Chapter-VIII

CONCLUSION
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The United States like most other external players got directly involved in Central Asia after 1991. The Freedom Support Act of 1992 guided the U.S. policy towards the region in the years following independence. However, a full-fledged U.S. strategy focussing Central Asia was formulated under the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999. The U.S. objectives in the Central Asian Republic (CARs) in the years following their independence as pointed out by the former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott were-promotion of democracy, creation of free market economies, sponsorship of peace and cooperation within and among the countries of the region and their integration with the larger international community. Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former Assistant to the U.S. President for National Security Affairs have stated that the U.S. needs to establish contacts with geo-strategically important countries of the Eurasian region and formulate a comprehensive geo-strategy for the region in order to preserve the U.S. interests in this strategic region.

Immediately after the independence of the CARs, the U.S. was more interested in Kazakhstan because of its rich hydrocarbon reserves and for its stock of nuclear weapons and materials. Uzbekistan did not figure then as an important country in the U.S. policy making circles. Post 9/11, anti-terrorism campaign emerged as one of the main agendas of the U.S. policy in the region. With the beginning of the ‘war on terror’, the CARs because of their proximity to Afghanistan became crucial actors in the U.S. led operation in Afghanistan.

Uzbekistan’s willingness to cooperate with the U.S. in its war efforts in Afghanistan made it a key ally of the U.S. in the region. Uzbekistan is one of the three CARs (other two being Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) sharing borders with Afghanistan. The opening of the U.S. base at Karshi-Khanabad in 2001 and the signing of the Strategic Partnership in 2002 strengthened Uzbekistan-U.S. relationship. The opening of the Friendship Bridge connecting Uzbekistan and Afghanistan facilitated the U.S. led coalition mission in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan also provided better connectivity between Uzbekistan and Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, which otherwise is difficult to access, especially in winter months.
The dynamics of Uzbekistan–U.S. relations has passed through various phases in the bilateral relations. It was only after 9/11 that U.S. interest in Uzbekistan increased. Nevertheless, both sides maintained contacts with each other. Since independence, Uzbekistan and the United States have been exchanging several high level diplomatic visits. The visits that took place before 9/11 led Uzbekistan to become a pivotal state in the U.S. campaign against terror. Post 9/11, with the strengthening of the bilateral ties, diplomatic exchanges between the two sides also increased significantly. The first visit from the U.S. side was by the then Secretary of State James A. Baker III in February 1992. Two U.S. Secretaries of State have so far visited the Republic, James A. Baker in 1992 and Madeleine Albright in 2000. Since 1997, visits from the U.S. side became more or less a regular affair. In 1997, the number of visits from the U.S. side was six, followed by five in 1998, seven in 1999, six in 2000 and twelve in 2001. However, the year 2002 with twenty five visits recorded the largest number of visits from the U.S. to Uzbekistan. In 2003 and 2004, there were eleven and twelve visits, respectively. Bilateral visits received a set back since 2005. In 2005, there were only two visits from the U.S. followed by one in both 2006 and 2007. Since 2008, diplomatic exchanges have revived. There were six visits from the U.S. side in 2008 and seven in 2009.

Though there have been several visits from various U.S. Departments to Uzbekistan, surprisingly till date no U.S. President has ever visited Uzbekistan. Also no U.S. President has ever visited any of the CARs till date. Even at the peak of the Uzbekistan-U.S. relationship after 9/11, there was no Head of State visit from the U.S. President Karimov’s first and till date the only official State visit to the U.S. was in March 2002. President Karimov had earlier visited the U.S. in 1993 and 1995; both these visits were to attend the UN General Assembly Sessions. In 1996, Karimov went to the U.S. for a private trip. Again in 1999 and 2000, President Karimov visited the U.S. to participate in the 50th anniversary of NATO and the UN Millennium Summit, respectively.

On the other hand, there have been several visits by Russian Presidents to Uzbekistan and vice - versa. President Boris Yeltsin visited Uzbekistan in October 1998. Vladimir Putin visited Uzbekistan in May 2000, followed by his visit in August 2003. Putin after his re-election as President for the second time in 2004 visited

There have been Heads of State visits between Uzbekistan and China too. Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Uzbekistan in July 1996. President Hu Jintao visited Uzbekistan in June 2004. China was the first country, which President Karimov visited after the Andijan incident. Both sides however, have claimed that the visit was planned long before the Andijan incident took place. President Karimov’s earlier visits to China were in 1992, 1994 and 1999.

