

**SECURITY VACUUM IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA:
IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award
of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in International Relations**

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Certified that the thesis entitled, “**SECURITY VACUUM IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY**” submitted by me towards the partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in International Relation of Jadavpur University, is based upon my own original work and there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is carried out, or to any other Institution. A paper out of this dissertation has also been presented by me at a seminar /conference at Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University on 30th April 2019, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission, as per the M.Phil Regulation (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation work of **SOHINI ROY** entitled “**SECURITY VACUUM IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY**” is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in International Relation of Jadavpur University.

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ACRONYMS

ADB - Asian Development Bank

BOMCA – Border Management in Central Asia

BRI - Belt and Road Initiative

CADP – Central Asia Drug Program

CCAP – Connect Central Asia Policy

CIS– Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

EAEU– Eurasian Economic Union

EBRD - European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

EU – European Union

EURASEC – Eurasian Economic Community

GAIL – Gas Authority of India Limited

GUUAM- Georgia Ukraine Uzbekistan Azerbaijan Moldova

IBRD - International Bank for Reconstruction and Development

IMU – Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

INSTC – The International North-South Transport Corridor

IPI – Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline

ITEC - The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation

ITPO - The India Trade Promotion Organisation

JKLF – Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

LNP – Look North Policy

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NDN – Northern Distribution Network

OBOR – One Belt One Road

OMEL – ONGC-Mittal Energy Limited

ONGC – Oil and National Gas Corporation

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

POK – Pakistan Occupied Kashmir

RATS – Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure

SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

TACIS – Technical Assistance to Commonwealth of Independent States

TAPI – Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India

TRACECA – Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

TURKSOY- International Organisation of Turkic Culture

USA – United States of America

ULO – Uighur Liberation Organisation

WMD - Weapons of Mass Destruction

INDIA – CENTRAL ASIA MAP



SOURCE: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/ci/>

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Mac Kinder in his Geographical Pivot of History in 1904 had summarized the significance of the Heartland Central Asia. He asserted the importance of land-power and showing the way forward for its rise he stated famously:

“Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland (the Pivot Area)

Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; (Europe and Asia)

Who rules the World Island controls the World.”

The logic of force drove such a pronouncement yet relevance of the same never seem to end. With reconceptualization of the ideas of the Great Game (Rudyard Kipling, 1904), in the recent era, ghosts of Mac Kinder have risen again. A proper consideration of such issues at hand can only be done after a brief look into the history.

Dominated by the nomadic horse people from the steppes the Central Asia, in the ancient times, was a region pecked with conflicts big and small. For about a millennia Turkic nomadic tribes ruled large. Such a rule ended only with people settling down. Until 14th century i.e. the Timurid period, Central Asia remained the epicenter of power and dominance in the Eurasian landmass.

However, with the Russian Empire under the Tsarist rule and the Qing Dynasty of China expanding into the region, Central Asia for a long time remained a lynchpin in historic, commercial and trade routes. After the ushering in of the maritime era, though the region suffered a setback since it could no longer retain its core character as an independent actor in world politics, its geostrategic significance as the ‘pivot’ did not reduce. Situated amidst myriad civilizations, the region soon attracted the attention of the then Great Powers.

1.1 The Great Game

Ruled by the Tsarist Russia, back then, the Heartland or the Central Asian ‘chessboard’ (Zbigniew Brezinski, 1997) lay at the centre of the World Island that spread over the area from Volga to Yangtze to the Himalayas (Mac Kinder, 1904) which as the world slowly trudged on to enter the 19th century became the locus of severe political and diplomatic confrontation between Britain and Russia. The struggle was for hegemony. The Russians, on one hand, were concerned about the deep political military and economic inroads the British were making into the region, the latter, on the other hand, were perturbed by the fear that Russia could snatch their ‘Jewel in the Crown’, India away and add it to their sprawling empire that was slowly pressing to the east.

Thus the imperial powers remained mired in a struggle for political dominance, control and security over and of a land and a population whose value lay sheerly in its location. While Britain was ready to make every effort to keep modern day Afghanistan under its control so as to ultimately make its presence in Central Asia, Russia too needed Afghanistan for, after all, the latter could be used as an excellent scaffold from where the former could venture out into the warm water ports of the Arabian sea boosting its trade and its ability to war against any perceived threat whatsoever. Russia’s move eastward to keep Central Asia and Afghanistan under its control would make sense if one calls the Mahanian doctrine into purview. Landpowers have a natural tendency to move towards the warm water ports so as to access the oceans. Such an analysis was not away from the British mind when they made it a high priority issue to block all the attempts Russia made to approach either Afghanistan or Iran in order to ultimately gain control over a port in the Persian Gulf or the Indian Ocean.

Central Asia as a pivot, therefore, stood caught between crosscurrents of Great Power competition with the political units, in there, having little say. Weak and incapable, therefore, Central Asia that was back then subsumed into the tsarist state of Turkestan was, at best, passive onlooker to the Grand Old Great Game that rambled on for years and came to an end only with the breakout of the Bolshevik Revolution (1917).

1.2 Soviet Union and Central Asia during Cold War.

Once the Soviet Union under communist stewardship emerged out of the ashes of the Tsarist Russia, Central Asia, the Heartland pivot was subsumed into the Soviet security arrangements through a re-conquest under an integrated framework. Far away from the oceans, located deep inside the continent, Central Asia's fate thus remained locked by the dominant power of the region, Soviet Union having gained control became 'the keeper of the Heartland'. Such a course of happening took place at the cost of the lives of millions of Central Asians who were slaughtered. Under Stalin, the Central Eurasian economy was pulled and welded into that of Russia's so that the latter's factories have unstoppable supply of raw materials from the former. In return, infrastructural and industrial developments were carried out in there. Mass education, healthcare, improved means of agriculture was also promoted. The Central Asian clans and tribes were Sovietized before they could acquire any sense of nationalism. It was sealed from away from its Muslim neighbors and were kept tightly controlled and ideologically sanitized.¹ The suppression of local cultures became a norm and the lasting legacy of rampant ethnic strife and environmental problems, that the region saw, could hardly reach the limelight. The so-called pivot was under a thickly secretive and oppressive shroud of communist rule. With the Cold War was raging high, almost every particularity was boiled down to dangerous and narrowly defined binaries that seemed to posit the world politics back then. Lost in bipolarity, it can be asserted that during the Soviet rule, an iron curtain had indeed seemed to enshroud the region in utter darkness. Though the geostrategic significance of the pivot was not lost, it was seen by the world, at large, as essentially 'won' and 'kept' by the communist heavyweight. It was still the core but in a bipolar world that was stricken with superpower conflict, such a 'core' had shifted its locus. Since the superpowers never clashed on a Central Asian context, from being in the centre, the former slowly slid down to the periphery, or the backwaters of International Relations.

¹Rashid Ahmad, (Winter,2000/2001), The New Struggle in Central Asia:A Primer for the Baffled, *World Policy Journal*, vol.17, no. 4, pp. 33-45.

1.3 Beyond Cold War

Such an order of things changed with the end of Cold War and the elimination of the bipolar logic on which the world worked. As the old Soviet Union melted off into absolute obliteration, a geopolitical transformation took place. While Russia emerged as a major successor state of the erstwhile superpower, from Central Asia or the 'Heartland of Eurasia' arose five new states whose independence was neither anticipated nor envisioned. The result, of course, was utter confusion. Thus it was not surprising that the relationship between these states and their powerful neighbours had a tentative quality. The potential of the new Central Asia and the Caspian region was hyped by the international community but the latter spent a better part of the 1990s trying to figure out what priority to assign to these newly independent units.² Almost all the stakeholders in the region talked about a uniform Central Asia policy but most of them developed policies that differentiated between states with more preference being given to the more energy rich ones. The Central Asian states, themselves were uncertain of which foreign actor to prioritise who came to the calling. The calculus of such decision making was complex that involved potential economic benefits and the advancement of general security needs.

Post 1990, the region saw a market of security services appear, once the security impotence of the newly independent states became evident. Different security umbrellas emerged which, in turn, tried to fill in geostrategic power vacuum in the Eurasian heartland, now that Russia, with its economy rocketing down and political system failing, remained no longer remained the sole 'keeper' of the region as it traditionally was³. The very fact that the region housed crucial energy resources, led the great powers make dive-in efforts which transformed the geopolitical dimensions of the same. Though Russia, during the 1990s did make every effort at subsuming the newly independent heartlandic pivot of the Eurasian landmass into security and economic arrangements led by it (CSTO and CIS) but the fear of Russian hegemony and the sheer inadequacy of those arrangements made the newly independent states look for alternatives. Such

² Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., pp. 56-61.

³ Farkhod F. Tolipov, "Towards a New Paradigm in International Relations: The Implications of Central Asian Geopolitics" in Anita Sengupta, Suchandana Chatterjee ,eds.,2010, *Eurasian Perspective: In search of Alternatives*, MAKAIS, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, pp. 20-21.

moves compounded the power vacuum and the entailing security vacuum Central Asia was already experiencing.

1.3.1 China

China, resurgent, with its economic clout slowly increasing owing to Deng Xiaoping's makeover made attempts at gaining a foothold in the region. The Shanghai Five which later turning into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization became its prime mover in the region. Though Beijing was not ready to aggressively assert its national interest in region for, momentarily, it did accept the newly independent Central Asian republics to lie within Russia's sphere of influence, this, however, did not stop China from conducting itself in a manner that could help it secure its long term interests, a lot of which had to do with gaining a direct access to the hydrocarbon basket of the Caspian basin, and at the same time could allow it to parry any short term security threats.⁴ Central Asia's respective sovereigns too welcomed China in. Heading states that were knee deep in in economic crises, poverty and deprivation, the leaders of the Central Asian states readily forged direct relations with their counterparts in Beijing. The Chinese capital more than eager to satisfy the latter's curiosity about its economic miracle, started signing a number of bilateral agreements that ultimately had the aim of helping Beijing assert itself in the region economically in the long run. The security dimension was also not left uncatered. Negotiations, therefore, started for delineating the disputed boundaries of the border regions. And considerable progress was, also, recorded in this regard.⁵ The Central Asian leaders particularly of that of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan sharply curtailed any support the Uighur terrorist could get from their soil. The Kyrgyz and Kazakh borders came to be watched closely in order to regulate the movement of the Uighurs who taking advantage of Soviet Union's fall were showing immense nonchalance in using Afghanistan as a passage to move into Tajikistan and then further north.⁶

Apart from security concerns, the Chinese government was also equally interested in development of transit links and building highways and railways that could help them reap benefits in areas of trade and energy. It was due to this reason China showed unprecedented

⁴Martha Olcott Brill, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C. , pp. 61-66

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

interest in upgrading and building highways in the region. Here, mention can be made of the Karakoram Highway that it sought to give special attention to given that it would link areas of strategic importance to its Xinjiang province. The Qurgan Teppe Kulob broad gauge railway, the cooperative agreements it signed in 1998 with Kazakhstan and Pakistan to upgrade roads also deserve mention.⁷

1.3.2 USA

The end of the Soviet Union stewardship in the region meant the entry of U.S., the sole and victorious superpower. Such a move was historic for it fundamentally changed the status quo. The U.S. engagement in Central Asia during this period was, much like China, designed to protect itself from the potential long term security risks rather than securing the same against the imminent dangers. Oil and gas sectors took the centre stage in the relationships with the newly independent states. The intention, undoubtedly, was to diversify western long term reserves and develop alternative routes to carry out gas from the reserves in the Caspian so as to reduce the region's dependence on Russia.⁸ In only one case of exception, the U.S. made it a priority to ensure that all Soviet era nuclear weapons were removed from the Central Asian states. While, on the surface, the U.S. policy makers seemed eager to maximize their influence in the region, quickly sending diplomatic representation to these states, establishing full embassies in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan immediately after their independence but such efforts were far more show than substance U.S. was gingerly in its approach. Wary of the fact that Central Asia, though geo-strategically significant was underdeveloped, undemocratic and had failing economies, US, therefore, led out a cold hand.⁹ Its foreign assistance to all the five countries taken together was than \$3 billion spread thinly across a dozen of categories.¹⁰ Thus it offered the Central Asian states a little more than symbolic help in meeting the tasks of economic, political and social restructuring.

⁷ Martha Olcott Brill, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C. , pp. 61-66

⁸ P.L Dash, "US in Eurasia: Geopolitical Overtures in a Tumultous Terrain" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds., 2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, p.31.

⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C., pp 66-72.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The U.S. was little more than disinterested but the Central Asian leaders were anxious to secure close ties with the former because of the international prestige such interactions would bring to them. Further they, also, considered it to be a way to distance themselves away from Russia now that, suddenly, post their independence, issues of territoriality had started attaining renewed importance.¹¹ The White House took advantage of such an attitude and through its engagement, tried to check a Russian resurgence in the region.

1.3.3 Russia

Despite such moves, however, Russia never lost its primacy in the region. Unable to fulfill the basic security needs of the newly independent republics, though the CIS and the CSTO could never become effective tools of Russian domination, there were several other means through which control was maintained over the republics. The near abroad policy was mined well in this direction considering Central Asia as its strategic backyard. The presence of huge Russian populations in each of the Central Asian states, control of the energy supplies that were made to the republics, the limited presence of the Russian military in the region all were used to command over the ventures these Eurasian states sought to make in any direction whatsoever.¹²

1.3.4 Other Regional Powers

While the Great Powers played their respective parts in the Central Asian powerplay, scrambling with each other for security, energy resources, commercial benefits, and influence, the regional heavyweights, too, were not far behind. The latter saw the collapse of Soviet Union as an opportunity to regain their respective historical advantages and expand their geopolitical reach by way of exerting disproportionate influence on the five states. Turkey and Iran deserve special attention.

¹¹ Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C., pp 66-72.

¹² Ibid, pp. 57-61.

