyuzneftegaz,
the Russian Company had provided $4 million to build these facilities (ibid). According to observer- “it is unlikely that the conspicuous absence of Uzbek officials occurred without a high-level order” (ibid). In the Annual SCO summit of 2008 in August, Russia failed to get the support of the CARs to accept South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent countries. Uzbekistan in November 2008 suspended its membership from the EEC. Moreover, earlier in the May 2008 SCO Defence Ministers meeting, Uzbekistan was the only Central Asian State to be represented by a Deputy Minister. Uzbekistan in 2008 renamed the Pushkin Street as Independence Street; the action on part of Uzbekistan is viewed as “symbolic actions with telling political implications” (ibid).

Moreover, Uzbekistan’s decision to accept NATO’s proposal to establish an inter-continental railway for Afghan stabilization programme without consulting Russia did not go well with the Russians (ibid). It was reported that “Uzbekistan’s participation in the project was deemed essential for it to be viable and Karimov was the only Central Asian President to make an announcement about the rail link apart from Russian leader Vladimir Putin at the NATO summit in April” (ibid). Russia is said to have reacted by temporarily banning Uzbek agricultural exports to Russia, which also includes cotton (ibid). Russia claimed that khapra beetles were found in agricultural imports from Uzbekistan, which may be true but Russia has often used such tactics for political purposes, which cannot be ruled out in case of Uzbekistan too (ibid).

Uzbekistan, after independence, wanted to reduce Russian influence in the Republic. The proximity with the U.S. enhanced its capability to move out of Russian orbit. However, sudden changes in the aftermath of the Andijan incident changed the power equation and Russia became one of Uzbekistan’s trusted allies. Recent incidents indicate that Uzbekistan’s relation with Russia today is not without hiccups, which has hindered the growth of a strong bilateral relation. Uzbekistan’s foreign policy orientations since independence indicate that Uzbekistan has shifted sides according to its interest; it has been playing one player against the other to get the maximum benefit. It has always skilfully utilised the U.S.-Russia competition in the region to its benefit.
UZBEKISTAN-CHINA TIES

China since 1991 has strengthened its position in the Central Asian region. Three of the five CARs share border with China. China has resolved all border disputes with the CARs after their independence. These border disputes were part of the Sino-Soviet border problems. China today, has emerged as a major player in the region, especially in the area of economic cooperation. Rich natural resources of the CARs are one of the prime driving forces behind Chinese interest in the region. The booming Chinese economy needs secure and reliable supply of oil and gas to sustain its economic growth. China’s interest in the region is mainly hydrocarbon but it is also engaging with the CARs for other mineral resources like uranium. China has made huge investments in building infrastructure in the region. Moreover, the access to the large Central Asian market makes the region further attractive to China.

The completion of the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline and the Central Asia-China gas pipeline has further strengthened Chinese position in the energy rich Central Asian region. The completion of these two pipelines was a challenge to the Russian interest in the region as oil and gas from the region so far had reached international markets through Russia. Russia so far had dominated the energy sector of the region as all pipelines connecting the region with international markets passed through Russia. None of the other west supported pipelines bypassing Russia have still become functional, except the Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline. Recently, however, Kazakhstan is also supplying oil to the BTC. For the CARs, these pipelines gave them an alternative pipeline system bypassing Russia and helping them to diversify their energy market.

Another major Chinese interest in the region is security. China does not want its Uighur population in the Xinjiang region, which shares border with the CARs, to get support from the Central Asian countries. The Uyghurs, the majority population of the Xinjiang region practice Islam and share Turkic culture, making them religiously and culturally closer to the CARs. Uyghurs are also available in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Among the several ethnic groups found in Xinjiang, the region is also home to Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz ethnic people. China through its diplomatic efforts has
been successful in preventing the CARs from providing support to the Uighur Movement in Xinjiang. The governments of the CARs have repeatedly said that they would not allow their territory to be used for the Uyghur movement.

China’s main interest in the region is primarily Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, both energy rich countries of the region. Uzbekistan though do not share border with China has drawn considerable Chinese attention for both strategic and economic reasons. The Republic is rich in hydrocarbon and other mineral resources too. However, in terms of oil and gas reserves, Uzbekistan’s reserves are moderate compared to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. There is sizeable number of Uighur population in Uzbekistan. Lack of official data makes it difficult to get the exact number of Uyghurs living in Uzbekistan. Some claim that at present there are about 200,000 Uyghurs living in Uzbekistan while others put the figure at around 500,000 (Tarimi 2004). However, in a statement at the OSCE Human Dimension Meeting in 2007, Dolkun Isa gave a far lower figure of Uyghur population in Uzbekistan, about 40,000 (Isa 2007).

Uzbekistan has strictly controlled any movement supporting the Uyghur cause in its territory- “fearing that Uzbekistan's Uighur movements, which support the Uighurs' struggle against the Chinese government, would negatively affect Sino-Uzbek relations, the Uzbek government has clamped down on the Uighur movements since independence” (Tarimi 2004). Since 1994 after Li Peng’s visit, Uzbekistan has repressed any Uyghur movement in the Republic (ibid). All Uyghur organizations speaking in favour of the Uyghur movement are banned and Uyghur press is also restricted in the Republic (Tarimi 2004). Unlike Uzbekistan, Uyghur in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can establish political organizations (ibid). In 2006, Uzbekistan arrested an ethnic Uyghur Huseyin Celil, who is a Canadian citizen on his visit to Uzbekistan and later on handed him over to China (Isa 2007). He was later imprisoned in China (ibid). Similar incident took place in 2007, another ethnic Uyghur temporarily staying in Uzbekistan; Rehmetjan Ehmet was arrested and sent to China (ibid).