Economic cooperation is an important facet of the bilateral Uzbek-U.S. relationship. Uzbekistan-U.S. economic cooperation at present is not so impressive. Very few U.S. companies are engaged in Uzbekistan as the U.S. economic interest in the Republic seems to be less. Few actions taken by the Uzbek Government like the closing of the Uzbekistan-Newmont Joint Venture for gold mining affected the bilateral economic ties. Several other joint ventures with the U.S. companies and other countries met with similar fate, sending wrong signals to foreign investors, especially the investors from West. Moreover, the Andijan incident and closure of the U.S. base at K2 put a spanner in the economic cooperation.

Notwithstanding the U.S. being among the top ten trading partners of Uzbekistan, its trade with the U.S. did not increase substantially in the last eight years. The trade between the two countries from 2001-2008 was US$ 214 million, US$ 225.9 million, US$ 362 million, US$ 334.7 million, US$ 169.5 million, US$ 198 million, US$ 248.1 million and US$ 596.8 million, respectively. The U.S. engagement in the Republic’s energy sector is negligible. Uzbekistan like the other CARs has been receiving U.S. assistance since its independence. The U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan jumped up from mere US$ 14 million in 1995 to US$ 297.84 million in 2002. In 2001, the U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan was US$ 84.66 million, which increased nearly four times in 2002 (US$ 297 million). With the deterioration in bilateral relationship, the U.S. assistance to the Republic has also dropped. From
US$ 101.88 million in 2004, the assistance was reduced to US$ 92.57 million in 2005 and US$ 49.41 million in 2006. The Uzbek government has also restricted the areas where the two can cooperate, further putting conditions to the U.S. assistance programmes in the Republic.

Russia and China are two important economic players in Uzbekistan. Russia with its past historical association, especially because of Soviet pipelines, has stronger economic presence in the region. However, with Uzbekistan’s independence Russia-Uzbekistan economic cooperation suffered set back. Among the CIS countries, Uzbekistan’s trade with Russia accounted for 53.1 percent of exports and 52.9 percent of imports in 1992, which dropped to 38.6 percent and 36.3 percent, respectively in 1995. Uzbekistan after independence encouraged trade and economic cooperation with western countries like U.S., Germany, Japan, France, Italy, etc. But as time passed on, Russia started regaining its position. With Putin coming to power, Russia began reasserting its influence in the region. Today, despite hiccups in the bilateral relationships, the economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Russia has remained strong, making Russia an important player in Uzbekistan.

In the total trade basket of Uzbekistan, the maximum share of trade is with Russia. In the past eight years, trade with Russia has increased manifold, increasing from US$ 927 million in 2001 to US$ 2119.0 million in 2006, US$ 3232.7 million in 2007 and to US$ 3679.5 million in 2008. In terms of trade turnover, Uzbekistan is the fourth largest trade partner of Russia in the CIS, accounting for 2.7 percent of trade with the CIS countries. In the Eurasian Economic Community, Uzbekistan ranks third as a trade partner of Russia in terms of volume of trade. During Prime Minister Putin’s visit to Uzbekistan in September 2008, bilateral economic ties were further strengthened.

The energy sector of Uzbekistan is still dominated by Russia and will remain so in the near future. The soviet pipeline system passing through Russia, which connects Uzbekistan to international markets is one of the primary reasons that have helped to strengthen Russia’s position in the energy sector of the Republic. Gazprom with major stake in Uzbekistan’s energy sector, both in extraction and transportation is the main actor in the gas sector of the Republic.
China has also emerged as one of the leading economic partners of Uzbekistan. China's trade with Uzbekistan has significantly increased from US$ 62.7 million in 2001 to US$ 554.2 million in 2004, US$ 663.2 million in 2005, US$ 988.1 million in 2006, US$ 1172.9 million in 2007 and to US$ 1659.5 million in 2008. Uzbekistan and China have also agreed to build a gas pipeline connecting the two countries, giving Uzbekistan an alternative option to reach international market. Moreover, Uzbekistan is a major transit country for the Central Asia-China pipeline.

As evident from the developments in the past few years, Uzbekistan no longer wants to rely on few countries for economic cooperation. It wants to diversify its foreign markets mainly for natural gas and cotton, two important export commodities of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan and South Korea in 2008 inked a deal to cooperate in natural gas sector, first ever such deal with South Korea. Both sides agreed to develop the Surgil gas field in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan also allowed South Korea’s Daewoo International Corp. to conduct geological survey of the Koskudyk and Ashibulak fields in Ustyurt plateau, which has also been surveyed by Russia and China. Moreover, it was agreed that Daewoo would gain major stake in Bukharatex cotton mill, the largest cotton mill in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan is also enhancing its economic ties cooperating with UAE. Gulf States have attracted considerable Uzbek attention in diversification mission. Other countries with whom Uzbekistan has shown interest to increase economic cooperation are Indonesia and Malaysia. Indonesia and Uzbekistan have agreed to cooperate in areas like raw cotton and textiles. In May 2008, Uzbekneftegaz and Petronas (Malaysia) signed a Production Sharing Agreement for three gas fields in Ustyurt Plateau (Urga, Kuanynsh and Akhchalak).