1.3.4.1 Turkey

In the early days of the 1990s, influence of Turkey on New Central Asia was high. Secular in its credentials, the Turkish political system was seen as an ideal by the republics of the region which they wished to emulate. With the former's economy working well, living standards rocketing high and the west working assiduously, to help Turkey position itself unviably in the Heartland, relations between the latter and these states saw a spurt. However, as the 1990s came to a close, the Central Asian states realized that the ability of Turkey to help them out of their economic predicaments was limited. This resulted in the latter's influence being progressively cowed.¹³ Further, the West often taking recourse to toying with Turkey for enhancing its position in the region and fulfilling its own strategic interests led to a greater degradation of the position that the latter had come to attain in the years that closely followed the end of Cold War.¹⁴ The Central Asian states' were also put off by Ankara's big brotherly attitude on a number of occasions. By the late 1990s, Turkey started adopting a pragmatic policy. Focusing more in establishing security relations with the Caucasus (especially Azerbaijan and Georgia), Turkey downscaled its strategic ambitions in Central Asia tying itself at dealing with the latter mainly in the areas culture economy and politics. Despite this, both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan continued to look up highly to Turkey. Till today, unlike the other fellow republics, both maintain active strategic partnerships with Ankara. Cultural interactions between them takes place through a body called International Organisation of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY).¹⁵

1.3.4.2 Iran

Iran, on the other hand, had clear geopolitical ambitions in attempting to make inroads into the region. Basking on the cultural affinities it had with the Central Asian states particularly Tajikistan, a part of whose population spoke an Iranian dialect and Turkmenistan, that was the only state sharing borders with it, Iran went on to carve out its strategic space. Such efforts, however, were tied to a certain extent by the fact that the actors in the region, perceived the

¹³ Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C., pp73-74.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Last Accessed on 23.03.2019, available at <https://www.bishkekproject.com/memos/28>

former with peering eyes for they believed that Iran had the capability of upset the already precarious regional balance by serving as the champion of religious values.¹⁶

1.3.5 Testing the Idea of Security Vacuum in Central Asia

Though there have been very less of works speaking about the power and the resultant security vacuum, on the fall of the Soviet Union in Central Eurasia, the reason behind its very birth and the way it came to position itself amidst the power play in post-cold war international relations, the credulity of the above said concept was real. Undoubtedly there were scrambles among the states for having more under their control but such a competition never brought out any conclusive result. There was a common acceptance of the fact among the stakeholders that though the region was geo-strategically significant owing to its location among great civilizations of the world - the Orthodox Slavic, the Chinese, the Indic and the Islamic, (Huntington, 1996) the former was, at the same time, a microcosm of the problematic that the post-cold war order had come to entail. The fall of the elephant in the room led to the unleashing of a plethora of ideologies ranging from Easternisation, Asianisation, Islamisation, nationalisation, in an arena that was sorrowfully poverty-stricken in terms of political and social institutionalization.¹⁷ The result was a sense of utter confusion of identities in public consciousness which only made acute the sense of emptiness and volatility in terms of both power and security that were already in place.¹⁸ The fear that thronged the minds of the Central Asian leaders, then, was that such a background was apt for the Islamisation of the region. Not unfounded, with a Talibanised Afghanistan lurking in the background, such fears of the regional security falling prey to and thereafter jeopardizing under the pressures of Islamic extremism had concrete bases in the 1990s post-Soviet Eurasian geopolitics.

¹⁶Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, The Brookings Press, Washington D.C., pp74-75

¹⁷Farkhod F. Tolipov, "Towards a New Paradigm in International Relations: The Implications of Central Asian Geopolitics" in Anita Sengupta, Suchandana Chatterjee, eds., 2010, *Eurasian Perspective: In search of Alternatives*, MAKAIS, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, p.18.

¹⁸ Ibid.

1.4 An Explosive Start to The Millennium: The Dawning of the New International Terrorism

Notwithstanding the slapdash that Central Asia had come to face with the end of Cold War, it was just when things were coming to some definition, with people in the region bracing themselves to face the grand American century where the world, they thought, would be marked by liberal democratic values, the free market logic and globalization now that the American hegemony seemed reestablished, the 9/11 incident came as a jolt.

In an audacious affront to America's financial and military might the Al Qaeda staged two direct hits on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, one on the Pentagon and another presumably on the White House that ultimately got aborted.¹⁹ Loaded with symbolism, this quintessentially criminal act of terrorism not only damaged U.S. power and prestige apart from taking away the lives of as many as 3000 innocent American lives, it also signaled a defining moment for International Relations. It heralded an era where terrorism had become truly transnational or even global. Unlike the traditional patterns, the New International Terrorism was far more lethal, destructive and expansive. Integrated with channels of drugs, human and illegal arms trafficking, the various armed terrorist groups and networks, by virtue of being fluid broke boundaries of nation states with ease. The New International Terrorism used identity, religion and modern technology as its major tools of operation. With vague goals and highly long term trajectories, they sought to capitalize on the sense of shock, grief and helplessness that came out when innocents were blown up indiscriminately as a punishment for supporting a system in which they did not believe in. Underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and injustice were fodders to this new form of terrorism. It helped the leaders in recruiting manpower for their unholy mission.

With this one strike made on U.S. soil on that fateful September morning, the standards applied to strategy and execution of terrorist acts was pulled up to a level several notches high. It was a watershed.

The cruelty of the act could not be justified and therefore, the U.S. had the sympathy of the entire humanity - its allies and the world at large but the sense of utter helplessness and the fear of

¹⁹ Rahmatullah Khan, 2005, "The War on Terrorism", *Indian Journal of International Law*, vol.45, no.1, pp.1-16.

facing more attacks led to frenzy.²⁰ Under such circumstances, the initial sagaciousness showed by the Bush government melted away and what began next was the War on Terror. Instead of treating this act of insidious criminality with all paraphernalia of law enforcement at both national and the international levels, the US chose a unilateralist path declaring war against the terrorists who perpetrated the attack, their sponsors and the states harbouring them. An acidic rhetoric was let loose and demonizing the enemy was used as its standard ploy. Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden were indicated as the culprits and five demands were put across to the Taliban including delivering to the US authorities all the Al Qaeda leaders, releasing all foreign nationalists, diplomats and aid workers and close all terrorist training camps present in the Afghanistan territory along with giving US full access to those camps to make sure as to whether they were fully closed or not. The discredited Taliban, not being a friendly regime to USA, failed to oblige and its obdurate recalcitrance readily made it a target of the U.S. ire. The fifth war in Afghanistan started with the coalition forces led by the U.S. unleashing a full scale invasion in order to pull out the terrorists responsible and topple the Taliban regime that had failed to comply.

As all of this started, the geopolitics in Central Asia, once again took a turn. The pundits who had tagged it as the backwaters of the world politics immediately after cold war, found themselves reawakened to the renewed strategic potential of Central Asia. Mac Kinder's heartland had once again become the centre of attention in international relations, this time, owing to its proximity to Afghanistan. The security discourse, as a result, too took a turn.²¹

With the US moving into Afghanistan to flush out the terrorists and effect a regime change, the Eurasian heartland turned into a strategic landmass. Support of the Central Asian states became indispensable. Being in the frontline, their territories were used as launch pads in the so called 'War on Terror' in Afghanistan. Military bases were thus set up throughout the region and thereafter, were used extensively for most of the operations carried out by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces in the years to come.

²⁰ Rahmatullah Khan, 2005, "The War on Terrorism", *Indian Journal of International Law*, vol.45, no.1, pp.1-16.

²¹ Arpita Basu Roy, "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Regional Security Concerns for India and Central Asia" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds., 2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, pp.23-31.

The Central Asian states were more than happy for their suddenly bloated international stature. With money pouring in and the US collaborating with the rulers of these states that only had a modicum of democracy, whitewashing their autocratic and dictatorial political systems, the states gained some legitimacy. Their power increased and they grew bold in their actions. Thus gone were those days when they used to be passive takers of great power policy actions. Now they too had a say.

1.4.1 Great powers in Central Asia post the 9/11

In the early days of the century's opening, Russia and China made little qualms of the U.S. coming into the region for both saw it as a blessing in relation to their own concerns of terrorism and Islamic extremism in Chechnya and Xinjiang respectively. But with years passing by, as the U.S. got entrenched into the Eurasian grand chessboard, one could very well make out that the war would take time to end. With this happening, China and Russia were the first bordering powers to be perturbed. Both, the latter in particular, were fearful of the U.S. activities in the region. The latter's democracy promotion efforts in the region was a cause of major concern for Russia. The eastward push of the NATO and the European Union (E.U.) into its zone of influence made things more awkward. Now that its economy was recuperating under Vladimir Putin, Russia was attempting win back the lost influence in its 'near' neighbourhood whose stewardship, it felt, that it could legitimately demand for. But, that, however, had come to be constrained owing to the U.S. presence in the region. Its free mobility in its backyard, an area which it considered to be a key to its rise had come to be inhibited. That, however, did not stop Russia under Putin as well as Medvedev from cooperating with the U.S. in its anti terror operations for it was only the former who help the NATO forces stationed in the region with the maps of the difficult terrain of Afghanistan owing to its exhaustive knowledge of the knitty gritty of the region and maintaining an uninterrupted supply chain through an alternative route (the other route was through Pakistan that was fraught with difficulties of myriad kinds).²² Mention, here, must be made of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), a route that passes through Russia and forms a critical component of U.S. operations in Afghanistan.²³Such cooperation saw

²²Arpita Basu Roy, "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Regional Security Concerns for India and Central Asia" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds.,2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 23-31.

²³Ibid, p.135.

an all time high under the *'perezagruzka'* or the reset policy of the U.S. that was formulated by the Obama government.

China, on the other hand, by the beginning of the century showed definite and assertive moves in the region as its stakes in the areas of trade, energy, infrastructure and pipeline building and security started increasing. Housing critical of the world's energy resources, Central Asia was seen by China as crucial for its economy to grow.

U.S., on the other side, was not merely interested in using Central Asia as a base for its action in Afghanistan. It, as the new world order ushered in, started perceiving Central Asia in a different light. It considered maintaining a foothold in the region as extremely important as far as its overall international stature was concerned. Moreover, its attempts at gaining access to the Caspian energy resources and in building alternative pipeline routes through states like Turkey in order to lessen the region's heavy dependence on Russia were reasons no less important. It, however, has to be kept in mind that these interests were just a dynamic upgradation of those in the years that immediately followed the end of Cold War (that has already been mentioned above).

Thus, early into the century, the security vacuum that had reached its acute stage by the end of the 1990s, stoked off the historic great game ghosts. A scramble for keeping more under its control was visible among the stakeholders. A geopolitical rivalry for political ascendancy, dominance over the collective security architectures in the region along with a struggle for the control over the hydrocarbon wells changed the strategic contours of the Central Asian chessboard. It was here that some declared the beginning of the New Great Game.

1.4.2 The New Great Game

Expansive and dynamic from its historical counterpart, the New Great Game²⁴, novel in its dimension, involved more than just two powers. The regional heavyweights like Iran and Turkey too had roles. The pay offs this Great Game had to offer was far more meaty than what was the case earlier. Monetary profit, security of energy supplies, national economic growth, enhanced politico-military benefits were a few that could be mentioned. All were involved in

²⁴“The New Great Game in Asia”, *The New York Times*, 1997.

making geopolitical maneuvers and were enmeshed in intense geo economic competition in the region. The conditions in Central Asia came to symbolize the uni-multipolar reality of the contemporary international relations.²⁵ Especially after 9/11, the region had become a zone of complex interaction between local conditions and the larger world systems. The reason for such a contestation was the absence of any single power that was capable of holding Central Asia under its wings and keeping other powers at a distance. Neither of the Great Powers, despite their formidable interests in the region was capable of doing so. 19 years, later to 9/11 this continues to hold true. The power and the resultant security vacuum exists leading to layered rivalries among the stakeholders. This has, particularly, become even more profound with the prospects of a complete U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan in the years to come turning clearer.

Though not the keeper, a crisis-stricken Russia with its shoddy quasi democratic structures continues to hold the preeminent position in the region as U.S. prepares for an exit from despite the latter's earnest hopes of facing something otherwise. Russia has been trying to hold control of the region, in the recent years through the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Though some of the Central Asian states have been cautious in their dealings, taking Ukraine to be their ultimate litmus test, Russia's foothold in the region is unparalleled. Despite knowing the fact that the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is an organ of promoting Russian hegemony in the region the Central Asian leaders cannot opt out of it given that they are inextricably enjoined to the fates of Russia by way of history, economy and politics.

Democratization has, in the recent years, been used as a political tool by the U.S. to help in its intervention in the internal politico - economic affairs of the weak states in the region in order to preserve its vital interests. The ultimate goal has been to effect regime changes in the region so as to create a strategic environment conducive to its own national interest and hostile to that of Russia and China to some extent. In the years to come, a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan will slowly turn into a reality. That, however, will not imply the latter's natural withdrawal from Central Asia. The region's geopolitical importance, its reservoir of energy

²⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, (1999), "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 35-49.

resources and its vibrant commercial potential will keep U.S.A. tied to the region. The newly developed strategy of the New Silk Road bears testimony to this. Developed under the stewardship of Hilary Clinton as the Secretary of State, this strategy pragmatically aimed at entrenching U.S.A. in the Eurasian pivot in the area of energy, trade, infrastructure development and the geopolitics of pipeline politics. Apart from this, the New Silk Road strategy also attempts at integrating the post-soviet Central Asia under a common regional framework and to boost its potential as a transit area between Europe and East Asia.

China has also changed its attitude towards the states of the region. The region becomes inevitable for China because of the latter's growing needs for energy resources for its domestic consumption and its security arrangement with the Central Asia particularly in its western border. Therefore, it is not without reason that it has been extremely articulate in presenting itself strongly and guarding its interests. Fearing that the constant presence of the U.S. aircraft carrier battle groups and the U.S. navy in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Malacca could create obstruction in its oil supplies, it has increasingly involved itself in the Eurasian pivot so as to emphasize on developing a land-based, pipeline-driven energy strategy that ultimately has the goal of building a silk road that would start from the Caspian basin and extend up to China's Xinjiang province in the far west, a logic that has been surmised well in its One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has come to be used well in mitigating both conventional and non conventional security threats facing the region. On one hand it has aided in fostering trust and cooperation among the stakeholders pulling them into solving their disputes peacefully, on the other hand, it has developed collective defense mechanisms against terrorism, drug trafficking and other security threats keeping Russia's support on the shore of its side. Apart from this, the organization has become the primary venture of China, helping it project its growing military power abroad.²⁶

Many scholars have found value in using the conceptual tool of *The New Great Game* to make sense of the complex interactions and geopolitical power play in Eurasia, such a term has its own analytical limits. Unlike the older version, where the Central Asian states were mere passive onlookers, in the new age, as has already been stated, they could no longer be called pawns in the games of the Great Powers. In this phase of great game, the Central Asian states enjoy immense

²⁶ Stephen Blank, 2003, "India's Rising Profile in Central Asia", *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 139-157.

autonomy in deciding their strategic partners. The pre-eminence of Russia has not reduced their capacity to choose. They have shown their assertion in their decision to diversify their relations framing multi-vector policies.²⁷The adoption of such multi-vector policy by the Central Asian states has helped them in dealing with many powers in the world. All of this has gone miles in accentuating the sense of vacuum and intense contestation in the region.

1.5 Internal Dynamics in Afghanistan and its Impact on Central Asia.

The dynamics of Afghanistan and Central Asia are connected. The fluidity in Afghanistan's social and political milieu has come to have an acute reflection in Central Asia's internal workings. Owing to the geographical proximity, the porous and often unguarded borders and the ethnic and religious ties Central Asia shares with Afghanistan has led the volatility, that is there inbuilt in the latter's political process, to spill over.²⁸ The Islamic bulge in the Central Asian population, the poverty (with exception to certain republics), underdevelopment and authoritarian political structures has been fodder to such a predicament. The import of extremism and religious radicalism into the Eurasian heartland thus became a reality. The problem of illicit drug, human and small arms trafficking, cross border terrorism, organized crimes increased exponentially. Central Asia came to be used as a transit point from where opium flowing out of Afghanistan would make its way towards the West. Such a plight continued to remain true at the beginning of the century, on the start of the War on Terror and even now. Therefore, Afghanistan remains central to the security framework of the Eurasian heartland as an integrated geostrategic whole.

With the start of U.S.A.'s anti-terror operations in Afghanistan to flush out the miscreants, bring them to justice and end the oppressively notorious Taliban regime, there were many who hoped that things in that state would change for the better. About a decade and a half later, now that we are at the cusp of seeing the complete withdrawal of the NATO forces (even the non combatant ones) from the region, we can hardly be positive about the future. Conditions do not seem to be bettering. A democratically elected government is undoubtedly in place in Kabul but democracy

²⁷ Ajay Patnaik, 2016, *Central Asia: Geopolitics, Security and Stability*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, London and New York, pp. 28-29.