Back in 2004, the Joint Statement signed between the two countries during Chinese President Hu Jintao’s visit to Uzbekistan also spoke on similar lines on Taiwan
issue. Uzbekistan supported one-China policy and accepted Taiwan as an inalienable part of China (Xinhua News Agency 2004). The Joint Statement of 2004 was major victory for China as the Uyghur movement received a set-back. In 2004, both countries agreed that the "crackdown on the terrorist force of 'Eastern Turkistan' is a major part of the international anti-terrorism campaign" (ibid). According to some analysts, the "new Sino-Uzbek cooperation against the Uighur movement for independence and democracy will cast a shadow over the future of Uighur people who have migrated to Uzbekistan China ensured that the Uighur movement does not get support from the CARs and such a statement serves Chinese interest" (Tarimi 2004).


There have been high-level visits on both sides. President Karimov visited China in 1992, 1994, 1999 and 2005. In 2001 and 2006, President Karimov paid a working visit to China to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Annual Summit. China was the first country that President Karimov visited after the Andijan incident in May 2005. Both sides however, claimed that the visit was planned much before the Andijan incident took place. In August 2008, President Karimov was in Beijing to attend the XXIX Olympic Games opening ceremony in China. Few other high level Uzbek government officials also visited China from time to time. In 1997, A. Kamilov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan and in 2002, B. Bugrov, the Vice President of Oily Majlis visited China.

The first visit by a Chinese Head of State to Uzbekistan was by then President Jiang Zemin in July 1996. In 1994, the State Council Prime Minister Lee Pen visited Uzbekistan. In 1995, the Deputy Chairman Hu Tszintao paid a visit to Uzbekistan. In

Economic engagement is the main focus of the Uzbekistan-China relationship. Trade between the two is flourishing. From 2003 till 2008, China has been in the top five lists of main export destinations for Uzbekistan. China, since 1992 has remained in the list of top ten export partners of Uzbekistan. From US$ 12.4 million in 1992 Uzbekistan’s export to China has increased to US$ 514.4 million in 2006. In 2007 and 2008 Uzbekistan’s export to China declined to US$ 330.3 million and US$ 331.7 million, respectively (Asian Development Bank 2009). Import from China has jumped from US$ 42.4 million in 1992 to US$ 446.7 million in 2006 and to US$ 1327.8 million in 2008 (ibid).

In 1999, the Uzbek-Chinese Inter-governmental Commission on Trade and Economic cooperation and Scientific and Technical cooperation was established. The seventh session of the Commission was held at Tashkent in 2006, where more than 200 representatives of Chinese companies took part in the business forum within the Intergovernmental Commission (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2010b).

China is also engaged in the Republic’s energy sector, which is still today a Russian stronghold. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China’s largest oil and gas producer is helping to explore and develop oil and gas fields in eastern and western Uzbekistan, including in the Aral Sea (Pannier 2010). The highlight of the Chinese Deputy Prime Minister Wu Yi’s visit in July 2005 was trade and economic interests between the two countries (McDermott 2005). The Joint Statement signed during President Hu Jintao’s 2004 visit to Uzbekistan indicated that the “trade and
Economic Cooperation Commission between the two governments, based on the principle of mutual benefit, should broaden their cooperation in energy, transportation, agriculture, irrigation, mechanical and electronic engineering, aviation, textile, science and technology, and information sectors” (Xinhua News Agency 2004). The Joint Statement signed during President Jintao’s 2004 visit stated that “enterprises of Uzbekistan are welcome to participate in the development of China’s western region, while Chinese enterprises are encouraged to bid for construction projects of infrastructure in Uzbekistan” (ibid). The Central Asia-China pipeline carrying 30 bcm of Turkmen gas annually for thirty years would pass through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and finally reach China (CNPC 2010). The route begins at Gedaim, which lies at the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan border cutting through central Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan reaching Horgos in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, from where it will be connected to the Second West-East Gas Pipeline (ibid). In July 2007, CNPC signed a production sharing agreement to explore and develop gas fields on the right bank of the Amu-Darya River with the Turkmen State Agency for the Management and Use of Hydrocarbon Resources and a natural gas purchase and sales agreement with Turkmengazi State Concern (ibid). The Chinese Company also signed two agreements on gas pipeline construction and operation with KazMunayGaz (Kazakhstan) and UzbekNefteGaz (Uzbekistan), respectively, under the framework agreements on pipeline construction and operation between the Chinese government and the government of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (ibid). According to the agreements, CNPC would invest in a cross-border gas pipeline in Central Asia, through which Turkmenistan would supply China with 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually for thirty years (ibid).

China has shown interest to invest in other areas in the Republic. There are plans to construct a China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail line till Andijan, near where the CNPC is developing Uzbek oil and gas fields (Pannier 2010). China’s XD Group is modernizing and reconstructing the electricity system for Tashkent (ibid). Central Asia also figures in China’s efforts to increase its civilian nuclear power potential. A subsidiary of the China’s Guangdong Nuclear Power Corporation and Uzbekistan is jointly trying for black-shale uranium in Navoi Province (ibid).
Economic cooperation in other areas is also getting stronger. The first session of Uzbek-Chinese Working Group on cotton trade took place in Beijing in April 2007 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2010b). The Second International Cotton Fair was held at Tashkent in October 2007, in which more than 100 Chinese representatives participated (ibid).