Various countries are jockeying for influence in the region and the government of Uzbekistan is also practicing a ‘multi-vectored’ policy, keeping all its options open. Greater economic presence of Russia and China has geo-political ramifications for the U.S. in the region, which it cannot ignore for its long-term interests in the Republic as well as in the region. Economic engagement is an important means to increase one’s position in the region. For example, China’s position in Uzbekistan as well as in the region has been strengthened primarily because of its robust economic engagement. Though the U.S. is active in countries
like Kazakhstan, its economic engagement with Uzbekistan in recent times remains far from satisfactory. Improvement of economic ties is essential for a stronger Uzbekistan-U.S. relations but it would not be an easy task in the present level of mistrust that exists between the two countries.

Another important dimension of the bilateral relation is security cooperation. The hallmark of the Uzbekistan-U.S. relations since 2001 has been security cooperation between the two countries. Before 9/11, security cooperation was on a smaller scale mainly revolving on destruction of Soviet period WMD materiel, training of defence personnel and cooperation within the NATO's PfP programme. Uzbekistan has been actively participating in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programmes since it joined the Programme in 1994. With Uzbekistan extending support to the U.S. for its war efforts in Afghanistan, the bilateral security relation reached its peak. Though, the Strategic Partnership Agreement dealt with cooperation on various issues, it did not refer to any long-term security commitments from the U.S. side.

Uzbekistan received the maximum share of the U.S. security assistance earmarked for the region. As part of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) assistance, Uzbekistan’s share increased from US$ 2.45 million in 2001 to US$ 36 million in 2002. Among the five republics, Uzbekistan was allocated the highest amount under the IMET funds too. In 2002, Uzbekistan received US$1 million under the IMET programme, highest in the region.

After September 11, the U.S. assistance to Uzbekistan was stepped up in spite of its poor human rights records and lack of progress in political and economic reforms. Before September 11 incident took place, these were major glitches in developing closer bilateral ties with Uzbekistan. However, after Uzbekistan agreed to cooperate with the U.S. in its war efforts in Afghanistan these issues were sidelined. The U.S. was, nevertheless criticised for not making human rights and reform issues a condition for U.S. assistance after September 11. At this time, for the U.S., security needs overruled other issues. However, since 2004, the U.S. Government became critical of continued lack of progress in human rights situation, democratization and economic reforms in the Republic, which was reflected in the reduction of assistance amount to Uzbekistan. FMF funds were stopped for Uzbekistan since 2004 as the
Secretary of State did not certify Uzbekistan to be eligible for the assistance. Citing the same reason, the IMET funds were also stopped since 2005. The final blow in the bilateral relation came with the Andijan incident and with the thaw in the bilateral ties; assistance in other programmes was also cut down.

Ever since independence, President Karimov has been seeking to keep Russia at a distance and the proximity with the U.S. after September 11 gave it the desired opportunity. The ‘war against terror’ also helped Uzbekistan to destroy IMU forces, a constant threat to the Karimov regime and to the peace and stability of the region. The opening of the U.S. military base in the region also intensified the regional geo-political competition. Despite U.S. assurances that it has no interest in maintaining long-term military presence in the region, Russia remained sceptic of the U.S. military presence in the region. After initial reluctance, Russia eventually agreed for the bases as being essential for the Afghan mission; stability and end of Taliban rule was in Russian interest too. However, Russia remained uncomfortable with the U.S. bases in its backyard. Russia responded by opening its own base at Kant in Kyrgyzstan in 2003.

Uzbekistan still lags behind in implementing substantial democratic reforms and in improving the country’s human rights records. Both Presidential and Parliamentary elections lacked genuine opposition candidates. In 1992 Presidential election, Mohammad Sohli, leader of Erk party was allowed to contest against Karimov, which was the only time till date that real opposition candidate contested the election. However, there were reports of government bias in favour of Karimov in the 1992 election too. In the Presidential election of 2000 and 2007, the opposition candidates were mere eyewash as they themselves supported President Karimov. In 1995, President Karimov through a national referendum extended the term of the office of the President until 2000, which was supposed to end in December 1996. Another referendum in 2002 extended the term of the office of the President from five to seven years. Both the referendums have been criticized by western observers. Moreover, Karimov contesting the 2007 election was in violation of the provisions of the Constitution. The Uzbekistan Constitution does not allow a person to contest for the post of President after serving for two consecutive terms. The government, since independence, has crushed all opposition forces. In the name of controlling Islamic
extremism and terrorism, the government has used detention, torture and other restrictivemeasures in the Republic.