²⁸ Arpita Basu Roy, "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Regional Security Concerns for India and Central Asia" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds., 2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, p.123.

per se has little scope of reaching its fruition in a war-weary and a terror-infested Afghanistan marked by extreme poverty and underdevelopment. The Taliban is not away and the terror groups freely operate in the region, particularly in the lawless fringes of the country on all sides giving tough time to the government and the military to keep the security architecture on the wheels.²⁹

The production of opium and other drugs, that took a dip after the U.S. intervention, has again notched up the scale. This points to the fact that Afghanistan continues to remain the lynchpin of the drug trafficking, small arms and human trafficking network which, of course has direct bearing on the terror industry emanating from the region.

The Central Asian Republics being the frontline states facing Afghanistan get immensely affected by the internal happenings of the latter. Apart from the common ethnic bonds that almost all the Central Asian states share with Afghanistan, their histories, politico-societal and economic realities enjoin their dynamics into an integrated whole. Therefore, it is not without reason that the national security of all the republics, particularly three of them - Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are considered to be directly tied to the developments in Afghanistan. Because the threats originating in this country are transnational in nature, the internal stability of the republics in the pivot is precarious. This has a natural bearing on the trade and supply routes, border security and energy pipelines. Now that the NATO combatant forces have already departed, such a fact seems to be true like never before. The home grown Central Asian extremist elements have shown an upswing in their activities with a view to exploit the power vacuum in the region. Operating from the Northern Afghanistan, they do have a potential of destabilizing the region. To fund their activities, they have engaged themselves in drug trafficking and other transnational organized criminal networks particularly those that deal in with illicit illegal arms and human trafficking. Central Asia's position as a producer of opium has also seen a growth. Its stature as a transit state continues to remain. All of this taken together, has the potential of turning the Central Asian stability upside down. That, in turn, would

²⁹Arpita Basu Roy, "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Regional Security Concerns for India and Central Asia" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds., 2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, p. 130

undoubtedly have telling effects on the strategic designs and security complexes of all the actors in the region.

The solution to this contingency lies in building an integrated approach with all the stakeholders contributing equally in handling the security situation in Central Asia. In order to succeed, taking realistic accounts of the conditions in Afghanistan that presently is facing extremely volatility under heat of a resurging Taliban will hold the key.

1.6 Implications of the Security Situation in Central Asia on India's Jammu and Kashmir

It is in this context of speaking about the Central Asian security architecture that it might be valuable to bring the case of India into the purview.

1.6.1 India's Role in the Central Asian Security Architecture: A Look into the History

India's links with Central Asia has been civilizational dates back to the centuries. Historical records have shown continuous exchanges of visits by Indians and Central Asians to each other's territories for at least the last six centuries. These visitors came from widest spectrums of life: artisans, scholars, traders, job seekers, soldiers, men of religious importance etc. The significance of the Indian moneylenders in the Central Asian socio-economic system can hardly be ignored. They, by lending out money to the common men shaped economic structure of the Central Asian society. In the early half of the 19th century it was not hard to find Indian moneylenders sitting in their caravans in the bazaars of Central Asia collecting money from their borrowers. Owing to the active inflows and outflows of people, the impact that the Indian culture had over Central Asia could hardly be concealed. This seems further true when one considers the fact that India was a part of the old Silk Road dynamics whose core was situated in the Eurasian pivot.

However, the tenor of the India's relations with Central Asia changed as the latter became a hot bed of intrigues with imperial rivalry between the Tsarist Russia and Great Britain taking off. The advent of the colonial era also left an indelible mark on the thriving link between India and Central Asia. The development in the area of technology and the construction of the

Trans-Caucasian and Trans-Caspian railways also had telling effect on the links.³⁰ With Central Asia coming under Soviet Union, political ties with India saw a natural obliteration. Its involvement remained solely in areas of culture and economy. Here too, they were far from being anything substantive. Though during the Cold War, India had fledgling relations with Soviet Union that, however, did not automatically entail an active political involvement within the Central Asian pivot. Despite this, India's diplomatic engagement in the region was not too shabby. It was among one of those very few states that had an embassy in Tashkent. This, however, does not preclude the fact that India, back then, was more concerned about other developments that plagued the then nuclearized bipolar world order.

1.6.2 India and a Post-Soviet Central Asia: A Security Perspective

However, as the Cold War saw its end and the bipolar logic of statecraft moved out of relevance, India, not unaware of the strategic importance of the Eurasian 'pivot', moved slowly into region, along with the other states, so as to place itself as one of the stakeholders in the region. Writings on the wall were clear for India. International Relations had been recast and therefore, a dire need was felt on the part of New Delhi to refurbish its foreign policy framework that was till then based on the idea of Non Alignment.

1.6.2.1 Look North Policy: India's Way Forward

Bent on placing itself as a 'great power' in the changed dynamics of a uni-multipolar post-Cold War global order, India, with its newly liberalized economy booming, was rather quick at establishing formal diplomatic relations with all the Central Asia states.³¹ Uzbekistan was the first in the line. With Tajikistan things took time given that the former was facing a civil war. By 1996, India had embassies in all the Central Asian states. Framing of a policy, however, took time. It was during the Prime Ministerial visit to Turkmenistan, in September 1995, that the stone was set rolling. Clearing his desire to establish an honest and open friendship and his objective of promoting peace, stability and cooperation in the region, Prime Minister P.V Narasimha Rao was phenomenal in his delivery. He announced that Central Asia was a region of

³⁰Surendra Gopal, 2005, *Dialogue and Understanding Central Asia and India: The Soviet and the Post-Soviet Era*, MAKAIS, Shipra Publishers, pp. 2-3.

³¹ Samuel P. Huntington, 1999, "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 35-49.

high priority for India, where the latter wished to remain engaged far into the future. This was the discursive beginning to the Look North Policy(LNP).³²

The goals India had in the region were clear. Having been raided and invaded time and again back in history, a security- led perspective topped the agenda. Thinking about the direct impact the spurt in religious fundamentalism and drug trafficking in Central Asia could have on its national interest, India was all wary because it had a restive insurgency-stricken Kashmir to worry about. Pakistan's activities in the region were also perturbing.³³ A bitter neighbor at best, with whom it had already fought as many as three wars and a state that, back then, was buttressing the discontents in Kashmir by training insurgents, radicalizing them to gain strategic and asymmetric depth, was trying to present itself as a trustworthy friend of the Central Asian states. The cultural and ethnic commonalities that Pakistan shared with these Eurasian republics added credibility to such friendly posturing. Further, its new found success in a Talibanized Afghanistan had also bolstered its efforts.

The issue of nuclear non-proliferation was also on the shore. To see to the fact that the nuclear armaments of the erstwhile superpower that were placed in these states and mostly in Kazakhstan, were not misused by the external and the non-state actors, taking advantage of the region's fluidity figured clearly as one of the objectives.³⁴

Energy and commercial interests were no less formidable. Tied to the overall security interest in the region, the desire to gain secure and sustainable access to the hydrocarbons and the uranium deposits in the Caspian basin were major the drivers of the Look North policy.

Further, that central Asia could serve as a market to an emerging India's nascent manufacturing industry and commercial ventures.³⁵

³²Anita Inder Singh, 1995, "India's Relations with Russia and Central Asia", *International Affairs*, vol.71, no.9, pp.69-81.

³³Mudasir Mubarak, Parvaiz A.Thoker, May 2016, "Russia in the Central Asian Cobweb: Challenges and Options for India", *International Research Journal of Social Science*, vol. 5, no. 5, pp.47-56.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Raghav Sharma, 2009, "India in Central Asia: The Road Ahead", *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Report*, New Delhi.

1.6.2.2 Look North Policy: India-Central Asia Relations

With the multifold strategic, economic and security interest, the idea was to forge durable, concrete and fruitful relationships based on mutual trust and respect for each other as stakeholders. But India lacked direct access in the region. The intervening states of China, Pakistan and a Talibanized Afghanistan were unwilling to see any progress in India's stature in the region for they had their own strategic agendas to cater to. It was precisely such geographical hindrances that LNP sought to remove. Assisting it in fulfilling its goals of forging mutually beneficial relationships, promoting liberal democratic values, a culture of peace and emphasizing on the value of secularism to which the central Asian states were already wedded to, the policy attempted to help India to establish a strong foothold in the region. In doing this, LNP attempted to leverage India's cultural bonds in the region, its Soviet era friendship and the image of a civilizational state having values of non-violence, dynamic assimilation, tolerance at its core. The idea of India being the grand old bridge builder between extremes was India's geopolitical narrative in the region. While enthusiastically realigning itself to the changed political and strategic contest of Central Asia, it was, however, cautious of keeping its actions in harmony with the Russian sensibilities and at the same time, not stoking of Chinese fears.

Undoubtedly, LNP was successful in generating enormous amount of good will but as the new millennium slowly moved into existence, it became increasingly clear that the former as policy had remained more an idea than an actuality. Incapable of transforming the country's cultural capital into any meaningful influence, the creative capacity of this policy could hardly reach its fruition. India was far behind the other stakeholders involved in the region. All its interest - security, energy, economic were, at best, haywire. Realization of such a fact, to New Delhi, came late.

1.6.3 The Connect Central Asia Policy

The specter of New International Terrorism and the invasion of Afghanistan by the NATO forces redrew Central Asia's strategic landscape. Further, China's growing assertiveness in the region owing to an exponential increase in the former's influence was a butt of concern. Amidst all this, India's inability to gain direct and meaningful access to the photons in the

Caspian basin or, at the least, stop the involvement of the Central Asian Islamic militants in establishing links with the extremist elements and terrorists in Kashmir, who were being pushed into the Indian territory by Pakistan after they received training in a war-weary and a volatile Afghanistan, led New Delhi finally feel the need to formulate a new policy that could focus exclusively as the Eurasian pivot. The aim was to end the prevailing strategic ambiguity to a position from where all the possible strategic and tangible advantages could be made use of.

1.6.3.1 Connect Central Asia Policy: Security Dynamics

Therefore, 28 years post the breakup of the traditional ‘keeper’ of the geographical pivot of world politics, an erstwhile superpower, the Soviet Union, came the Connect Central Asia Policy (CCAP), which clearly indicated a change in India’s strategic mindsets, something that was commensurate with the growth of its economic and military standing in world politics.³⁶ At a time when pragmatism was holding its sway, a proactive approach clearly underwrote this policy change.³⁷ A rush of interest, one has never seen before, was suddenly in place. A greater focus and coherence seemed to discern Indian strategies and objectives in Central Asia. Indian interests in Central Asia though had modified under the changed conditions of a post 9/11 world order, but they had not changed fundamentally. In fact, they remained almost the same with a bit of change in positioning. The girth of commercial and energy interests of India in the region had risen and had become more integrated with the security interests in region in ways unprecedented.³⁸ Therefore, serving its imperatives almost became an indispensability. A geopolitical rivalry with Pakistan, a desire to keep a peering eye on China’s ‘peaceful’ rise and compelling economic and trade objectives underwrote the CCAP. To fulfill such objectives, India, in the new decade, was seen using up all classical and modern tools of influence building, security assistance, trade, diplomatic support and even forging close and substantive relationships, if not alliances with the major regional actors.

³⁶J.N. Dixit, 2004, “Emerging International Security Environment: Indian Perceptions with Focus on South Asian and Central Asian Predicaments” in Santhanam K., Dwiwedi Ramakant eds., *India and Central Asia: Advancing the Common Interests*, IDSA, Ananya Publishers, pp.13-25.

³⁷Kothari Kumar Raj, *India’s Connect Central Asia Policy: Emerging Economic and Security Dynamics*, *Sociology and Anthropology*, vol. 2, no.6, 2014, pp. 239-245.

³⁸Sharma Raghav, 2009, “India in Central Asia: The Road Ahead”, *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies Report*, New Delhi.

The withdrawal of the NATO combatant forces did not signify the end of terrorism, the defeat of Taliban or the final elimination of all the other security problematic that Afghanistan had come to signify. Pakistani actions in destabilizing Afghanistan too had not stopped and the specter of a security vacuum reminiscent of the immediate post-cold war days became even more acute. The vacuum stoked of rivalries which, in turn, multiplied the security implications. India's refurbished policy in Central Asia, therefore, was perceived to serve the major job of dealing with the security threats of terrorism, drugs, arms and human trafficking and civil violence. The other role of the policy was to deflect Pakistan's ability to use the security vacuum in Central Asia an opportunity to turn the latter into an active training and recruiting ground for fostering anti-India terror. Thus undoubtedly, the CCAP was the result of a realization of the fact that the security horizon of India had extended in scope owing to globalization which implied a picture of a thoroughly integrated world pecked with both conventional and most importantly non conventional security threats.

Under the CCAP, while on one hand, New Delhi has ambitiously promoted the entry of state ventures like ONGC Videsh (it had bought 25% of the Satpayev oil bloc in Kazakhstan in April, 2011) and GAIL and joint ventures like OMEL (ONGC-Mittal Energy Limited) into the Eurasian pivot, it, on the other has also actively steered the development of the 1680 kilometer long TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline project along with the idea of building an North-South transport corridor from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Anzali and then to the Caspian port of Astrakhan. Further, it has been seen making significant contributions to the building of the Trans Afghan Railway and promotion of the IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline that has been termed as the peace pipeline.³⁹

What strikes the CCAP apart is that, in terms of design, it is not divorced from India's overall South Asia policy particularly its Afghanistan policy as far as security is concerned. Afghanistan has been a source of instability and a fertile recruiting ground for the terrorists. Drugs, small arms and human trafficking networks crisscross the region placing major challenges to India's foreign policy. Afghanistan has not only been the spring board producing anti-India extremist militants but it has also been a rear base for Pakistan from where the latter

³⁹Firdous Ah. Dar, Tabassum Firdous, 2014, "India's Response to New Great Game in Central Asia", *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no.1, pp.33-44

constricts India's mobility in Central Asia and even beyond.⁴⁰ There has been a considerable increase in the number of war veterans in Jammu and Kashmir, who have, after being injected into the Indian territory by Pakistan, become mercenaries for the several Kashmiri militant outfits. Further, the spread of the Kalashnikov culture and drug addiction to India remains the other point of concern. Pakistan's activities in Central Asia keeps India on its heels. Both the states have histories of clashing regularly in the proxy wars in Tajikistan that was mired in a civil War for years. Such a contest continues, albeit under the sheets, even today with Pakistan trying in earnest terms to marginalize Indian influence in Afghanistan and deny India an entry point in Central Asia. Pakistan has also its limitations as far as its influence in the region is concerned. With a failing economy, a faltering domestic political system and a terror infested and lawless territory, the Central Asian states are cautious in their dealings with Pakistan. It is clear that Pakistan's Afghan policy (one that it followed during the 1990s of supporting the Taliban regime in Afghanistan) has been counterproductive. Far from making Pakistan as a conduit of trade, the policy has alienated the Central Asian states from Pakistan and has generated suspicions that will take a long time to be undone. India, however, is a state that sees itself as an 'emerging' power, a rightful and a benevolent hegemon in South Asia. Since the dynamics are linked, India finds it natural to make strategic forays into the Eurasian pivot bypassing all hindrances and finding all alternative routes. India's sees any instability in Central Asia as threats to its integrity and security interests.