China too was concerned with increased U.S. presence in the region after September 11. China was uncomfortable with the U.S. military presence in the region (bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan), lying in its neighbourhood. However, the Taliban rule posed threat to China as the 'East Turkestan' movement is believed to have received assistance from Afghanistan. China saw the U.S. operation in Afghanistan as an opportunity to end the Taliban regime, for which China initially supported the U.S. military presence in the region. As time passed on, China became suspicious of the U.S. prolonged presence in the region. The closure of the K2 base thus came as relief to China.

Both China and Russia have been trying to keep the U.S. out of the region, one of the common interests that unite the two countries in the region. After the Andijan incident China got an opportunity to further strengthen its ties with Uzbekistan. Roger Mcdermott, an expert on the region wrote in 2005- (McDermott 2005)

"China, of course, seeks to minimize the growth of U.S. interests within the region, and the help afforded to Uzbekistan since Andijan has given Beijing an opening to remind Washington of China's long-term interests in Central Asia. The security implications are emerging slowly, but the SCO appears to be acting in greater harmony, with the apparent eventual aim of seeing an end to the U.S. military presence in Central Asia. For China, that presence is particularly intolerable. In this sense, Karimov's overtures will continue to arouse interest in Beijing and relations will likely become warmer still".

China-Uzbekistan relation got a boost after the Andijan incident in 2005. China like Russia remained silent on the way the Uzbek authorities handled the Andijan episode. After Andijan massacre, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kong Quan said "China firmly supports Uzbekistan's moves to crack down on the three forces and to maintain domestic and regional stability" (Jize 2005). China has also never raised issues like human rights and lack of political and economic reforms in the bilateral negotiations. Karimov's first foreign visit after the Andijan incident was China and during the visit
both sides signed the Treaty on Friendly and Cooperative Partnership. During Wu Yi’s visit in July 2005, Karimov appreciated the bilateral ties and called China as a “reliable friend and friendly neighbour” and that “the establishment of a friendly co-operative partnership marks bilateral relations’ moving towards a new high” (ibid). The new relationship after Andijan included “closer economic cooperation, political and military ties and promoting security interests through the SCO” (McDermott 2005). The geo-political significance of the new level of bilateral camaraderie was immense- “the timing of increased diplomatic traffic and deepening economic interests serve the geo-political interests of both states. Karimov is keen to avoid any appearance of weakness or isolation within Central Asia, keeping his relations with Moscow and Beijing as balance as possible” (ibid).

Both countries are also encouraging student exchanges and learning of Chinese language and culture programmes. In 2005, the Confucius Institute on learning Chinese language and culture was established at Tashkent, the agreement for which was signed during President Hu Jintao’s visit to Uzbekistan in June 2004 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan 2010b). The opening of the Uzbek Consulate office in Shanghai in 2006 reflects the growing proximity between the two countries.

During Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to Uzbekistan in April 2007, both sides signed a Joint Communiqué and agreed to “further enhance bilateral exchanges at various levels, including high-level visits, and deepen pragmatic cooperation in politics, economy, culture and security” (China View 2007). Uzbekistan supported one-China policy and China in return opposed any interference in the internal affairs of Uzbekistan in name of “human rights” (ibid). Both sides agreed to increase cooperation to tackle terrorism, separatism and extremism and to further promote cooperation in energy, transportation, tele-communications, agriculture, chemical industry, mining and infrastructure, and continue to explore new areas of cooperation (ibid).

China and Uzbekistan became closer after 2005. China through its economic diplomacy is able to strengthen its position in the Republic. Uzbekistan is trying to
balance the various players in the region according to its interest where China remains an influential player.

**UZBEKISTAN AND EUROPEAN UNION**

Three of the five CARs are rich in hydrocarbon reserves. Europe is dependent on Russia for its energy supply; Russia buys Central Asian gas at cheap rate and then resells them to Europe at much higher price. Europe’s desire to reduce its dependence on Russia for its energy needs makes the CARs attractive to Europe. Direct access to the region’s resources would help Europe to deal with its energy requirements. The European Union’s (EU) document on European Union and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership was formulated to enhance EU-Central Asia cooperation. The document outlines the importance of the region for Europe- (Council of the European Union General Secretariat 2007)

- “Strategic, political and economic developments as well as increasing trans-regional challenges in Central Asia impact directly or indirectly on EU interests;
- With EU enlargement, the inclusion of the Southern Caucasus into the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Black Sea Synergy Initiative, Central Asia and the EU are moving together;
- Significant energy resources in Central Asia and the region's aim to diversify trade partners and supply routes can help meet EU energy security and supply needs”.

Energy cooperation remains an important component of the relationship with CARS for Europe. In addition to oil and gas, Europe is also keen on developing cooperation on electricity and water management with the CARs. The 2007 document says- (ibid)

“The dependency of the EU on external energy sources and the need for a diversified energy supply policy in order to increase energy security open further perspectives for cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. EU efforts to strengthen local energy markets will help to improve investment conditions, increase energy production and efficiency in Central Asia and diversify energy supply and distribution in the region--------The EU and Central Asia share a paramount interest in enhancing Energy Security as an important aspect of global security. There is a common interest in diversifying export routes, demand and supply structures and energy sources. Besides oil, gas and electricity, water management is a decisive aspect of energy cooperation with Central Asia”.

299
The document also indicated the common challenges faced by Europe and Central Asia, which calls for greater cooperation between the two sides (ibid). The strategic location of the region adds to the significance of the region for Europe. The documents says- (ibid)

“Many challenges facing the globalised world affect Europe and Central Asia alike, and warrant a common response. Security questions and regional economic development require close cooperation of the EU with each Central Asian state, taking into account their geographical location, in particular with respect to Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. This applies i.e. to developments in the areas of border management, migration, the fight against organized crime and international terrorism, as well as human, drugs and arms trafficking.”