The socio-political dynamics has its impact on the stability and security of Uzbekistan and in turn would have regional implications. Uzbekistan's authoritarian regime is building up tensions in the country, which have so far been controlled by the government repressive measures. Islamic groups are spreading their base in the country with a promise of providing an alternative to the present government. Though the IMU forces have been dis-integrated after 2001, HuT has been posing threat to the Republic. The Ferghana valley has, since independence, witnessed the spread of Islamic groups. The Ferghana valley is divided between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and any tension in the Valley would affect all the three states. In Uzbekistan, the Ferghana region is the most populated. Poverty in the region makes it vulnerable to radical ideas and social unrest. Regional stability would be threatened if there were major tensions in Uzbekistan, which would also affect the U.S. led coalition forces efforts in Afghanistan and other U.S. interests in the region.

Another important question is what will be the situation of the country, once President Karimov is no longer there. The situation gets even more complex as President Karimov has not named any successor and opposition forces are weak in the country. The vacuum in the leadership might lead to social unrest given the public discontent with the present regime and lack of strong leadership. Will Uzbekistan also see a smooth transition like Turkmenistan after President Niyazov's death? Will there be a genuine democratic election? If the frustration of the people leads to social unrest, regional security will be at stake, which the U.S. or any other player in the region would not like to see happening.

The socio-political issues in Uzbekistan have geo-political ramifications too. Among other things, Russian and Chinese silence on these issues has helped these two countries to come closer to Uzbekistan, especially after 2005. Russia and China have termed the Andijan incident as an internal affair of Uzbekistan. Both these countries are important players in the region and have been uncomfortable with the U.S. presence in the Republic and in the region.
Initially it was hoped that Uzbekistan's closeness with the U.S. after September 11 would improve the human rights situation in the Republic. There was also expectation that Uzbekistan-U.S. proximity would make Uzbekistan address the issues of human rights and democratic reforms seriously. Opposition groups like Birlik expected that Uzbekistan's closeness with NATO would bring about democratic reforms. However, nothing substantial has been done. The situation became worse after the May 2005 Andijan incident. Uzbekistan, despite its commitment in the 2002 Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation did not introduce meaningful and substantial changes in the Republic.

Since 2008, the bilateral relationship is showing signs of improvement. However, it also reflects that the U.S. has again become soft on human rights and reform issues. Uzbekistan till date has not acceded to the demand put forward by the West, for an independent international investigation of the Andijan incident. The U.S. nevertheless, has shown interest in engaging with Uzbekistan. The ongoing Afghan imbroglio makes it necessary for the U.S. to rethink its policies towards Uzbekistan. The U.S. once again has sidelined human rights and democratization issues to get Uzbekistan's cooperation, similar to the policy pursued by the U.S. after 9/11.

Though the U.S. rhetoric on human rights and reforms has affected the bilateral relations, the U.S. has used these terms when it served its interest. During hey days of Uzbekistan-U.S. relationship, these issues took a back seat. However, since 2004, these issues again became prominent. Within U.S. too, there have been differences as to what extent these issues should affect U.S. relationship with Uzbekistan. The State Department since 2004 became cautious about the deteriorating human rights situation and lack of progress in reforms in Uzbekistan and thus recommended cuts in assistance. However, the U.S. Department of Defense required Uzbekistan’s assistance for its Afghan mission and has thus preferred to remain silent on these issues, which led to differences between the two Departments. The constant change in the U.S. position reflects the U.S. flexibility on these issues and strengthens Uzbekistan’s position, which is still continuing with its own policies.

The U.S. would now prefer to maintain a balance between engagement and negative enforcement. The U.S. at this stage does not see free and fair election as the main agenda of democracy but would rather like to see release of more political
prisoners and development of civil society. Uzbekistan in the past few years have taken few small steps like introduction of *habeas corpus*, abolition of death penalty, resuming Red Cross access to prisoners but nothing concrete have still taken shape in Uzbekistan. Despite no substantial change in the Republic, the West is looking for ways to cooperate with Uzbekistan, which indicates the significance of the Republic. The U.S. today would like to go ahead with the limited engagement even without meaningful democratization in the Republic.

Since independence, Uzbekistan has witnessed geo-political competition among various players. Competition among Russia, China, the U.S. and EU is visible in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is not a silent spectator in this great power competition. 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 competition among various players to bargain the best deal for itself, depending on its national interest.