The CCAP stemmed from a realization that New Delhi's supine foreign policy postures had led to a general compromise of its interests in this immediate neighborhood. It fears that it had lost ground to China and fallen a victim to Pakistan's actions were not false. Further, as the U.S. drawdown process started rolling, (the first phase took off in July, 2011 when the first badge of 650 U.S. soldiers left Afghanistan), it was no longer possible for India to sit back. The security vacuum that had popped its head up off the carpet, post U.S. withdrawal had given rise to possibilities that could have dangerous impacts on India's vital national interests. A volatile Afghanistan if fell under the resurgent Taliban's sway, could give rise to a succession of radicalized societies throughout Central Asia which would have destabilizing impact on not only Central Asia but also the Pakistan and greater South Asia. This could have tremendous

⁴⁰Ivan Campbell, 2013, India's Role and Interests in Central Asia, *SAFERWORLD Report*, pp.7-10

implication for India. There could be high possibilities of fomenting unrest, self-motivated terrorism and the springing up of separatist forces within the country that could well dent on the latter's territorial integrity. The drug and small arms trafficking taking place through the networks running through Central Asia that forms a part of the Golden Triangle was also a concern given that it, not only, had the capability of bolstering terrorist activities, but also, rupturing the already delicate, precariously balanced social fabric that India possessed.

It has been under the consideration of such circumstances that India is making bolder moves in the Central Asian security matrix, under the present conditions, in order to prevent both real and perceived security threats in this region. To this end, therefore, India has been seen enhancing its security assets in the region. The most notable of them all was the acquisition of the foreign military outpost in Tajikistan, the latter being the focal point of all concerns given the fact that it is separated from POK by only a 20kms stretch of Afghan territory. Refurbishing its air base in Ayni, Tajikistan is a deeply symbolic act. It is also emblematic of India's pragmatic, assertive and its strategic aspirations in the region.⁴¹ The base is of immense geo-strategic importance for it would not only help India counter security threats but would also help it strike Pakistan from the rear, if circumstances demand so, keeping an eye on the developments both in Afghanistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Such moves are also sends strong messages to China with whom India's relations in the region seems to be trapped under the larger rubric of both tension and competition and cooperation.

In Central Asia, notwithstanding the problematic bilateral understandings they share in terms of their problems, India and China has come to share some sort of "Co-politics" as has been pointed out rightly by Basudeb Chaudhari and Manpreet Singh. While the specters of drug trafficking and terrorism and the imperatives of security would bring both the Asian giants to share a cooperative relationship, the issue of access to energy will induce a sense of rivalry or competition in their relation. However the point of competition should not be exaggerated given that China's presence in the energy sector in Central Asia is far more extensive when compared to India. However, it also needs to be mentioned that the grounds of cooperation between India and China is quite narrow when a Sino-Pakistan axis is considered. That the security situation in

⁴¹Marlene Laurelle, Jean-Francois Huchet, Sebastian Peyrouse and BayramBalci eds.,2010, *China and India in Central Asia: A New Game*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, pp. 254.

Afghanistan can hardly become a point of cooperation between India and China owing to the fact that the latter's 'all weather friend' will, undoubtedly, be an intervening variable shaping attitudes and approaches on both sides. Notwithstanding India's recent entry into the SCO, China's common concerns regarding Afghanistan and SCO's maneuvers to stabilize the latter, it must be understood that both China and Pakistan, given their sustained close relations and a natural commonality in interests in relation to India, could develop joint strategies to marginalize and cause an exit of their adversary from their immediate backyard. A Sino - Pakistan axis tethering India from gaining access to energy resources in Central Asia is also scenario for which India has to remain prepared. The decision makers in Delhi would have to be mindful of all such possibilities and make proper provisions within the CCAP to help it deal with such circumstances.

Having said so it must be stated that despite all such earnest efforts that Pakistan and China might seek to make elbowing India out of the Eurasian pivot will find hard to succeed for both Russia and U.S. find an Indian presence in the region as valuable. Russia is involved with China in Central Asia under what could be called to be an 'axes of convenience' (Laurelle,2010) owing to the significant convergences in major interests but it also realizes what could happen if such convenience condominium were to crack if China, someday, seeks to pursue political interests that clashes with those of Russia. Therefore it is not without reason that Russia buttresses India's presence in the region and wishes for its greater involvement. The idea is to balance out any assertive Chinese involvement that could undermine Russian influence. Russia, in the recent years, has gone out of its way in persuading India to help the former and expand its access to energy supplies by investing in the Sakhalin Oil project with Japan and the U.S. It has also greatly supported India's TAPI pipeline project which would also give Russia monetary benefits from the transit fees. However its recent bonhomie with Pakistan has been a matter of concern for India.

The U.S. has similar reasons for desiring India's meaty involvement in the region. Thus it has put India on a crucial role in its geopolitical venture of The New Silk Road so as to keep a check on China's spectacular ascent in the Eurasian pivot using the power and the security vacuum to its advantage.

1.6.3.2 Connect Central Asia Policy and Geopolitics

While India might remain keen in protecting its national interests in Central Asia, such a thing would hardly reach its fruition if a nuanced approach to the geo-politics of the region is not taken. Central Asia is a classical paradox. A landlocked region, with modest economic credentials, Central Asia's vitality lies in the fact of it being an entrepot of sociocultural and political influences from all four directions. A storehouse of scarce energy resources, it also has the potential of transmitting influences from one region to another, along with maintaining a strong identity for itself. Therefore, it is not without reason that the region is so deeply contested. Security dominates the discourses on Central Asia because insecurities throng the region. Almost all major actors have made attempts to bring about integration in the region but they do not aim to promote economic development, competitiveness and living standards. Rather they focus on narrow interests that mainly has to do with natural resources which is seen by all states as a potential way at gaining geopolitical dominance. Therefore, the intergovernmental organizations in the region have failed to establish credible and effective security frameworks. Though India too seeks to attain geopolitical dominance mining the security and the power vacuums in the region, it, however, considers stability in Central Asia crucial to its both security and energy interests in the region that can hardly be achieved without bringing about economic development, employment and a rise in living standards in the region. Thus the CCAP apart from projecting India's power in the Pivot should attempt at promoting prosperity in Central Asia. The lack of cooperation within and amongst the Central Asian Republics accentuates the security vacuum and makes the region more vulnerable to the nonconventional security threats. India, in such a context, should look for ways to bring about cooperation and a sense of unity among the republics for it is only by doing so that its interests will find a smooth fulfillment.

Russia is valuable to ensure the success of India's policy in Central Asia given that it remains the major player in the region with the pipeline politics being its point of reference. USA is of no less importance. Withdrawal from Afghanistan will not mean its withdrawal from Central Asia. It will remain as involved as it has been balancing Russia and China out. In its efforts at doing so it would see India as its ultimate pivot state. A success of India's Connect Central Asia policy would come about only if it is able to cautiously deal with the U.S. in the

region. A balanced, pragmatic approach is required over here. Benefits are to be extracted without losing ground in terms of autonomy in terms of policy action.

Since the ultimate aim of the CCAP is to help India gain direct access to the Caspian hydrocarbon and uranium basket and gain a foothold in the region to guard its security interests generating from the region, bypassing the geopolitical hindrances put forth by Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, attempts must be made to consider Iran being used as a gateway. The Chabahar Port that India has been already involved in developing will be of strategic importance in this regard.⁴² Investing infrastructure in Iran will pay off rich dividends to India which will shoot its Central Asian Policy into strategic and a thumping success.

1.7 Stocktaking

India is there to stay in Central Asia. Though a lot remains to be done and a lot remains to be achieved, the CCAP has been successful to a large extent to make India's presence felt in the region. It has galvanized its policies regarding terrorism, small arms drug and human trafficking with the other great powers in the region that was a hidden implication the security vacuum in Central Asia had come to impinge on. However the success of its policy moves in the region will depend on how well it deals with Pakistan and Afghanistan. On the other side, the narratives of a mini great game developing between India and China are far stretched though the latter's moves needs to be kept under a check. The Modi government has been able to push the CCAP beyond its inhibitions. The Prime Minister's visit in 2016 to the Eurasian pivot is loaded with symbolism. It showed India's keen interest in this region, its expanded security horizon and its assertiveness that had come to characterise its rise. Lastly it must be said that while India may coordinate its actions with the other powers in the region seek for their assistance when needed but building up its own independent capacity will remain the key. The security vacuum will make such a move an indispensability.

⁴² Arvind Gupta, October 14, 2013, India and Central Asia: Need for a Pro-Active Approach, *ISDA Policy Brief*, pp. 1-6.

Rational and the Scope of Study

Most of the intellectual enquiries that have been carried out over the issue of security vacuum have singly considered the issue of the same in Central Asia. Those that have brought India into their purview of research have frozen themselves in speaking about the India-Central Asia relations. This has given rise to a dearth in works that simultaneously analyse the security vacuum in Central Asia and the impacts that it has on the Indian foreign policy and its interests in the region especially those that relate to Kashmir, the role of Pakistan, the impact of a restive Afghanistan that is almost inevitably tied to the phenomenon of the fateful rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the *Pivot*. Further, there have been very few works that elucidate on the reasons behind the very birth of the security vacuum and even less of those that speak of the how has such a vacuum come to position itself post-2014 i.e. after the declaration of a potential U.S.-led-coalition forces withdrawal in light of the arrangements and mechanisms that have been forged by all the stakeholders in the region. India's attempts to deal with the security conditions in Central Asia under the new reality of the upcoming U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan have also not been explicated by many. Most of the works that have been carried out in this area has been from a single theoretical point of view that have left various issues untouched, unattended and unconsidered particularly those that involve issues in human security.

On the above backdrop, the rationale and the scope of the study is to explain the birth of the security vacuum in Central Asia post the melting away of Soviet Union within whose territorial boundaries the former was subsumed for years. Tracing the well spring of such a phenomenon in the region's vexed geopolitics; the research studies the impacts such a security vacuum has had on the world at large. The causes of the involvement of the Great Powers in the politics of the region and the nature of their scramble for power have been looked into essentially from a multi-theoretical dimension. The terrorist attack of 9/11 changed the region's security scenario. USA moved into the Central Asian platform and used it as a springboard to carry forth its operations in Afghanistan. Such an action was an exemplification of the way in which the dynamics of the Eurasian pivot was tied to fates of Afghanistan. The other powers were not away from the pivot. While Russia's presence in Central Asia was natural, China was seen busy establishing itself in Central Asia in areas of security energy trade and politics. Regional actors like Turkey, Iran and Pakistan also vied for making their respective places in the region's geostrategic power play. The

research, here, tries to make sense of New Great Game that came to characterise the Central Asian chessboard with the millennium slowly moving into existence. The declaration of a potential complete U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, in the recent years, has added a new facet to the politics in the pivot. The security vacuum has been accentuated and the threats spilling off from the Afghan cauldron has endangered the delicate balance on which the Eurasian pivot hangs. Harping on critical perspectives on security to understand such a contingency, the work looks at the steps that have been taken by states to deal the problems arising thereof. Such a peril holds implications of critical importance to India.

The aim of the study has been to focus on the Indian muddle in Central Asia from a security perspective. Attempts have also been made to look into policy maneuvers made by the Indian government to safeguard its national interest in the region along with maintaining friendly relations with the major actors so as to nurture a culture of peace and prosperity in the region. The non-conventional security threats are the greatest cause of perturbation for India. The study, therefore, evaluates the steps that have been taken both at bilateral and the multilateral levels to deal with such challenges, pointing out to those that have the most successful in obtaining credible results. Finally, the study also seeks to look into the geostrategic nuances, the streaks of which joins the actions of Pakistan, the Afghanistan to those in Central Asia which, in turn, has direct bearings on the security situation in Kashmir and finally India's prospects of gaining sustainable and long term access to Caspian energy basket. A holistic and an extensive approach have been applied in order to reach to the conclusions of the study.

Research Questions:

- Why was the security vacuum created in Central Asia after the demise of the Soviet Union?
- What are the reasons of the involvement of the Great Powers in the region?
- How has the security vacuum come to position itself in Central Asia now that world is witnessing a complete U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, a region where it had entered to topple the Taliban regime and bring to justice the miscreants who had led out the brutal terrorist attack on 9/11 at the beginning of the century?

- What are the joint mechanisms that have been developed to address the security threats that might merge out of a turbulent Afghanistan to affect the Central Asia security kinetics with the prospective U.S. withdrawal becoming a reality?
- What implications will such a security scenario in Central Asia hold for India that has a bitter neighbor and a turmoil stricken Kashmir to worry about?
- What are the mechanisms that have been developed by India and Central Asia to address both the conventional and the non conventional security challenges that might arise out of the security vacuum?

Research Methodology:

The research studies the security situation that has come to characterize the post-Soviet Central Asia with the ushering in of the New World Order, after the tragic fall of the twin towers in USA. The region faces problems unbound. Tracing the roots of these predicaments into the history has been considered valuable. Using a multi-theoretical edge, an enquiry has been attempted to test the credulity of the idea of security vacuum in the region. Such a phenomenon has implications for all the stakeholders. India, being one among the latter, as has been assumed, is not an exception. The security vacuum is of crucial relevance for both India's Kashmir quandary that, in the recent years, has seen significant bouts of instability and violence and its Pakistan muddle. The methodology of research, that has been applied, is historical, descriptive, analytical and qualitative. The study, further, refers to a number of secondary sources that includes books, journals and articles from newspapers and web sources.

Chapterisation

The study has been divided into five chapters which will include the introduction and conclusion. They are as follows.

Chapter 1

Introduction

The introductory chapter of my study produces an overview of the problems that Central Asia as a geo-strategic region faces. Putting a historical background to the vexed security situation that presides in Central Asia today, it tests the credulity of the idea of security vacuum and its role in stoking off the New Great Game in Central Asia. It has also been mentioned as to how the present Great Game is different from its historical counterpart. In doing so, the roles of the regional and extra regional great powers, involved in a power scramble, in giving rise to insecurities in the region has been explicated well. The aspect of the non-traditional security affecting the Central Asian dynamics particularly in the post 9/11 period has also been shown. It has been in this context, that a summary of the India-Central Asia relations has been put forward. A historical account tracing India's interactions with Central Asia since antiquity to bringing out the present policy rigours of India's involvement in all the republics has been produced in the light of the actions of other stakeholders in the same. It has been stated that the non conventional security threats not only affects India's security in the region but it also put costs on its national well being, territorial integrity and interests at large. The chapter speaks of Pakistan working to achieve a strategic depth in the region and the impact of such overtures on the problem of Kashmir. Finally, India's involvement in the energy sector, infrastructure and pipeline building and in the area trade and commerce in the region, arguing that these are not separate from the understandings of security has also been stated.