In order to promote cooperation with the countries of the Central Asian region, the EU 2007 Strategy for a New Partnership outlined- (ibid)

- “Establish a regular regional political dialogue at Foreign Minister level;
- Start an “European Education Initiative” and support Central Asian countries in the development of an “e-silk-highway”;
- Start an “EU Rule of Law Initiative”;
- Establish a regular, result-oriented “Human Rights Dialogue” with each of the Central Asian States;
- Conduct a regular energy dialogue with Central Asian States”.

The various mechanisms through which the EU is building its relationship with CARs are- the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, Commission and Member States Programmes, cooperation frameworks like the Baku Initiative and political dialogue, using the variety of CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) instruments (ibid). Another forum for discussion is the bilateral human rights dialogue (ibid). The EU would also work closely with other international and regional bodies engaged in the region like UN, ECE, OSCE, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe, NATO, International Financial Institutions, etc (ibid). The main EU objectives for cooperation with CARs are- (European Community 2007)

- To ensure the stability and the security of the countries of the region;
- To help eradicate poverty and increase living standards in the context of Millennium Development Goals;
- To facilitate/promote closer regional cooperation both within Central Asia and between Central Asia and the EU, particularly in the energy, transport, higher education and environmental sectors.
The Uzbekistan-EU relation, since independence, reflects the geo-political and geo-economic significance of the region. Over the years, EU and Uzbekistan ties have gradually developed. Uzbekistan has ratified the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with EU, an important mechanism facilitating closer EU-Central Asia cooperation. PCA with Uzbekistan came into force in July 1999. The European Union since 1991 has provided assistance to the CARs under various programmes like Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (Tacis), which later was renamed as European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), European Community Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), etc. From 1991-2006, the EU/EC assistance to the CARs were €228.85 million for Uzbekistan, €193.4 million for Kazakhstan, €282.25 million for Kyrgyzstan, €111.35 million for Turkmenistan and €499.75 million for Tajikistan (Regional Strategy Paper 2007). Under the Tacis programme, from 1991-2006, Uzbekistan received €168.95 million, while Kazakhstan got €168.5 million, €107.95 million for Kyrgyzstan, €64.35 million for Turkmenistan and €69.25 million for Tajikistan (ibid). In 1991, Uzbekistan received €2 million under EU’s Tacis programme, which increased to €29 million in 1998, the highest during the period 1991-2006 (ibid). The assistance amount went down gradually and in 2005 and 2006, Uzbekistan received €9.25 million and €8.5 million, respectively, under the Tacis programme (ibid).

In the last five years, EU’s relationship with Uzbekistan has witnessed several ups and downs. After the Andijan incident of May 2005, Uzbekistan’s relation with the European Union (EU) received a setback. The EU like the U.S. also demanded an independent enquiry of the Andijan massacre, which the Karimov government till date has refused. The EU in 2005 imposed visa restrictions on twelve Uzbek government officials who are believed to be involved in the massacre. Moreover, EU also imposed ban on arms sales to Uzbekistan. In November 2006, EU extended the ban on arms sale for one more year and the visa ban for another six months (Eurasia Insight 2006). However, these sanctions could not bring about any change in the Uzbek government’s attitude. Neither, did Karimov government allowed independent enquiry of the Andijan incident nor were there any meaningful improvement in the human rights situation in the
Republic. Andrea Schmitz¹, an expert on the region view that EU sanctions on Uzbekistan were “symbolic” and “did not hit the Uzbeks very hard” (Schmitz 2009). The arms embargo in reality was ineffective as “trade in military equipment or even ‘dual use’ technology has never played a significant role in the EU’s relations with Uzbekistan” and even the “suspension of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, had no immediate impact either, as it did not impede the implementation of projects already approved” (ibid). Only visa ban on the government officials responsible for the massacre was “more than just symbolical value” (ibid). Another expert, Michael Emerson², also expressed similar views, calling the sanctions as ‘symbolic, which only brought a few minor changes in Uzbekistan’ (Najibullah 2009). He said, “it does not seem to have had direct impact on human rights or political situation in Uzbekistan, except there have been a few superficial gestures in the direction that the European Union would like, like the introduction of habeas corpus” (ibid).

However, gradually differences with EU seem to be easing out. In October 2006, Pierre Morel, the EU’s special representative for Central Asia, visited Uzbekistan. The Council of the European Union’s External Relations 2009 meeting indicated that the “dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan have acquired a new scope and quality” (Council of the European Union 2009). The EU External Council Meeting of 2008 discontinued the travel restriction on the Uzbek officials said to be involved in the Andijan incident, the travel ban has been put on suspension since October 2007. In 2008, however, the Council renewed the arms embargo for another one year (Council of the European Union 2008). In 2009, the arms embargo was also lifted (Najibullah 2009). The EU in its 2009 External Relations Council meeting mentioned that the change in EU policy towards Uzbekistan was the result of some progress made in improving the human rights situation in the Republic like release of few human rights defenders, allowing the Red Cross to visit the Uzbek prisons, abolition of death penalty, measures to improve detention conditions, introduction of habeas corpus, ratification of conventions against child labour, steps taken for judicial reform, progress made in implementation of certain

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² He is a Senior Research Fellow with the Brussels-based think-tank Center for European Policy Studies.
OSCE commitments, active participation of Uzbekistan in the EU Law Initiative for Central Asia and the consolidation of human rights dialogue between the EU and Uzbekistan (Council of the European Union 2009). However, critics have called the abolition of the sanctions a wrong step as Uzbekistan’s human rights situation remains grim and till date Karimov did not allowed an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident.

