The five Central Asian Republics (CARs) of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were born following their independence in 1991, opening a new chapter in international politics. Among the five Republics, Uzbekistan is the most populous country with about 27 million population and it shares a unique position in terms of its strategic location. Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian Republic that shares its borders with all other CARs. It has Kazakhstan in the north, Afghanistan in the south, Turkmenistan in the west, Kyrgyzstan in east and Tajikistan in east and southeast.

Uzbekistan emerged from relative obscurity following the American intervention in Afghanistan in the wake of September 11. The American-led coalition’s campaign in Afghanistan changed the scenario, as Uzbekistan became the central partner of the U.S. in the region. The present study looks into the various dimensions of the Uzbekistan-U.S. bilateral relations. The study gives an in depth analysis of the geo-political situation in the region especially in the context of Russia and China. The study reviews the socio-political dynamics within the country that has a profound impact on its foreign policy.

The Introductory chapter examines the U.S. overall policy towards Central Asia since the independence of the CARs. It throws light on the major issues affecting the U.S. policy towards the region. The chapter outlines the rationale of the study, objectives, hypotheses and methodology of the study. A detailed review of literature is also done in this chapter.

The Second chapter gives an overview of Uzbekistan and outlines the basic trends in Uzbek foreign policy since independence. It discusses the determinants of the Uzbek foreign policy and its relations with various regional and extra-regional players. It throws light on the changing dynamics of the Uzbekistan’s foreign policy, which is vital to understand the changing nature of the Uzbekistan-U.S. relationship.

The Third chapter deals with the high level official visits that took place between Uzbekistan and the U.S. The chapter discusses the diplomatic visits between the two
countries, which has been divided into three phases- 1991-2001, 2001-2004 and 2005-2009. The study of the diplomatic exchanges helps to assess the changing nature of the relation; it also briefly discusses some of the high level visits with Russia and China, to show the shift in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy priorities.

The Fourth chapter focuses on the economic cooperation with the U.S. It briefly discusses the role of energy sector in the bilateral economic relation. This chapter gives a detailed overview of the trade with the U.S. and the U.S. investment in Uzbekistan. The chapter examines the bilateral trade figures and the main items of bilateral trade. It also throws light on Uzbekistan’s other major trading partners, indicating the U.S. position in the overall trade basket of the Republic. The chapter gives a comparative picture of the U.S. trade with the other CARs, which helps to ascertain the level of Uzbekistan-U.S trade in the region. The chapter gives a detail overview of the U.S. assistance to the five Republics. It showed that Uzbekistan received the largest amount after 2001, which went down significantly after 2005.

The Fifth chapter analyses Uzbekistan-U.S. security cooperation since independence. The first section discusses the Uzbekistan-U.S. security cooperation prior to 9/11, which involved the Republic’s engagement with NATO and various bilateral military exercises. Post September 11, the security cooperation reached qualitatively new heights. It discusses the Karshi Khanabad (K2) base and the Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework. A detailed overview of the U.S. security assistance to the Republic is given to understand the nature of the bilateral relationship since independence. The assistance to Uzbekistan after September increased manifold. A comparison with the other CARs helps to better understand the shift in the Uzbekistan-U.S. bilateral relationship in the various phases. The renewed U.S. interest in Uzbekistan is reflected in the opening of the new base at Navoi and Uzbekistan again emerging as a key country for the U.S. in the region after the inauguration of the Northern Distribution Network.

The Sixth chapter discusses the major socio-political dynamics in Uzbekistan like Islamic extremism, democracy and human rights issues and their impact on the bilateral
relationship. These issues remain vital as they can lead to social tension posing threat to the regional security. Moreover, these issues till the beginning of ‘war on terror’ were important criteria for developing ties with the west, the scenario, nevertheless, changed after September 11. Silence maintained by Russia and China on these issues after 2005 have helped them to move closer to Uzbekistan, especially after the thaw in Uzbekistan-U.S. relation. The U.S. criticism of the poor human rights record and lack of progress in democracy have been some of the major irritants in the bilateral ties, which were nevertheless sidelined during hey days of their relationship. The chapter also deals with the two main issues that brought an end to the bonhomie in the bilateral relationship- the Andijan incident of May 2005 and the subsequent closure of the U.S. base at K2. The U.S. demand for an independent enquiry of the Andijan incident was rejected by President Karimov. The bilateral relationship reached its lowest in 2005.

The Seventh chapter deals with Uzbekistan’s relations with other major players engaged in the Republic like Russia, China and EU. It also discusses Uzbekistan’s relation with the regional Organizations like, SCO, CSTO, EurAsEc etc. Uzbekistan’s relation with the major players and its equation with the regional bodies reflect the geo-politics of the region. It indicates the geo-political competition among the various external players to create their spheres of influence in Uzbekistan, a significant country in the region. 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 players from time to time.

The Concluding chapter rounds up the main conclusions of this study. 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 would become weaker. A successful U.S. policy towards Central Asia cannot afford to sideline Uzbekistan. The U.S. can have presence and influence in Uzbekistan but can never control it, which is evident in the last eighteen years of Uzbekistan’s foreign policy decisions.