Uzbekistan’s relation with Russia has never been smooth. Uzbekistan like the other CARs remains suspicious of Chinese presence in the region, though economic necessities force them to move closer to China. Uzbekistan hence does not want at present to keep itself aloof from the West. The presence of Russia and China, U.S. and EU has strengthened Uzbekistan’s bargaining position *vis-a-vis* the various external players.

Uzbekistan’s membership with various regional groups also reflects the geo-political competition among the various players. Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) are Russia led security and economic groups, respectively in the region. Russia and China are two big players in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Russia would not like to see SCO developing as an economic group in the region, which would strengthen China’s influence in the region. NATO plays an active role in the region through the PfP programme. Russia is concerned with NATO’s presence in the region. Some observers view the SCO as a counter-weight to NATO in the region. GUUAM, a West supported organization was established to counter Russian influence in the region, which, however, could not make much progress. Uzbekistan has often used
the membership with these various groups to manoeuvre its own political agenda, adding to regional geo-political complexities.

With the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, security dimension is gaining prominence among the U.S. policy makers in formulating its policy towards the Central Asian region. With Barack Obama’s announcement to increase the size of coalition troops in Afghanistan and also announcing his decision to start withdrawing U.S. troops from July 2011, a change in the U.S. Afghan strategy was visible. The new Northern Distribution Network makes cooperation from the CARs important and its success depends on cooperation from Uzbekistan. Richard Holbrooke in his February 2010 visit to Uzbekistan acknowledged Uzbekistan’s pivotal role in the Northern Distribution Network system. The U.S. today needs alternative supply routes to transport materials to the coalition forces stationed in Afghanistan. The main supply route through Pakistan has of late been frequently attacked by the Taliban forces. The newly inaugurated Northern Distribution Network supplying materials to Afghanistan once again makes Uzbekistan an important country for the U.S. Uzbekistan in 2009 has allowed the U.S. to use it cargo airport at Navoi to transport non-lethal materials to Afghanistan, though it was done indirectly with the help from South Korea. Uzbekistan also allowed its territory to be used for the Northern Distribution Network. These initiatives reflect the growing rapprochement between the two sides and the importance Uzbekistan holds for the success of the U.S. policy in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan’s willingness to cooperate with the U.S. reflects Uzbekistan’s eagerness in adjusting its policy towards the West once again. Moreover, the U.S. too wants to leave aside Andijan episode and move forward to develop closer relations with Uzbekistan.

Back in October 2005, Condoleezza Rice during her visit to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in October officially announced the U.S. policy of the Greater Central Asia (GCPA) concept. Afghanistan is the crucial player in the GCPA and the success of the project hence depends on stability in Afghanistan, which at this stage is laden with various difficulties. Hence, Afghanistan factor would remain crucial for the U.S. policy towards CARs.
As long as the situation in Afghanistan remains critical, Uzbekistan will remain important for the U.S. But it is not to suggest that with normalcy returning to Afghanistan, the U.S. interest in the Republic will become weaker. Uzbekistan is an important country in the region as it borders all other CARs and any power that can establish influence in the Republic could influence other republics. It is the most populous country in the region with a commendable defence force. Uzbekistan has significant mineral resources. The U.S. Central Asia policy cannot ignore an important country like Uzbekistan.

Moreover, the U.S. needs to take into account another factor. If tomorrow there is a regime change, what would be the situation? Instability in the Republic would have a destabilizing impact on the region, which would not be in the U.S. interest. It would also affect the U.S. economic interest in the region. A smooth succession and in case a liberal person comes to power, the U.S. stands benefited by stronger cooperation.

Weaker U.S. role in the Republic would increase the influence of Russia and China. Both these countries would prefer to keep the U.S. out of the region. In that case, the U.S. interest in Uzbekistan would have greater geo-political dimension. The U.S. would not like to see Russian and Chinese stronger presence in this strategic country, which would affect the U.S. interests in the region.

Even though the U.S. economic cooperation with Uzbekistan is less at present there are greater possibilities of cooperation in future. Break down of relation like the one that happened after Andijan is not in anybody’s interest. It is apparent that the U.S. can have presence and influence in Uzbekistan but can never control it, which becomes evident in the last eighteen years of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy decisions. In the Uzbek foreign policy since independence, national interest has remained its driving force, encouraging Uzbekistan to keep all options open.
Though Russia and China have strengthened their influence 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. Competition among the external players is not going to reduce in future and surely Uzbekistan will try to make best use of the situation, while keeping balance in dealing with the various players.