Though EU relationship with Uzbekistan received a jolt after the Andijan incident but bilateral ties with Germany, an EU member, remained good. Germany was instrumental in improving EU-Uzbekistan relationship. Germany held the EU chair in 2007; the year saw the beginning of EU-Uzbekistan rapprochement since 2005. In spite of Uzbek deteriorating relation with the West, Uzbekistan allowed Germany to maintain its base at Termez in Uzbekistan to support NATO mission in Afghanistan because of its good relation with the Uzbek government. Even in 2005, when the visa ban was in operation, Germany allowed Zakirjon Almatov, the Uzbek interior minister, to visit Germany for medical treatment (Eurasia Insight 2006). Almatov was one of the officials whom EU has refused to issue visa after the Andijan incident. In October 2006, two German delegations visited Uzbekistan, first such visit from the EU member countries after the Andijan incident (ibid). In November 2006, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Foreign Minister visited Tashkent and during the visit he openly spoke in favour of lifting sanctions against Uzbekistan (ibid).

Post 2005, Russia and China emerged as strong ally of Uzbekistan and the Republic enhanced its ties with these two countries to counter the isolation, which the West imposed to force Karimov government to comply with their demands. However, Uzbekistan very cautiously used its strong relationship with Russia and China to strengthen its bargaining position with the west (Schmitz 2009). EU’s desire to enhance its relationship with the CARs is based on the greater geo-politics of the region. Uzbekistan is a key country in the region. For a successful EU energy policy for Central Asia, Uzbekistan will be one of the important countries. As pointed out by an expert- (Firdavsky 2006)
“the EU needs a diversified energy policy with many vectors in it. A key Central Asian country, Uzbekistan may become Europe’s principal partner in major transport projects. Every second resident of Central Asia lives in Uzbekistan. Any emergency like a toppled regime or uprising somewhere in the periphery, and Uzbekistan itself may foment some serious conflicts in the region—maintenance of stability in Central Asia is impossible without the so called Uzbek Factor taken into account. That’s what make Uzbekistan an inevitable partner in establishment of energy contacts with Central Asia and promotion of regional security”.

In order to cater to its long term energy needs, though EU continued with the sanctions against Uzbekistan in 2006, EU officials showed their eagerness to work with Tashkent “on promoting regional calm” (Eurasia Insight 2006). Moreover, as the situation in Afghanistan remains precarious, the “trade-off with regard to human rights will persist, making the defence of European norms and values vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes a major challenge in the years to come” (Schmitz 2009). The developments in the last few years reflect the importance of the Republic and in spite of sanction, the Karimov government was successful in bargaining its position without succumbing to EU demands. Only token steps were taken to show the international community that the Republic is trying to improve its human rights situation. EU’s own concerns forced it to soften its stand on Uzbekistan, nevertheless a victory for Uzbekistan.

**UZBEKISTAN AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Uzbekistan’s relation with various regional bodies reflects the geo-political complexities. Various players are jockeying for influence in the region. Uzbekistan too has used its association with these organizations to strengthen its bargaining position while dealing with various players engaged in the region. Uzbekistan has on and off moved out of some these regional bodies to serve its interests. Among the various regional organizations, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are gradually emerging as influential groups in the region. Uzbekistan’s relation with these two groups is interesting to understand the dynamics of great power play in the region.
Collective Security Treaty Organization and Uzbekistan

The CSTO is a Russian-led security and military group in the region. The group came into existence in 1992 with the signing of the Collective Security Treaty at Tashkent, which entered into force in 1994. Along with Uzbekistan, the other founding members were Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Later on Belarus, Georgia and Azerbaijan joined the Treaty. However, Azerbaijan and Georgia joined the group in 1994 but later on withdrew from the group in 1999. In 2002, the CIS Collective Security Treaty was renamed as the Collective Security Treaty Organization. At present, the members of the CSTO are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (rejoined in 2006). According to Article 3 (Chapter II) of the CSTO Charter—"the purposes of the Organization are to strengthen peace and international and regional security and stability and to ensure the collective defence of the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member States, in the attainment of which the member States shall give priority to political measures". Chapter III of the Charter outlines the areas of activities of the Organization. According to Article 7- (CSTO 2002)

"in order to attain the purposes of the Organization, the member States shall take joint measures to organize within its framework an effective collective security system, to establish coalition (regional) groupings of forces and the corresponding administrative bodies and create a military infrastructure, to train military staff and specialists for the armed forces and to furnish the latter with the necessary arms and military technology. The member States shall adopt a decision on the stationing of groupings of forces in their territories and of military facilities of States which are not members of the Organization after holding urgent consultations (reaching agreement) with the other member State”.

Further Article 8 mentions others areas of cooperation among the member countries- (ibid)

"The member States shall coordinate and harmonize their efforts in combating international terrorism and extremism, the illicit traffic in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and arms, organized transnational crime, illegal migration and other threats to the security of the member States”.

For Russia, the CSTO is a tool to strengthen its influence in the region—

"through the CSTO, Moscow thus aspires to weaken America’s military partnerships in the region, and hopes to become the indispensable intermediary of military relations between the West and the Central Asian regimes. The Kremlin aims in effect for the CSTO to be on a par with NATO, so that it can speak to the
latter as an equal and oblige the Central Asian regimes to go through Moscow before engaging in any common military initiatives with the West” (Laruelle 2008).