Chapter 2

Security: A Theoretical Exposition

The whole of my study will hinge heavily on the idea of security. Therefore, my second chapter will deal with the theoretical understanding of the very idea of security. Not only will it speak about the conventional theories, with particular emphasis on the realist, neorealist school, the liberal, neoliberal school and the constructivist approaches, that had developed under the influence of a bipolar international power structure, it will also discuss the changed dimensions of security in the post Cold War era, owing to the rise of the non conventional security threats that grew not from the actions of the state but from the functioning of the non state actors. It will advocate that the security situation in Central Asia should be seen from a multi-theoretical altar. While the traditional theories would be helpful in understanding the streaks of cooperation and conflict among the stakeholders in the region along with the conceptual underpinnings of the security vacuum and the new great game, the role of the non-traditional security has to be looked from a different perspective. Security, in this respect, will not merely be about survival but it will imply something more than that. The critical perspective understanding security as emancipation, as something positive, as resilience is helpful in adding a humane element to the hard understandings of power and security. Together this chapter will attempt to set an outlook from the standpoint of which the power play in Central Asia and its implications for India's foreign policy will be looked at.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Security Situation in Post-Soviet Central Asia

The theoretical perspective being set, the third chapter will attempt to look at the general security situation in Central Asia. It will start off by examining the idea of security vacuum. Its conceptual credentials will be looked into and the reasons behind its very birth will also be

analysed. This being said, the aspect of great power competition will be given an analytical cast. The reasons behind the involvement of the great powers and other actors in the Central Asian dynamics will also be looked into, in a wholesome manner making a conceptual cleave between the years that immediately followed the end of Cold War and those that came after the 9/11 incident. The change in the geopolitical conditions of Central Asia post the declaration of a potential U.S. drawdown will be mentioned. Further, the roles of the multilateral organisations in the security architecture of Central Asia will be analysed substantively with a special focus on Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Dynamics of Afghanistan has heavy reflections on the security dimensions of all the Central Asian Republics. The chapter will explicate in details how the strings of both the regions- Central Asia and Afghanistan remain attached and how the security vacuum has come to place itself now that world is at the brim of seeing the withdrawal of the coalition forces from the latter. The non-traditional security threats creating irregularities in the power structure of Central Asia will be looked at. The joint mechanisms that have been developed by the stakeholders in the region to deal with the geopolitical implications of such a withdrawal and the contingencies precipitating thereof will also be studied.

CHAPTER 4

Tracing the Trajectory of India-Central Asia Relations: Security Implications

With the security situation in Central Asia being analysed, chapter 4 of the study will peer into the implications the former has on India. It will lead out an extensive study into the India-Central Asia relations tracing its roots from the historical times. The reason that led to India's move into Central Asia, its foreign policy objectives in the region in the post cold war and post 9/11 period will be extensively discussed. The policy frameworks of the Look North and the Connect Central Asia will be analysed from both a comparative and individualistic perspective. India's involvement in areas of energy, trade and security will be comprehensively looked into. The concerns of India regarding Afghanistan and its impact on the stability of Central Asia, the problem of Islamic extremism in the region and its insinuation on the predicament of Kashmir along with the role of Pakistan in fomenting such concerns will also be analysed. The

geopolitical innuendos of an American withdrawal to India's interests in the region will be studied by looking into all the mechanisms- both bilateral and multilateral, that the latter has engaged itself in. Finally the pitfalls of India's policy approach in the region, despite the recent flurry of activity, will also be showed.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The concluding chapter will present an analytical summary of all the above mentioned chapters. It will also mention in short the findings of the research questions.

CHAPTER 2

SECURITY: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

2.1 Security : the Concept

History of politics in human affairs is as old as the existence of mankind. It may be fashionable to decry politics or insist on being outside anything political by speaking against it but these very claims puts one in the political domain. Asserting for oneself a superior or a privileged position as compared to others is by the fact itself a political act. Politics emanates whenever there is a difference over an outcome sought by two or more interdependent partners - which might be individual human beings or their agents - with respect to their interests, aims and values. In its widest scope, politics is omnipresent. It pervades and is embedded in all human relations.

Security is a special form of politics.¹ Common and extensive in its dimension, security is the pivotal property of all such political disputes that ensues when actors threaten to use or use force to get what they want from each other. Concurring with human history in its ambit, security is a phenomenon created by human intent and action. Indispensable, therefore, it is almost impossible to make sense of world politics without a reference to it.² Security plays a vital role in deciding who gets what when and how in world politics (Lasswell, 1936). Therefore, understanding security can never be simply an intellectual affair. Talks on security are often stimulated to achieve the same for 'real people in real places' (Booth, 2007). It involves interpreting the past - particularly looking for meanings as to how different groups thought about and practiced security, making sense of the present and thereafter, trying to determine and shape the future.

¹Edward A. Kolodziej, 2005, *Security and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p.22.

² Ibid.

2.2 Major Theoretical Expositions on Security: A Critical Analysis of the Realist-Neorealist, Liberal-Neoliberal, Constructivist Approaches

Crudely summarized as advocating political realism, studies in security during the Cold War era was preoccupied with states, strategy and the status quo.³ States were considered to be the most important referents and agents of security in International politics.⁴ Since much of the core Cold War intellectual concerns and practical issues remained concentrated on devising the best means of employing threat and military force, strategy was the other point.⁵ Lastly, there was also an explicit conservative desire to preserve the status quo militating against any move that sought to bring about radical or revolutionary changes within the international society.⁶ The 1950s and the 1960s were regarded as the golden era of studies led out on security. It was during this time that the security analysts busied themselves in devising theories of nuclear deterrence and war fighting, developing systems analysis relating to structures of armed forces and resource allocation and finally refining the tools of crisis management. Truly this was the time when security studies holding a positivist edge, could best be described as a child of ‘Machiavellian and Hobbesian Realism’. The idea of National Security was given unbound importance. Conceived in a unidirectional form, the term implied a focus on defending a particular state against external threats that was automatically assumed to be coming from other state actors. The concept of power was taken to have direct bearings on the idea of security during the cold war era. Having its roots in the anarchical system of International relations, a somewhat parabolic relationship was taken to be present between relative power and security.⁷ Increase in a state’s power was thought to lead to an automatic increase in its security and there, inevitably, were structural incentives for states to increase their relative power. The conventional discourse on security of the cold war era was essentially underpinned by the conceptualization of security as control.⁸ It hinged on the idea of survival and downplayed on the factors of change and complexities of the international system. As an understanding, it reflected a blind faith in a

³ Paul D. Williams, 2012, “Security Studies: An Introduction” in Paul D. Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 3.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Davide Fiammenghi, 2011, “The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis”, *International Security*, vol.35, no.2, pp. 126-154.

⁸ Emilan Kavalski, 2008, “The Complexity of Global Security Governance: An Analytical Overview”, *Global Security*, vol.22, no.4, pp. 423-443.

makeable world – one in which construction of a secure environment was possible for human activity.⁹ Premised on the belief in human rationality, fundamental physical order, the idea of security as control - the way it was conceived in the Cold War decades - demonstrated high levels of predictability by using reductionist methods assuming that global life changed in a gradual manner and followed foreseeable trajectories.¹⁰ Since the idea of progress was institutionalized in the notion and practices of sovereign territorialized nationhood with the reference point for analyzing the concept of security being entrenched in the existentialist understandings of human being as fearful and selfish creatures and the reductive theories about the ‘logic of anarchy’, the pundits of International Relations remained locked chiefly in state centric narratives forgetting the fact that the ‘state of nature’ was, in fact, in itself the most pressing among future practical concerns. The fundamentalism of the mechanistic and positivistic conceptions of global life befuddled the Cold War conceptions of security making it narrow, state centric and leading it into the rut of hylomorphism – a doctrine that suggests production to be the imposition of order on chaotic or passive matter.¹¹ Security as control denotes a condition where human beings increasingly seek to adapt their temporal and physical environments according to themselves rather than adapting themselves according to it.¹² Therefore, the perception of reversibility remained central to the ‘illusion of control’ and this underpinned security narratives in the Cold War period.¹³ Such narratives rested on de-contextualization of interaction between human and natural systems.¹⁴ Thus it was not without reason that such conventional understandings presented paradoxes of complex nature. Discourses on security led to breeding of insecurity. A zero sum game was inevitably under play. Increase in the power and therefore, security of a state led to the decrease in the security of or the rise of insecurities in other states. Since states as rational actors could never be sure of each other’s intentions, they, therefore, erred on the side of pessimistic caution and shaped their policies in accordance to the capabilities possessed by other states. A security dilemma in the form of an irresolvable uncertainty, thus, became an absolute predicament, the central theme of international relations and a tragedy that could hardly be avoided. According to the Classical Realists, the

⁹ Emilan Kavalski, 2008, “The Complexity of Global Security Governance: An Analytical Overview”, *Global Security*, vol.22, no.4, pp. 423-443.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

roots of such a dilemma laid in the flaws characterizing human nature that was power-seeking, selfish and prone to violence. Morgenthau was of the view that there were biological and psychological compulsions common to all men “to live, to propagate and to dominate.” The Neorealist (structural realists) led by Kenneth Waltz, not happy with such an explanation, sought to differ. According to him, the roots of the security dilemma laid in the structure of the international system and the patterns of behavior it compelled the states into following. Waltz believed that the states, governed by the principle of self-help and being functionally alike as units - not in terms of capabilities but in terms of the tasks they pursued - were in fact helpless. Owing to the premium placed on the value of self-help, the states were forced by the realities of the structure to acquire security through their own efforts. They did this either by building up their national military strength or through clever strategies; they felt could give them advantages over other states in the system. Once a state reached a level beyond its so called security threshold, balancing and bandwagoning on the part of other states followed. States did this by, either, joining alliances and working towards strengthening them or by acting in ways that weakened them.¹⁵ The necessity to conform to the realities of the international state structure justified a particular ordering of state priorities in the security field. It is this fact that explains as to why statesmen commit scarce resources to armies and weaponry even when the manifest and the most pressing of human needs go unmet. The key feature that neorealists seemed to imply was that states must either adopt the prevailing ‘best practice’ to obtain security or fall way side (Waltz,1979). They recognized that the adoption of such ‘best practices’ (which inevitably were unilateral policies hinged on national survival) would result in an intensified security competition and would establish a vicious circle of irresolvable dilemma, one in which only relative security as against “peace defined as a state of tranquility or mutual concord” (Mearsheimer, 1995) was possible.

Such were the dominant understandings of security in the bipolar world order, narrow and state centric. There were dissenting voices but they hardly made any headway. Almost inevitably they were relegated to the intellectual and practical margins of the then predominant theoretical frameworks. However, a key development occurred in the academic mainstreams of

¹⁵Davide Fiammenghi, 2011, “The Security Curve and the Structure of International Politics: A Neorealist Synthesis”, *International Security*, vol.35, no.2, pp. 126-154.

the studies on security with the publication of Barry Buzan's book *People States and Fear*.¹⁶ The traditional understanding of a state centric security came to be questioned for the first time in the most meaningful ways possible. Buzan, a flagbearer to the liberal camp in International Relations, in his work persuasively argued that security was not just about states but was to a large extent related to all human collectivities.¹⁷ Factors ranging from military, political, economical to societal and environmental affected the security of human collectivities. Though his book didn't do much to disrupt the traditional focus on scientific methods or concerns to preserve the status quo or to bring in the gendered dimensions of security, it, nevertheless, revised the timely way of thinking about security.¹⁸ The field's preoccupation with military force was questioned. For the first time, in years, an attempt was made to redefine security. Presented as a subjective and an elastic notion, security was taken to be exactly what the person in question understood it to be as. A contested concept, security signified or accredited some kind of a prized achievement. Associated with the alleviation of threats to cherished values, security in the late 20th century was seen in a wider light. Survival and security was often used synonymously, but with time as neoliberalism made its voice felt in the realm of international studies, the latter came to be perceived differently. Whereas survival implied an existential condition, security, unlike days bygone, was seen as the ability to pursue cherished political and social goals and ideals. Ken Booth's idea of security as 'survival plus' - the plus being freedom from some life determining threats and access to some life choices - is of significant value in this context.¹⁹ The Neoliberals or neoliberal institutionalists accepted several of the key premises from where the neorealists started their intellectual discourse, but in course they asserted that the prohibitive and negative effects of anarchy that pecks the international order could be mitigated by the international institutions. Political survival need not be as precarious as neorealism had contended it to be as a relatively high degree of order and international governance was possible. Merging with the English School, who, holding a pluralistic view often saw justice as a value indispensably linked to the idea of security, on the issue of International Society, the neoliberal

¹⁶Paul D. Williams, 2012, "Security Studies: An Introduction" in Paul D. Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge, Oxon, pp. 3-6.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid

institutionalists argued about the necessary condition of developing international regimes.²⁰ Anarchy, they contended, had been overemphasized at the expense of interdependence. The value of interdependence and its consequences, according to the neoliberals, had the ability to minimize the effects of anarchy and thereby transform the nature of international politics. Trade and economic interdependence, that forms the core of commercial liberalism, had, according to the neoliberal institutionalists, the ability to cut down on the insecurities that states felt while conducting themselves through International Relations. Undoubtedly the military- security component would remain important but the growing commercial links would reduce the structural perks of using violence and war as a means of state policy.²¹ Inextricably linked, the interests of the states would, therefore, lead to the development of an associative security system where interdependence would lessen the muddle of anarchy. Security, under such conditions, would be pursued in cooperative, noncompetitive and non-confrontational terms to ensure joint survival, protection and promotion of values that are held significant. Unlike self-help systems where relational identity is negative, with the states fearing each other and thereby tending to formulate security in zero-sum and distributional terms, in cooperative security systems, relational identity would not be negative or would only be minimally so.²² Even if states were suspicious and mistrustful of each other, there would be no perception of an immediate threat. States, herein, would accept the status quo and would not wish to radically alter it.²³ They would conceive their security in limited terms and therefore, to avoid least preferred outcomes and promote common interests they would coordinate and collaborate amongst themselves. International Regimes, according to the neo-liberals, played a direct role in reducing and ameliorating uncertainties. They produced incentives that cannot be produced otherwise. Through codification of principles, rules and procedures to govern international relations including the use of force, they kept an eye on arms acquisition and deployment. They also actively maintained mechanisms of dispute settlement. These measures helped lift the fog of suspicion, enable a more accurate reading of intentions of other states and prevent unintended breakout and escalation of tension and conflict. The neoliberal take on security essentially

²⁰Muthiah Algappa, "Rethinking Security: A Critical Review and Rethinking of the Debate" in Muthiah Algappa ed., 1998, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford University Press, California, Stanford, pp. 35-39.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid

²³ Ibid., pp. 54-56.

emphasized on a cumulative cooperation collective action and reciprocity on the break out of violence, which, they felt, by strengthening interdependence raised the costs of resorting to force or going to war.²⁴ Talking of security to be achieved together with the adversary and not against him, the Neoliberal institutionalists put forth a positive model of interstate security that hinged on 'live and let live' as against mutual destruction. Such a model, by providing an environment for socialization and learning, they perceived, contributed to the internalization of new understandings of self and the other. Such understandings, they felt, in the long term could help transform interests, contexts and power politics.²⁵

As is evident from above, neoliberalism subsuming elements of commercial liberalism presents a moderate critique to the neorealist logic of security. Keohane most passionately argued in favour of including institutions into the international system and stated that the relevance of material capabilities in explaining state behavior varies inversely with the degree of institutionalization. Power, to him, was much less relevant as a factor in explaining state behavior in areas where institutionalization was higher as compared to those places where institutionalization was low. Thus he held institutions to be as fundamental as capabilities were in explaining state behavior (Keohane, 1989).