Uzbekistan was one of the founding members of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (also known as Tashkent Treaty), which was signed at Tashkent in 1992. However, Uzbekistan walked out of the group in 1999. Uzbekistan was critical of the failure of the CST to provide assistance to the Republic during IMU incursion into Kyrgyzstan (ibid). The same year Uzbekistan joined the West supported GUUAM, however, suspending its membership from GUUAM in 2002. Uzbekistan’s tilt towards Russia post Andijan was visible also in Uzbekistan’s decision to rejoin CSTO in 2006. In the June 2005, CSTO meeting at Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister, Defence Minister, Russian Security Council Secretary and CSTO Secretary General called the Andijan incident “as an assault by international terrorism and radical Islam against Uzbekistan” (Socor 2005). CSTO’ position on the incident was appreciated by Uzbekistan, which was cornered by the west after the Andijan massacre.

Uzbekistan’s relation with CSTO is again showing signs of cracks in recent times. The Republic has raised question on the establishment of the CSTO Rapid Reaction Force. Uzbekistan did not participate in the CSTO Foreign Ministers meeting at Yerevan (Armenia) in April 2009. In the June 2009 CSTO summit meeting, Uzbekistan raised “multiple objections and reservation” on enlarging the CSTO’s collective forces, the scope of their missions, and the legal authority for their operations (Socor 2009). Uzbekistan is worried about Russian military presence in the region. Uzbekistan has raised objection on six issues- (ibid)

“a) Uzbekistan to decide on its own whether to participate in CSTO military operations and other activities, on a case-by-case basis;
 b) Collective forces' entry on the territory of a member country to be authorized only if the move does not contradict that country's constitution and legislation
 c) CSTO decisions on force deployment in any theater to be made by consensus, not by a majority of the member countries' votes;
 d) Collective forces are not to be deployed in conflict situations occurring between CSTO member countries;
 e) The agreement on creating collective forces to require parliamentary ratification by all member countries, and only then to take legal effect;
 f) Tashkent also registers objections, not specified publicly, to Moscow-proposed command arrangements for the collective forces".
Now, there are speculations that Uzbekistan might withdraw from the CSTO membership, though Secretary General of CSTO has ruled out any such possibilities. However, Karimov’s actions in the past do suggest that if need be Uzbekistan would again walk out of the Organization. Moreover, Uzbekistan has opposed Russia’s second base at Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, which would function under CSTO. The new base is to be located in the Ferghana valley bordering Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China. Uzbekistan is uncomfortable with the presence of CSTO troops at its border. Moreover, Uzbekistan is unhappy that though the base would be close to Uzbek border yet Russia did not consult Uzbekistan on the issue (McDermott 2009). Uzbekistan stated that “the implementation of such projects in this rather complex and difficult-to-predict territory, where the borders of three Central Asian republics directly meet, may render an impetus for strengthening the processes in terms of militarization and arousing various nationalistic confrontations, as well as the actions of radical extremist forces that could lead to a serious destabilization of the situation in the greater region” (ibid).

**Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Uzbekistan**

The SCO was born as Shanghai Five in 1996 with Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as members. It became Shanghai Cooperation Organization with Uzbekistan joining it in 2001. Diversifying the membership, Mongolia was inducted as an observer in 2004 while India, Pakistan and Iran became observers in 2005. Recently Belarus and Sri Lanka are included as dialogue partners in the SCO. The main purposes of the SCO are- (Official Website of SCO Summit 2008)

“strengthening mutual trust and good-neighborliness and friendship among member states; developing effective cooperation in political affairs, economy, trade, science and technology, culture, education, energy, transportation, environmental protection and other fields; working together to maintain regional peace, security and stability; and promoting the creation of a new international political and economic order featuring democracy, justice and rationality”.

The Organization since its inception in 1996 has come a long way and today deals with various issues concerning the region. In the beginning, the Organization was mainly engaged in de-militarizing and resolving the border issues among the member states (Laruelle 2008). In the 2001 summit, SCO adopted the Convention on combating
terrorism, separatism and extremism (Official Website of SCO Summit 2008). From 2002 onwards, SCO has been working against terrorism, Islamism and separatism, which addresses the concerns of all the members- “Russia’s concerns about Chechnya, China’s about Xinjiang, and those of the Central Asian states about the Islamist movements” (Laruelle 2008). A Regional Counter Terrorism Structure (RCTS) was opened at Tashkent in Uzbekistan in 2004. Experts see the choice of establishing RCTS office at Tashkent as “a logical recognition of the active role of Uzbekistan in this sphere, increasing the country’s status in the SCO” (Alimov 2005: 336). It was a step to strengthen Uzbekistan “more firmly within the Organization” (ibid). Uzbekistan’s membership in the Organization is vital as the country has the highest population in the region, strategically located and rich in natural resources. Among the five CARs, Turkmenistan, an energy rich country (especially gas reserves) of the region has remained out of the group.

Though Russia and China are both competing for Central Asian resources, the SCO has provided a common platform for the two countries to cooperate on issues of common interest in the region. One such common area of cooperation is to keep the U.S. at bay in the region. Some scholars see the Russian and Chinese understanding in the region through the SCO as a result of “number of geo-political and economic realities, but also on many unspoken truths” (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2009: 13-14).

“For now Beijing seeks to maintain Russian rule in the region. It needs the support of Moscow to reduce Western influence in Central Asia, but also to curb growing competition with Washington. Beijing has quietly maintained Russia’s anti-Americanism, effectively killing two birds with one stone. The United States withdrew from Central Asia, but Washington blamed Moscow rather than the Chinese authorities. The international agreement between Russia and China is based on negative principle-rejection of a unipolar world under U.S. domination-not a substantive agreement. The historical conflicts between Russia and the Middle Kingdom have not disappeared”.

With Russia and China as members, the West, particularly the U.S. will continue to be sceptical about SCO. Both Russia and China gradually became uneasy with the continued military presence in the region, which were stationed in the region in 2001 with the onset of the ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan. By 2005, Russian and Chinese dis-comfort with the U.S. military presence became evident. The Astana summit of the
SCO in 2005 reflected the dis-satisfaction of the two big players of the SCO with the prolonged U.S. military presence in the region. The SCO members in the Astana Summit asked for a deadline for the U.S. military presence in the region after the U.S. claimed victory in Afghanistan. The U.S. after September 11 claimed that the U.S. military presence in the region is temporary and would leave the region after the Afghan operation is over. President Bush in 2004 said that the “coalition forces, including many brave Afghans, have brought America, Afghanistan and the world its first victory in the war on terror.---- Afghanistan is no longer a terrorist factory sending thousands of killers into the world” (CNN.com 2004). The Astana Declaration (2005) stated that-

“We are supporting and shall continue to support the efforts by the international coalition, conducting antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan. Today we are noticing the positive dynamics of stabilising internal political situation in Afghanistan. A number of the SCO member states provided their ground infrastructure for temporary stationing of military contingents of some states, members of the coalition, as well as their territory and air space for military transit in the interest of the antiterrorist operation. Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation consider it necessary, that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states”.

In 2010, Uzbekistan is holding the chairmanship of the Organization. For Uzbekistan the key role of the Organization is to maintain security in the region and “to create conditions for the stable development of Central Asian countries” (Alimov 2005: 343). The primary focus of the SCO should be security and economy and Uzbekistan “unequivocally supports the uncompromising struggle against international terrorism, extremism, separatism and drug trafficking proclaimed as the SCO priority” (ibid). Uzbekistan does not see the SCO as a “military-political block and is open for dialogue with all countries and other international organizations” (ibid: 342). In his 2009 SCO summit speech, President Karimov said, “with each year, the role and significance of the SCO were seeing their rise in resolving the problems of regional and global security, counteracting the international terrorism, separatism and extremism, drug trafficking and other challenges and threats to security in the strategically important region of Central Asia” (Consulate General of Uzbekistan in New York City 2009). President Karimov emphasised that Afghanistan remain a major threat to the security of the region (ibid).
Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) and Uzbekistan

Another important regional group is the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc). It is a Russia led economic group in the region established in 2000. The founding members were Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The creation of the EurAsEc was the brainchild of Kazak President Nursultan Nazarbayev (Blagov 2008). Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine have observer status (Weitz 2006). It replaced the Customs Union started by these countries in 1995. The primary objectives of the Organization are- (EAEC 2009)

“The purpose of formation of the EAEC is for the Contracting Parties to effectively promote the process of formation of the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space, and to implement other objectives and tasks outlined in the above-mentioned agreements on the Customs Union [Customs Union Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus dated 6 January 1995, the Agreement on the Customs Union dated 20 January 1995, the Agreement on Deepening Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Spheres dated 29 March 1996, and the Agreement on the Customs Union and Single Economic Space dated 26 February 1999], the Agreement on Deepening Integration in Economic and Humanitarian Spheres, and the Agreement on the Customs Union and Single Economic Space, in stages as scheduled under the above documents”.

The Organization of Central Asian Cooperation (OCAC) established in 1994, revamped in 2001 was merged with the EurAsEc in 2005. The OCAC included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Russia joined the Organization in 2004. According to some scholars, “Russia’s hope in joining was to have the two economic institutions dissolve into one and thereby to bring the reluctant Uzbek pupil back into its fold, as it was a member of the OCAC but not of the EurAsEc. The gamble paid off with the OCAC’s announcement in October 2005 that it would dissolve into the Eurasian Economic Community” (Laruelle 2008).

In January 2006, Uzbekistan joined the Organization. After breaking off its ties with the West after 2005, Uzbekistan moved closer to Russia. It rejoined CSTO in 2006, also joined the EurAsEc in the same year, both Russia led Organization-. The CSTO looks after the security aspect and the EurAsEc deals with economic issues. Uzbekistan joining the EurAsEc was a gain for Russia as reflected in the statement below- (ibid)
“Uzbekistan’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Community was therefore perceived as a great victory for Moscow, particularly as its strategies in Central Asia made dealing with the most populous state in the region unavoidable. Henceforth, the four countries of Central Asia (Turkmenistan having chosen isolation) now constitute an economic space that is in part unified with Russia and Belarus”.

However, Uzbekistan’s bonhomie with the EurAsEc was short-lived. In January 2008, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed nine trade agreements, which included export customs duties, unified customs and tariff regulations, unified rules to determine the countries of origin of goods, unified measures of non-tariff regulation, anti-dumping and protective measures, determination of customs values, customs statistics, technical and sanitary controls, and taxation of imports and exports (Blagov 2008). Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan refused to sign the agreements (ibid). In June 2008, President Karimov at the informal CIS summit at St. Petersburg floated the idea of merging CSTO and EurAsEc as according to him the “two organizations duplicated each other” and the merger would act as a “counterweight to NATO” in the region, which however, was not supported by the member countries (Tolipov 2008). Putin also pointing at the “functional nexus” between CSTO and EurAsEc, said, “you cannot advance the economy without having ensured security first” (Weitz 2006). However, merging the two organizations has its own problems as the internal structures of both the organizations are still developing (ibid). Tolipov (2008), on the other hand argued that the functioning of the two organizations do not overlap as both are “different in mission and composition”. Russia sees the merger as a means to counterweight SCO’s growing role in the region, in which China plays a “preeminent role” (Weitz 2006).