This being said, another critique that challenged the neorealist logic on security more radically was put forth by the constructivists. According to the latter, there was nothing inevitable and immutable about the realist logic of anarchy that was responsible for causing the problem of survival in the very first place and had thereby necessitated a system of self help. Rather, according to them, state behavior in international relations was a product of a set of historically rooted intersubjectively understanding among the political units. A change in the intersubjective understanding could alleviate or transform the security problem. They further argued that material factors did not have any meaning in themselves; they derived it from shared understandings, state practices and ideational factors which in turn constituted the international

²⁴Muthiah Algappa, "Rethinking Security: A Critical Review and Rethinking of the Debate" in Muthiah Algappa ed. 1998, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford University Press, California, Stanford, pp. 54-56

²⁵ Ibid.

system.²⁶ Therefore, the international system was social and was composed of shared knowledge. The cultural-institutional context not only affected the incentives for state behavior but it also shaped identities and interests of states. This was because such identities were not something intrinsic but were socially contingent.²⁷ Further, state practices were informed by the structure which could be transformed by actions of capable and knowledgeable agents. This was because constructivists considered structure and agents to be as mutually constitutive. On the issue of change, the constructivists placed their hope on ideas and institutions (Wendt, 1992). As identities and interests changed, they felt, transformations were bound to come about in the area of international politics thereby increasing the possibility for peaceful change. Thus came the statement “Anarchy is what the states make of it” (Wendt, 1995). Seen from the constructivist perspective the causal logic of realism was not necessarily a consequence of anarchy or distribution of capabilities, but it, rather, flowed from a certain set of intersubjective understandings.²⁸ It was the process and not the material structure that had produced the present self-help system and therefore, if the intersubjective understandings could be changed the realist logic of anarchy could also be altered.²⁹ Survival and security were conditioned on the shared understandings among the society of states. The constructivists spoke of community security.³⁰ An arena in which ‘security’ was not considered as a scarce value, community security sought to provide a context in which each state had a direct interest in maintaining the security of the others. Force, under such conditions, automatically became illegitimate as an instrument of state policy.

²⁶ Muthiah Algappa, “Rethinking Security: A Critical Review and Rethinking of the Debate” in Muthiah Algappa ed., 1998, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford University Press, California, Stanford, pp.55-63.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

2.3 Common Fallacies of the Theoretical Frameworks: A Case for the Post-Colonial and Non-Traditional Security in a Post Cold War Post 9/11 World Order

Arising out of the laboratories of Cold War, the above mentioned theories have been crucial in making sense of the idea of security but with the end of Cold War as the world order took a turn, the common fallacies of such theoretical expositions came into the open. Ethnocentric in character and narrow in its outlook, almost all such theoretical constructs gave little space to the postcolonial other.³¹ Everything in relation to security was framed in the constricted binaries of the so called orderly and the secure inside and an anarchical outside. The Realist cognitive parameter, for instance, attempts to neither problematise subjectivity nor put any effort at historicizing conflicts across spaces. Instead it falls like a hood on all variations across time and space.³² Subjectivity, along with consciousness, are at best lost amidst the cacophony of power, its discourse on anarchy and security dilemma.³³ The neoliberals, also, provide little space to deal with the security issues that are typical to the Third World postcolonial. Subscribing to the same inside outside divide, they too, “add to the ahistorical justification of the present international order based on territoriality along with indulging in the shallow utopia of an international society based on the idea of selfhood and predicated upon the notion of eternal reversibility and change of ends.”³⁴ Constructivism did mark a point of departure but it too after a point, out of the fear of being left isolated, led itself into acknowledging the role of the standard positivistic methods and thereafter tragically reifying the fateful binaries of the orderly inside and the expedient and contingent outside.³⁵

Security, however, in a post cold war world particularly after the 9/11 terrorist onslaught, a phenomenon that is taken to be as the watershed in International Relations, saw its dimensions change. While the conventional sources of insecurities remained, what added on to the list was a sea of non conventional security threats ranging from economic, political, social to environmental. Calls for redefinition were not uncommon during the 1970s, but the case for inclusion of such new dimensions into the concept of security came to be argued vigorously only

³¹Shibashis Chatterjee, 2014, “Western Theories and the Non Western World: Search for Relevance”, *South Asian Journal*, vol. 21(1&2), pp.1-19.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

with the elimination of the superpower conflict. The complexity of the new world order with the forces of globalization unleashed led to the popping up of novel issues. The reified binaries of the inside and the outside came to be questioned. The fact that the domestic was an arena of peace, order and security as against the international, no longer seemed to hold absolute credence. The weaknesses of the new modern nation states, their inability to deal with issues at home, their failure in the task of nation building; globalization and its negative effect on state autonomy, national, cultural and civilisational values, the rise of ethno national conflicts, issues of climate change, population explosion, religious extremism, terrorism and its links with illicit drug, human and small arms trafficking networks and the rise in criminal activities further made it necessary to operationalise a thorough revision of the conceptual rigors of security. The conventional theoretical frameworks were not out of use. Their relevance remained. The conventional security threats from state actors, also did not retire out of existence. Despite this, however, broadening the security understanding to include pressing issue areas like economic security; environmental security; energy security and human security became indispensable. Denying access to the markets, environmental degradation and climate change causing violent conflicts among states, barring the latter from reaching energy resources held crucial for its growth, terrorism; ethnic cleansing; genocide; torture; gross human rights violations arising out of state sponsored violence in the domestic arena or broadening criminal and trafficking networks; poverty; diseases; inflows of refugees resulting from either climate change or a civil wars have all come to be subsumed under the concept of security.

The threats of the 21st century have blurred the cleaves of territoriality and has threaded the security of the body or the person, security of the society and security of the state into a single string. This has led to unbound complexity. Further, the inclusion of non state actors has made the idea of security even more cumbersome and problematic. Dealing with such issues on a competitive and self help basis is almost impossible. While the collective security system may work to deal with the conventional security threats, essentially military in nature, coming from state actors by way of emphasizing on across-the-board-application of norms and rules that may seek to strike a balance between the preservation of national interest and interest of the community of states but those threats that arise from the non state actors and non conventional sources have to be dealt using cooperative security strategies. The imperatives of globalization,

the fluidity of the concept of security and the interdependence, the world is characterized by, has made it indispensable for states to coordinate. Interests between states undoubtedly clash but common grounds for cooperation have been found. It must be stated that under such circumstances, no single theory, exclusive of the other, can provide a wholesome insight into the broadened idea of security. Instead a continuum of systems developed out of the already mentioned theoretical frameworks proves helpful today.³⁶ Along with that a cognitive space has to be left for non conventional security threats and the idea of security that is peculiar and exclusive to the postcolonial. The critical perspectives that sees security as emancipation is extremely relevant in the present times. Emphasizing on human security and integrating it with the state security is where the catch lies. New regionalism encompassing all factors of security and injecting a kind of multidimensionality and at times pushing the regions beyond the politico-security axes to include economic, environmental and cultural aspects that has powerful bearing is an example. Such 'regional security complexes' has been crucial in not only institutionalizing a norm based order binding states in rules that would not allow them to use war as a means of state policy thus taking care of the conventional and military aspects of security, but it has also been able to shore up the will to cooperate and coordinate on the part of states to deal with security threats of non conventional nature especially those that defy boundaries of territorial political units - for example terrorism, proliferation WMDs, criminal and drug trafficking networks, fundamentalism etc.³⁷

2.4 Setting a Theoretical Perspective for understanding Central Asian Security: A Case for a Multi Theoretical and a Synthetic Approach

Central Asia presents us with the classical example of a place where this problematic and widened dimension of security can be seen. The end of Cold War fundamentally altered the geopolitics of Eurasia. From an area seen as 'won' and 'kept', it, after years, had become accessible to other powers. The political units within this Mac Kinder-ian pivot land had an independent say. The region's proximity to Russia did not throttle the reach of other states who

³⁶Muthiah Algappa, "Rethinking Security: A Critical Review and Rethinking of the Debate" in Muthiah Algappa ed., 1998, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford University Press, California, Stanford, pp.54-55.

³⁷Last Accessed on 12.04.2019, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4621805>

wanted to carve out their own strategic space in the region. They moved in to toy with the vacuum so as to maintain an influence and exploit the natural resources the region had to offer. This added dynamism to the core of this peripheral unit of world politics. Competition was in sight between the major power actors but here, too, the latter remained cautious owing to the troublesome political terrain that the region had inherited from its superpower predecessor. Ethnic conflicts, faltering economic conditions, authoritarian state structures, records of human rights violations against minorities, rising religious fundamentalism, poverty, drug trafficking and criminal networks and political anarchy made the stakeholders seek no more than a limited involvement particularly in areas of energy, pipeline infrastructures and commerce. In the years that immediately came to follow the obliteration of the Soviet Union a realist- neorealist approach was the chief means used to make sense of the strategic scenario prevailing in Central Eurasia. It formed the overarching logic.

However, such an overarching logic came to be questioned with the 9/11 terrorist attack that reduced the twin towers, a symbol of U.S. hegemony- the so called Pax Americana into ashes. Security in the region that was fathomed in zero sum terms with the focus being on defending against conventional military threats coming from states came to be challenged. The grammars of the prevailing narrative on security – of the want to seek security and avoid harm- being too simplistic, had to be changed. The need was dire more so in case of Central Asia as the region was close to Afghanistan, a country that was war hardened, Talibanised and the spring of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism and the lynchpin of world's drug production and drug trade. The onslaught of September 2011 on the American homeland, the challenge that was posed to its superiority came to be avenged with USA leading out an all-out invasion in Afghanistan. The Taliban regime was pushed out of power and with that began the War on Terror effort in Afghanistan. Such a happening altered the strategic terrain of the Central Asia. In addition to being contested, security became much more expansive, fluid and an uncertain concept. Deterrence and diffidence were no longer seen as the catchwords in the Central Asian security discourse. Post 9/11, it emerged as a launch pad in USA's anti terrorist actions in Afghanistan, the salience of this Eurasian pivot changed for the world at large. The traditional sources of insecurity remained as the region was still the locus of great power competition – a core arena, albeit in the peripheries, of unmitigated rivalry between the dominating powers vying for

influence, power, hegemony and profits – but the non traditional sources of insecurity made a thumping entry changing the narratives and the ground rules. Traditional military means were used by the states to achieve security but the state, as a political unit, no longer seemed to be the container of security. The sever between the orderly domestic and a chaotic international was blurred particularly with the entry of terrorism as the chief security threat in the region. The idea of sovereign territoriality and the labels of internal and external threat were rendered useless. The insecurity processes at work in Central Asia took a transnational or even global turn leading to a manifold increase in its expansiveness. A plethora of issues came to posit the security landscape in Central Asia. Environmental threats and climate change, the situation of forced migrants and refugees, nuclear instability, interstate security dilemma, the rise of the power clout of the religious fundamentalists in the domestic political structures of the Central Asian states that had the capability of denting into the region’s stability particularly owing to its geographical closeness to Afghanistan, trade in small arms, drugs and humans, their links to the terrorist networks crisscrossing the region, concerns on endemic human security issues represented by the widespread poverty, alienation, experiences of women in conflict zones, human rights violations targeting the minorities, radicalization of the youth ethnic tensions gave rise to a complex scenario.³⁸ These interconnected arrays of concerns were of such nature that individual handling was almost impossible and at the same time no state could neglect it. Thus it was not without reason that security as an insecurity discourse came to dominate the strategic framework in the region.³⁹ Security, here, was not merely about sanitizing the borders from the threats to integrity the political units as rational and self interested actors could pose or safeguarding the values that were held significant. Security, here, had to be conceived in wholesome terms. The erstwhile Cold War leitmotif of the take on security – “Better orderly error than complex truth” - was no longer applicable. The exclusivity of the immobile metanarratives had to be done away with in order to understand the security situation in Central Asia. Instead, such a conceptual framework was needed to be constructed that would be informed by the continuous transformations in global life and the resulting complexities rising thereof. A multi-theoretical layered and a synthetic

³⁸ Last Accessed on 13.04.1019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

³⁹ Last Accessed on 13.04.1019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

approach kept to make sense of the security situation since no single existing theory can adequately capture and generalize about all of reality, serves the purpose.⁴⁰

The kind of threats the region faces precludes every possibility of dealing with the issues on an individual level. It is, therefore, that we see interdependent pluralist security complexes (Barry Buzan, 1994) that helps in binding the stakeholders – both regional and extra-regional. The interactions happen in a rule based ways ensuring stability and prosperity and a sense of security in the region. In Central Asia, as of today, three security complex circles thrive. The first includes all the Central Asian states plus Afghanistan, the second has Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, India and Turkey to some extent and the third, finally, includes USA and the European Union. These circles are finally subjected to the involvement of several international intergovernmental structures that have an overlapping nature. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the NATO, the CSTO, the CIS, the EAEU and the SCO are to name them. Despite the absence of an international authority managing relations, it has been due to the recognition of common interests that organizations work together in a sort of consortium to deal with the common threats emerging from a volatile Afghanistan, terrorism, religious fundamentalism, drug and small arms trafficking, radicalization of the youth, ethnic instability etc. and work towards the common goals of obtaining better living standards, win-win trade terms, development of common infrastructures in form of energy pipelines, roadways, waterways and highways to encourage exchanges between states and their peoples, the resolution of conflicts through peaceful means, energy security, sustainable environmental measures, a move away from life threatening diseases etc. The neoliberal take on security can be the best framework to make sense of such cooperative streaks in spite of the fact that the region continues to remain an arena for rivalries between major powers to be played out.

Anarchy is the ordering principle for the geopolitics of the region. The realist-neorealist understanding may prove particularly helpful in understanding the competition between states to access the best in the region cancelling out on the other's influence. The uneasiness that China and Russia had come to face with USA's presence in the region especially after 9/11, the

⁴⁰Muthiah Algappa, "Rethinking Security: A Critical Review and Rethinking of the Debate" in Muthiah Algappa ed., 1998, *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, Stanford University Press, California, Stanford, pp 61-63.

competitive streak in the India-China relationship in Central Asia, the very fact that despite being in security complexes the state actors that compose the region, often, hold diametrically opposing positions and pursue mutually exclusive policies can be cited as examples that proves the salience of the neorealist perspective on security in understanding the geopolitics of Central Asia. The reality of a security vacuum arising after the fall of the Soviet Union- the traditional keeper of the region, the dynamics of the New Great Game that stoked off in an accelerated speed especially after the 9/11 incident, the scramble among the stakeholders for access to energy all can be summarized in the best possible way from a realist neorealist point of view.

Further the idea of a community security can be particularly helpful in dealing with the insecurities rising from the issues of identity and interests that are embedded in cultural context. Apart from this, the concept of the postcolonial would also be indispensable to understand the chaos that resides within the 'domestic' of the Central Asian states, the fact that the external security has direct bearing on the internal security structure of the republics and the conceptual intricacies of the non-traditional security. It is in this respect that security in Central Asia should be seen as resilience as against control for it is only then can it absorb the changes and adapt to the difficult and complex conditions the nontraditional security threats create in the region. Further it is only by following such a modus operandi that security will become multidirectional and wholesome as against keeping itself hinged to merely the idea of survival.