In October 2008, Uzbekistan suspended its membership from the Organization. Some analysts see this move by Uzbekistan as a response to its improving relationship with the west (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty 2008). According to reports, “Uzbekistan wants to strike more balance by maintaining pragmatic relations with Russia while seeking better ties with the West to promote much-needed foreign investment to spur its stagnant economy” (ibid). On the other hand, Uzbekistan claimed that the EurAsEc duplicates other organizations such like CIS and CSTO (Ozod 2008). Another reason for the Uzbek action was that the “automatic joining of all EurAsEc member-
states to the Customs Union" (ibid). President Karimov was reported to have said- “It is considered that member-states will join to the previous legal base of the Union without any reservations and remarks, i.e., without further discussions and consideration of each member-state’s vital interests. It is clear that such an arrangement of an issue is unacceptable” (ibid).

Uzbekistan has been part of other groups in the region. Uzbekistan was an active participant of the NATO PfP programme until 2005. Uzbekistan joined the NATO’s PfP programme in 19953. Uzbekistan joined GUAM, anti-Russian group in the region, making it GUUAM in 1999 only to leave it in 2002. Uzbekistan refused to join the Central Asian Union, which was initiated by Kazakhstan.

**CONCLUSION**

The CARs have attracted international attention ever since their independence in 1991, which in turn has increased competition among the various players, engaged in the region, especially among China, Russia and the United States. Uzbekistan since independence also witnessed geo-political competition among various players. With the onset of the ‘war against terror’ in Afghanistan, the Republic’s importance increased, bringing it close to the U.S. Uzbekistan’s proximity with the U.S. was a matter of concern for Russia and China, both influential players in the region. Both China and Russia became uncomfortable with the U.S. military presence in the region after September 11. After Andijan incident, the geo-political scenario in the Republic underwent a dramatic change. Uzbekistan broke off its ties with the West and moved closer to Russia and China.

Competition among Russia, China, the U.S. and EU is visible in Uzbekistan, an important country of the region. However, it is not to suggest that Uzbekistan has been a silent spectator in this great power play. Unlike the nineteenth century “great game”, the CARs today are active participants in the developments taking place in the region. Uzbekistan like the other CARS is utilizing the geo-political rivalry among the various players to bargain the best deal for itself. It has often played one country against the other

3 Details in Chapter 5
to get the maximum benefit. Post-independence, Uzbekistan in its efforts to reduce
dependence on Russia was looking for closer cooperation with the west. Post September
11 gave an opportunity to Uzbekistan to develop stronger relation with the U.S. China
has also emerged as a major player in the Republic especially in the economic front. With
the Uzbekistan-U.S. relation shaken, Russia and China became main partners of
Uzbekistan. Though Russia and China became the main players in the region after
Andijan incident, their relationship with Uzbekistan has not been always smooth.

In the last few years, there are signs of rapprochement with the U.S. and the West,
again bringing about a change in the geo-political milieu. Though in recent times,
Uzbekistan’s relation with the U.S. and the EU are improving, it is interesting to note that
Uzbekistan did not introduce any of the demands put forward by the west. President
Karimov till date has not allowed an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident as
demanded by the West. Few token steps were taken like introduction of habeas corpus,
abolition of death penalty, resuming Red Cross access to prisoners but nothing concrete
have still taken shape in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan still lags behind in genuine political and
economic reforms. In spite of these obstacles, which were the main irritants in developing
closer cooperation with the West, Uzbekistan and the West are looking ahead for
cooperation, indicating the significance of the Republic.

Uzbekistan’s membership with various regional groups also reflects the
geo-political competition among the various players. CSTO and EurAsEc are Russia led
security and economic groups respectively in the region. The two big players in the SCO
are Russia and China. NATO plays an active role in the region through the PfP
programme. Russia is concerned with NATO’s presence in the region. Some observers
see the SCO as a counterweight to NATO in the region. Russia would not prefer SCO to
develop as an economic group, which would give an upper hand to China in the region.
GUUAM, a west supported organization was established to counter Russian influence in
the region. Uzbekistan has often used the membership with these groups to manoeuvre its
own political agenda, adding to the geo-political competition in the region.
However, Uzbekistan’s constant shift in foreign policy has its share of disadvantages. It portrays a negative image of Uzbekistan. Tolipov (2005) argued that—

"strategic confusion in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy in fact leads to strategic failure because Uzbekistan consciously or unconsciously plays into the hands of geo-political currents, or itself plays off inadequate old-fashioned zero-sum-game geo-politics. Uzbekistan will not overcome the difficulties and challenges of independence if it will regards the states of the geo-political triangle— the U.S., Russia and China—as permanent rivals and worse, regard itself as the victim of geopolitical rivalry, instead of taking all measures toward inviting all sides of the triangle to constructive cooperation in Central Asia”.

With regard to Uzbek foreign policy, national interest will remain the driving force, encouraging Uzbekistan to keep all options open. Though Russia and China have strengthened their influences in the Republic after 2005, Karimov has not completely set aside the possibility of renewing its ties with the western countries. Recent developments point at renewed interest to mend ties with the West. ‘Multi vectored’ foreign policy of Uzbekistan is likely to continue and who gets the best share depend on these players ability to negotiate. In the days to come, competition among the external players is not going to reduce and surely Uzbekistan will try to make best use of the situation. However, it has to keep the balance while dealing with the various players.