All such theoretical frameworks have to be placed on a continuum to understand the totality of Central Asian security situation and it is only then policy multidimensional, layered and uniform in all aspects can be formulated.

2.5 Conclusions

Now that USA's combatant forces have withdrawn from Afghanistan, the debates on the security vacuum, symptomatic to those that happened in the days post the disintegration of the Soviet Union, has been renewed. The talks on the New Great Game being played out in the region, that in turn, is infested with terrorism, drug, human and small arms trafficking networks, environmental challenges, etc getting rampant, have been renewed. To understand these, a wholesome approach is indispensable. It is only, thereafter, that any policy formulation for the

Eurasian Pivot is possible. As has already been stated a balanced multi theoretical approach will be helpful in this regard. The chapter seeks to set forth a theoretical vantage point from where security situation in Central Asia needs to be seen. Such an exercise is seen to be of fundamental importance to produce answers to the questions relating to the birth of the security vacuum in the very first place, its role in attracting the great powers into its grand chessboard, their overtures in dealing with the non-traditional security threats along with tackling the conventional sources of threats and how has such a security vacuum come to place itself after the complete U.S. drawdown (both combatant and the non combatant ones) in Afghanistan. The next chapter holding the theoretical perspective that has already been articulated tries to make an in depth analysis of the security situation in Central Eurasia in the first place and concomitantly tries to explore the dimensions of the security vacuum and the bearing it has on the region as well as the stakeholders in it.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERSTANDING THE SECURITY SITUATION IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA

Now that the theoretical perspective is set studying the security situation in Central Asia becomes necessitous.

3.1 Examining the Idea of Security Vacuum

Always at the core of imperial attention, Central Asia's geostrategic salience, since historical times, has laid in its location amidst world's greatest of civilizations. From being the trunnion of the ancient Mongol Empire, that bestraddled two of the world's greatest continents- Europe and Asia, to being the bone of contention between the then great powers Russia and Britain in their Grand Old Great Game back in the early half of the 20th century, Central Asia had seen it all. Though it did escape international attention and authority over it was left uncontested for over a period of about 80 years, with it coming under the suzerainty of the Soviet Union post the *Bolshevik Revolution*, the end of the Cold War, changed such realities. With Soviet Union extirpating out of existence, a security vacuum developed fast in the region. Something that had never been held as possible had happened. Not only had the Cold War and the bipolar international structure slumped down on its knees, one of the contending superpowers, the sprawling Soviet Union had flickered off. Out of its ashes alighted a number of states. Russia was the former's major successor but there were several other states that had been born. Ukraine, Georgia, Belorussia and Azerbaijan formed the Caucasus and in what Mac Kinder called the Heartland i.e. the Central Eurasia grew five republics that had already been named and demarcated since the Soviet era- Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Ethnically diverse, owing to the Russian imperialism and Stalin's mass deportations, the region was a classic problematic.¹ Also, that it was a landlocked cultural entrepot for more than a millennia bounded by world's greatest civilizations and states- Iran and

¹ Rashid Ahmad, (Winter,2000/2001), The New Struggle in Central Asia:A Primer for the Baffled, *World Policy Journal*, vol.17, no. 4, pp. 33-45.

Afghanistan in the south, China to the east and Russia to the north and west- and was linked to all of them by the historical Silk Road that carried not only goods wares and people but also transmitted ideas philosophies and religion made it a cosmos of contention in International Relations.

Independence to the communist elites of the Central Asian states was not a matter of happiness. They instead were horrified at the turn of events. While the people in the region welcomed the liberation and the de-cloaking of the Central Eurasia from the Moscow-centered oppressive Communist Rule, their leaders dreaded this event. Most of the latter, brought up in a Soviet system, could not even speak their national language properly. Their privileges and promotions depended on Moscow, their security sat on the Soviet military, and their economy ran on the raw materials export they made to the Soviet hinterland and their social services like medical facilities, schools etc wheeled on the regular Soviet aid. Further, they found themselves unable to deal with the issues of inflation, economic development, unemployment, foreign policy, national security and most importantly nation building. The cropping up of ideas like political freedom, democracy and Islam, that were once prohibited, made the leaders palpitate. Confusion prevailed at large. The idea of Western style democracy being advocated by the Russian liberals, proposals of a unified Turkic state reaching from China to Turkey, demands made by the ultranationalists to repatriate all the ethnic Russians back home, the popping up of the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in almost all of the 5 republics, the alarming ethnic clashes that had already begun between the various groups like the Russians against the Kazakhs, the Tajiks against the Armenians, The Uzbeks against the Meskhetian Turks and finally the Islamic militants against the Uzbek President Islam Karimov raised intense concerns.² On the issue of nation-building, there were a host of models grabbing attention which far from solving issues at hand, added to the befuddlement of the post-Soviet transition.

However, despite such exigencies, the people, on the other hand, were hopeful of the ex-communist Central Asian political and bureaucratic elites who, notwithstanding all their fears and horrors of separation from the mother state, had successfully transformed themselves into the

² Rashid Ahmad, (Winter,2000/2001), The New Struggle in Central Asia: A Primer for the Baffled, *World Policy Journal*, vol.17, no. 4, pp. 33-45.

indigenous national elite.³ Accordingly, in the initial years, there were some attempts made by the post-communist leaders to stand up to address the public expectations by dealing with the problems systematically. Attempts to create a Central Asian common market, joint defense plans and other initiatives to bring about greater unity in the region to deal with the common threats and make the most out of the common benefits of cooperation were all part of that.⁴ But, before it could be long enough, such attempts started foundering on the grounds of ambitions jealousies and megalomania of the respective leaders. As clinging on to power became the sole aim of the leaders, the internal problems that could have been solved following a cooperative effort started bloating in size. With Russia withdrawing its troops (partially) from the region leaving the weak, incapable and fledgling local armies alone to deal with a host of security problems both traditional and non-traditional, the region was facing as a whole, the former demanding international prices for the exports it made to the Central Asian Republics while pressurizing the latter to sell raw materials at the Soviet-era prices and the stoppage of all loans and aid that were being made to the latter, immense pressure seemed to penetrate countries' both economic and national security architecture.⁵ Demands of the repayment of the past debts in no time by the Russian authorities, finally, resulted in rapid economic decline in all of the Central Asian Republics.⁶ The result was snowballing of the political problems that had already been there. Furthermore, the issues of border demarcation, uncontrolled border crossings, territorial claims coming from the neighbouring powers and the great powers in the region i.e. China and Russia, the drug, illegal weapons trafficking networks crisscrossing with the terrorist movements and the spillovers from a Talibanised Afghanistan (1990s) wreaked havoc on the fragile status quo of the region. The so called multi-vectored policy attitude on the part of the republics in the external environment added on to the muddle. Fears that the transition process would break down under the pressure and the ethnic cauldron will overwhelm its brim leading to Eurasia becoming an expansive arc of instability and crises loomed large on mindsets all throughout the 1990s. Nevertheless, such a course of happening never actualized. The 'Eurasian Balkans' (Zbigniew Brezezinski, 1997) faltered but never fell. Their state-building activities were faulty but efficient

³Pinar Akcali, "Nation-State Building in Central Asia: A Lost Case" in M.P.Amineh, H. Houweling eds., 2005, *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands, pp. 95-115.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., pp. 54-61

enough to keep them working as viable political units. Their closeness to Russia, did not mean that they were pawns of the latter's policy. In fact, notwithstanding the initial hesitation, once the nation building process took to its feet, Soviet-era state symbols were rejected in favour of images that reflected national symbols. New flags emblems, anthems, postage stamps and bank notes were inducted in. Extensive renaming of streets and cities took place reviving pre-Soviet titles and institutions. These acts were symbolic whereby they sought to assert their political autonomy. Unlike the era of the Grand Old Great Game, the Central Asia, as has been mentioned earlier, was no longer a mute spectator for to a large extent they decided their own fates by choosing as to whom they would go along. The region, therefore, became an uncharted battlefield open to contestation. Since the Soviet Union had withdrawn itself into the Russian core, Central Asia, devoid of its traditional chaperone, was left behind with a power void. The early security systems whose part Central Asia was as a territorial unit of the erstwhile superpower was in tatters but nothing compared to that had arisen to take its place. Neither was there a power that could take Soviet Union's place in the region assuring security to the region and its stakeholders. Therefore, a security vacuum was in place which in turn attracted great power attention. The security impotency of the states of the region post their independence was another important factor in the development of the vacuum in the very first place. The absence of a centralizing authority keeping both the control and the peace brought in other actors, interested deeply in cutting out for themselves their respective strategic space, in the region. Further, the untapped natural resources added a novel dimension to the rivalry in the same. The structural logic of the region was embedded in anarchy and therefore, following the exposition of the neorealists, the states posturing themselves as stakeholders in the region had little option than not pursuing more and more of power in zero sum terms. The rivalry happened because the security dilemma structurally characterized the region; because power was seen as a function of security; because more power was perceived to bring about more of security that would not have come in any way otherwise. The states, therefore, with a view to attain more power and thereby more security added on to the structural insecurities in the region. The great power stakeholders in the region apart from Russia i.e. China and the USA, taking advantage of the security vacuum in the region, did make dive in efforts soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union but their involvements remained extremely limited. This, in turn, played its part in intensifying the security vacuum stoking fears of instability and impending clashes among the state actors in the

region. Rivalries exalted and thus came the initial claims of the world being on the verge of seeing a New Great Game in the Eurasian Pivot. The competition that implied the New Great Game was not for complete control but for control over selective issue areas. The aim was to attain hegemony but such a desire had strings attached to it. None were ready to bear the strategic burdens that involvement in a region as paradoxical as Central Asia was but they, at the same time were deeply interested in reaping of the benefits the region held. Such an attitude of non-committal was also because Central Asia was no longer the only 'Core' in international relations control over which would ensure an automatic domination of the 'World Island' as was stated by Sir Halford Mac Kinder. Instead there were several core-like regions that attracted attentions of the Great Powers. The structural logic of a globalized multipolar deeply fragmented post-cold war world also was a reason of the security vacuum in the region. The inability of the actors to attain a credible consensus on the issue of dealing with the threats lurking in the post-Soviet Central Eurasian space led to each looking to protect their interest in the narrowest of terms possible.

3.2 External Powers in Central Asia in 1990s

3.2.1 United States of America

USA, albeit, moved into the region changing the latter's geostrategic mosaic but owing to the lack of vital interests, the former's heed remained tied to the energy resources the Caspian was housing and to keep a Russian and an Iranian rise, here, at bay. With the US government's Energy Intelligence Administration estimating that the proven oil reserves in the region ranged between 17 and 33 billion barrels, United States decision makers seemed eager in exploring the region so as to diversify its oil source from chiefly of the middle east but such interests were not formidable enough to motivate it to go in for a complete involvement in the region.⁷ Desires were undoubtedly there to lead and keep the region under its control but they were not formidable enough to call for any strong involvement. Therefore, superficially, though Washington, along with the international community at large, took part in creating a hype about the potential capability of the region as a geopolitical pivot, it, in reality, spent a long time figuring out as to what role these newly formed republics should be assigned in the international

⁷Rajan Menon, 2003, "The New Great Game in Central Asia", *Survival*, vol. 45, no.2, pp. 187-204.

relations, that, following the end of Cold War, had become extremely volatile. On the surface, therefore, the U.S. policymakers were quick in sending diplomatic representation to all the Central Asian republics setting up full embassies, making a number of official visits and encouraging the American oil companies in joining the multinational oil consortia emerging in and around the Caspian Basin, including increasing trade with the region, it, however, amidst all this, kept the political and military ties at a low key.⁸ The American aid to the region was also pitiful. Spread across a few dozens of categories, the amount was less than 3 billion dollars that was hardly enough for carrying out the pining tasks of economic political and social restructuring.⁹ U.S. was also harsh in shaping the priorities of the intergovernmental organisations starting from International Monetary Fund to the World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Asian Development Bank (ADB).¹⁰

Removing the nuclear armaments of the erstwhile superpower from the region was a concern to prevent them from being misused amidst the fluidity and barring a Russian heavy-handedness in Central Asia by promoting the idea of constructing multiple pipelines for the export of Caspian Oil remained a major area of interest. That, however, could not be formidable enough to ensure USA's committed involvement in the region. The American determination to avoid quagmires and its predilection for limited involvement and quick exits in cases of contingencies in order to avoid strategic burdens was strong as a variable deciding policy overtures.¹¹ In contrast to such an attitude of measured and selective interest, the Central Asian states, on the other hand, were eager to build meaningful partnerships with USA purely with a view to attain global recognition and prestige as viable and significant actors in international politics. But being a one-sided effort, the achievements attained remained grossly limited.

3.2.2 European Union (E.U.)

The European Union was, in spite of the major points of difference, closely aligned itself to the position of that of USA. Its interest, in the region, laid in promoting trade relations, gaining access to the energy resources and checking a resurgence of Russia by promoting the

⁸Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., pp. 67-73.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹Rajan Menon, 2003, "The New Great Game in Central Asia", *Survival*, vol. 45, no.2, pp. 187-204.

idea of alternative pipeline routes. The OSCE (The Organization of Security Cooperation in Europe) was built up to bring the region close to E.U. but since it purely worked on soft power, by setting examples of good international behavior, its ability to create a stir remained extremely limited. Apart from these, it ,also, as a matter of policy, regularly, made efforts at sailing forth the ideas of democratization and checking human rights violation in the region but when it came to aiding the latter in dealing with the non-traditional security threats and the enormous developmental problems it steered clear of any involvement whatsoever.

3.2.3 China

China was deeply interested in the region. Unlike USA, it had vital interests that had to be safeguarded in the region, now that it was no longer under the shrouds of the erstwhile superpower's rule. Sharing borders with three of the five Central Asian Republics namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, China was prompt in embracing these states into its fold, soon after their independence, by developing committed bilateral relations with each of them. Within a period of merely 12 days of independence, it signed, with the region, scores of bilateral agreements ranging from issues on trade, infrastructure and energy to security. Apart from these, direct personal linkages were established with the each of the Central Asian presidents by the Chinese leaders. The message that such actions tried to send off was loud and clear. It was about China's intense interest in establishing committed relations with the states of the region based on principle of mutual respect, transparency and cooperation so as to reap the common benefits that would not be attained otherwise. China's rising growth rates at the beginning of the 1990s, and its increasing dependence on the Middle Eastern oil supplies made it put strong efforts in establishing sustainable channels in each of the Central Asian states in order to gain access to the energy basket of the Caspian and also establish proper plans to transport it to the Chinese homeland. This apart, China was also interested in keeping Central Asia as a market for its flourishing manufacturing sector. Therefore, it was to this end that a number of agreements were signed. Steps were also taken to satiate the curiosity of the Central Asian leaders in the Chinese growth. The Chinese capital was invested in the untapped and shoddy markets of these republics to catalyse growth and inject dynamism into their then stagnant economies. Investments in infrastructure development were also made by the Chinese government with a view to secure several long term interests in the region. Finally, scopes of cooperation were also explored with

rapt interest in the area of security. The independence of the Central Asian States led to the demand for greater autonomy by the Uighurs and the other Turkic muslim minorities living in the Xinjiang province.¹² There was a heavy increase in the terrorist activities in China by the pro-separatist forces and the terrorist elements of the Uighurs who received a lot of support from the Central Asian soil particularly from that of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The porous border regions helped the former in using the Central Asian states as a corridor to reach Afghanistan and then back. These were threats that had precipitated following the end of the Soviet era and therefore, attempts were made by the Chinese decision makers to shore up cooperation in mitigating them. Along with these, attempts were also made to resolve the border disputes China had with the states of the region. The Shanghai Five, which was born as means of operationalising the confidence building measures, was helpful in aiding the former deal with the myriad issues of security cooperation.

Having said so, it must also be mentioned that though China had concrete concerns in the region that had to be addressed on a priority basis, it, in the 1990s was not as prepared as Moscow was in asserting itself in the region for they accepted, at least, for the time being, that Central Asia was a prize of the Russians, a part of the Russian sphere of influence.¹³ Furthermore, the region's internal problems relating to ethnic conflict, identity conflict, rise of religious extremism, environmental crises and its being a part of the terrorist drug and small arms trafficking networks made China to only work towards attaining the long term interests and circumvent all the short security threats in the region.¹⁴ Such an approach, much like that of USA's, had a selective, tactful and an evasive underpinning.

3.2.4 Russia

Russia, post its formation, quickly demonstrated that it was heir to the erstwhile superpower. Mikhail Gorbachev asserted this by occupying the apartment and the Kremlin office which symbolically meant that such a mindset would shape Russian actions and sensibilities in the post –Soviet space. It was clear that the former would take leadership and wrest the position

¹² Martha Brill Olcott, 2005, *Central Asia's Second Chance, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, Washington D.C., pp. 61-66.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

of dominance in the vast territories that had once formed its empire for, after all, they were critical to maintaining Russia's Great Power status. The peaceful dissolution of USSR was part of the price that Russia's new leaders paid for taking control of Kremlin. It was, however, to maximize the value of their prize that an instrument was sought to allow easy control of the former Soviet Republics. CIS was initially thought to be serving this end. Though the body had come up to ensure a peaceful dissolution of the USSR, Russia hoped to turn it into something more. Therefore, it wasn't without reason that the former urged for the creation of a host of coordinating bodies in all of which they ensured that they had weighted votes. The aim behind doing so was to ensure that Russia's voice and national interest prevailed over the efforts of the new neighbours (who were slowly making attempts at defining and advancing their own national interests in an independent manner). However, such a task was not easy for none of the post-Soviet CIS member states were ready to give away their national sovereignty. This was not only true of states like Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan but was also the case for the Central Eurasian republics. Presidents of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were in conspicuous opposition. Kazakhstan's the then President Nursultan Nazarbayev was in favour of the formation of a Euro-Asian Union replacing the CIS where the smaller post-Soviet states were far from being equal partners. Thus the CIS could never become a tool of effective domination by the Russians. The Customs Union whose part three of the Central Asian states were by 1999 was also hardly a success in being able to project Russia as the predominant power in the region. Further, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, also, remained starkly impotent in meeting the security needs of Central Eurasia. Boggled down by the Chechen muddle, Russia, in spite of its intentions to keep its near neighbourhood under its thumb, was unable to do much to help these states deal with their internal security concerns.

Apart from funneling arms to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan to prevent a Taliban rise so that the repercussions of the same were not felt in Central Asia, it in the 1990s could do nothing more. Such an effort, too, fell to its knees as the Central Asia's eastern war-weary South Asian neighbour came under the Taliban-sway. Though Russia did try to keep control of the region by making use of other non-institutional levers like encasing on the dependence of the post-Soviet Central Asian states on the Russian economy, the presence of a sizeable Russian population in the all of the latter states, control of the energy supplies and the Soviet-era oil and

gas pipelines along with the limited Russian military presence in the region, none of that could ensure it the role of that of a keeper, a hegemon that it, previously, used to enjoy. Further its involvement was, to a large extent, selective. Russia was, in no way, capable of dealing with the problems the region was facing. In the 1990s, with a faltering economy and limping state transition process, it could not afford to come to the aid of the Central Asian states.

3.2.5 Iran and Turkey

The sub regional smaller powers, particularly Turkey and Iran, much like the former ones, came into the Eurasian 'pivot' with a view to wrest for themselves their historic advantage and expand their geopolitical outreach by exerting disproportionate influence on the newly independent states. Their hopes were founded on an exaggerated confidence on the influence that these states could exert and the benefits that such an influence might bring about but the reality was completely different. The narrow aims that motivated Turkey and Iran's involvement only accentuated the dynamics of the security vacuum on which the region posited and the rivalries that the vacuum had stoked off among the stakeholders.

The occasional toying of Turkey by the West particularly U.S.A in the initial days following their liberation led to a general degradation of the former's strategic position in the region. Iran, on the other hand, was seen with immense paranoia. Its capability to spread its fundamentalist religious ideas was perceived as a threat by the Central Asian leaders. In reality, however, there is little evidence of Tehran wanting to start a campaign of Islamisation in Central Asia. It, in the 1990s or even later was driven by realism. Following a policy that was a balanced concoction of defensive caution and limited containment of the U.S. on its borders, it was often seen aligning itself with Russia and China in lieu of their common interests in the region.

3.3 Vacuous Central Asia owing to limited Engagement

It was owing to the limited involvement of the stakeholders to attain their national interests based on short term and ad hoc means, the regional multilateral organisations formed by the former were unable to fill in the vacuum. Economic and security multilateral regional cooperation in the 1990s remained, at best, rhetorical and on paper. Further the lack of cooperation and unity among the Central Asian Republics and the weakness of the state structure

in general made regional coordination through multilateral ventures extremely difficult adding on to the intensity of the security vacuum.

3.4 Central Asia in Post 9/11 Period: A Changing Geopolitical Mosaic

3.4.1 United States of America : Refurbished Interests

The ushering in of the new millennia post the end of Cold War brought in new threats. It was just when Central Asia was coming to terms with its new status of no longer being a part of the erstwhile Soviet Union, the 9/11 incident happened that almost overnight changed the geopolitical and geostrategic salience of the region. The policymakers who had termed the Central Eurasia as merely peripheral to world politics found themselves awaking to this new reality where the latter once again had become the pivot. The inability of Afghanistan's Taliban regime to oblige the Bush government by giving in to the demands imposed on it soon after the terrorist attack precipitated an America led intervention in Afghanistan. The War on Terror, an injunction that arose at best as a writer's flourish, became a reality and as this happened Central Asia being on the frontline became a decisive theatre. Its aid in the anti-terror operations became indispensable. Thus shaking off the initial prevarication characterizing its approach, USA made a thumping entry. It was no longer the interested bystander like it was in the 1990s. The rapidity of such a happening transformed the internal tectonics of Central Asia and in U.S. foreign policy, it made sail from being in the margins to the centre. America's move into the region redrew the geopolitical map of Central Asia. The undemocratic and chaotic backwardness of the Central Asian states, that were grossly dissimilar from each other, no longer pricked the U.S policy makers, now that they had finally realized the strategic price the region held in their effort in bringing the perpetrators of the 9/11 attack to justice.

The location of the region was such that operations could be carried out in every direction: the greater Middle East- covering stretches from Turkey to Afghanistan, East Asia, South Asia, and Europe and even to a certain extent in North Africa. Thus within months of the war effort in Afghanistan, America opened military bases in four of the five Central Asian states and started projecting itself as an active geostrategic player in the region with both the will and undoubtedly, the capacity to exercise power and influence both in and beyond what was considered to be its

area of interest. Several security agreements were signed which, in the first place, allowed USA to build military infrastructure in Khanabad in Uzbekistan where elements of 10th Mountain Division were deployed, and thereafter, take Kyrgyzstan's Manas Airbase where F-15E and FA-18 tactical aircrafts were kept. Tajikistan's Dushanbe airport and Turkmenistan's territory, on one hand, together, provided the facility of refuelling to the coalition forces' aircrafts and Kazakhstan, on the other, allowed USA to develop a transit centre for the forces in duty in Afghanistan. Along with these, plans were also underway to train and equip local militaries and intelligence agencies throughout the region implying that U.S. involvement would be long and engrossing. As a means to carry out the anti-terror operations devoid of breaks, USA, not only secured cooperation in areas indispensable for performing operations in Afghanistan but it also worked towards intelligence input sharing and other steps that were required to deal with the terrorist spill offs in Central Asia.

Being aware of the formidable role the criminal networks in drug and weapons trafficking played in financing terrorist attacks, USA undertook steps, both formal and informal, to nab the channels flowing out of Afghanistan that undoubtedly had intense impacts on the delicate balance on which Central Asia as a region sat for, after all, it had ethnically and a religiously diverse population that was ruled by patrimonial authoritarian state structures that drew their vitality from conspicuously corrupt and insensitive regimes based on personal power. Save for Kazakhstan that had recorded considerable economic growth and hikes in living standards, most of the other states in the region had pining issues ranging from low development rates, inflation, rise of extremist ideology to high rates of migration from the rural to the urban areas especially by the discontented youth in search of a better life. Fergana Valley in Central Asia was and continues to remain the most problematic among all the sub-regions. Such factors were formidable enough to fuel the possibilities of a spill-over of the contingencies that Afghanistan was facing given that the dynamics of the former were enjoined with that of Central Asia. This, if happened, US knew, would lead to widespread instability that, in turn, would have extreme repercussions for its interests in all the adjoining areas.

Therefore, apart from shoring up cooperation from the Central Asian Republics on the issue of its anti-terror enterprise, USA made it a point to squeeze in some space to make the ruling regimes in the region bring about some reform in areas of both economy and politics so as

to keep extremism's root causes at a distance. However its success in this particular area remains extremely constricted. Owing to the distinctly different native political ethos, U.S. could not have an overarching role in moulding and modelling internal politics of Central Asia. While War on Terror was the chief reason that brought U.S.A. sweeping into the region jerking of the initial hesitation, the objective of gaining a solid access to the Caspian hydrocarbon basket – both natural gas and oil and building alternative pipeline routes so as to reduce the region's dependence on Russia and at the same time axe on the latter's de facto monopoly that it enjoyed as an advantage of the asymmetric relations that it had with the region, much of which banked on the common Soviet history that tangled their fates to a single string. (The Baku Tbilisi Ceyhan pipeline was promoted by USA to lessen Russia's control over the pipelines and energy transportation.) It has also been interested in the Central Asian market which is why one could see a clear spurt in the commercial activities between USA and the region. Investments in infrastructure and economic development of the region were perceived as an imperative for reinforcing USA's presence in the region. It was, therefore, not without reason that the U.S. multinational companies dived in with their capital as the Eurasian pivot, inspite of it several structural pitfalls, solely due to its strategic location amidst the crosscurrents of world's greatest civilizations and adjacent to Afghanistan, became a central piece in America's War on Terror puzzle.

3.4.2 European Union : Evolving Interest

E.U.'s interest in Central Asia's stability and security increased many times over post the 9/11 incident. This was because the region, after all, bordered its target states involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy and Black Sea Synergy Initiative. Thus the consequences of terrorism, extremism, drug and illegal weapons trafficking affecting Central Asia would have immense impact on EU's security. Further three of the Central Asian states were crucial in carrying forth the War on Terror effort. Also the hydrocarbon supply that E.U got from region was crucial to its energy security. It was, therefore, not without a reason that the European Union started adopting security focused projects in the region. Central Asia Drug Program (CADP) and the Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) can be cited as examples. The security approach, in order to be wholesome, required proper policies to induce economic prosperity in these states. To fulfill this objective not only was the OSCE used extensively, several projects

focusing on the economic, social, technical and welfare issues were adopted. The Technical Assistance to Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA), Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), the European Education Initiative and the e-silk-highway are worth mentioning. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation and dialogues with the other regional organisations like the SCO, the CSTO, OSCE and EURASEC has also been crucial in E.U.'s involvement in the region.

3.4.3 Russia: Its Newfound Assertiveness

The moving in of USA into the 'Eurasian Chessboard' post the 9/11 terrorist attacks was quickly accepted by the Russian state that was back then was being stewarded forward by Vladimir Putin. Not much was questioned as using the Central Asian states as springboards in the anti-terror effort was quite natural. Moreover, though the U.S. military presence in the region was prickly, Russia saw the beginning of the War on Terror to be starkly in its interest given the effect the latter would have in justifying its claims relating to Islamic extremism and terrorism in Chechnya, a region where its actions had since the 1990s had come under the scrutiny of human rights activists. Also Russia, back then, could do hardly anything to bar U.S.A. from pushing into the region that the former considered to be its strategic Asian rear. Despite its predominance in Central Eurasia and the various attempts the former made to thumb on the republics' foreign and security policies, the former's ability to keep the region-its near abroad as simply a 'cordon sanitaire' guarding its core from the onslaughts was at best limited.¹⁵ This was because the Central Asian states were sovereign bodies that had the authority to take decisions regarding whom to engage with. Further, Russia was in no position to take control of the region and thereafter ensure its security filling in the power void that the obliteration of the Soviet Union had left behind.¹⁶ Therefore, early into the millennium there was a growing domestic political concern regarding a strategic displacement of Russia in the region. A realist neorealist perspective prevailed in the state thinking as within the Russian military and security establishment there was a general sense of grievance and zero sum reasoning that U.S.A. was

¹⁵ Last Accessed on 12-04-2019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

¹⁶ Roy Allison, 2004, "Strategic Reassertion in Russia's Central Asia Policy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 277-293.

systematically appropriating Russia's geopolitical space through its military presence in Central Asia.

By 2003 or so, a duality was in place. While Russia remained signed up for the War on Terror effort cooperating with USA over Afghanistan, distinctly different opinions were coming up about the implications of such cooperation. With USA moving into Iraq alongside Afghanistan where the campaign did not seem to be ending any time sooner, the foreign policy establishment in Moscow started speaking in favour of the need to synchronise Russian cooperation with the duration of operation in Afghanistan. Further, the differences between Russia and USA over the broader rubric of the anti terror campaign was also mounting. Russia's demand for creating a broader blacklist of regions where terrorists have filled the vacuum including states in Middle East, the Balkans, Somalia, a number of Asian countries and the states in the northern Caucasus including Georgia besides the U.S. favoured three state 'Axes of Evil' composed of Iran Iraq and North Korea was the chief of all the points of disagreements.¹⁷ Further, U.S.A's preemptive and unilateral action in Iraq and the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime acted to reinforce the traditional Russian emphasis on security relationships and its interest in sustaining and reviving a forward security zone in the CIS southern tier. On the other hand, the personal insecurity of the Central Asian states increased with the American action in Iraq and this provided Russia with the opportunity to march in.

The Ivanov doctrine, Oct 2003, that advocated a right of Russia to carry out preemptive strikes anywhere in the world had a message for the Central Asian states. It seemed to state that Russia could lead military actions in Central Asia especially the less stable ones. The causes of the intervention could be political and ethnic conflicts that were potent enough to dent on Russia's larger well-being. Though the latter had limited capability to turn such claims into action, as has already been mentioned, the very spelling out of such a doctrine signaled towards some kind of posturing, one of strategic reassertion that was built on the country's newfound confidence in its improving economy under Putin.¹⁸ In the 1990's lacking a proactive approach, Russia's actions in Central Asia often seemed rudderless but with Putin in power, things had a

¹⁷ Roy Allison, 2004, "Strategic Reassertion in Russia's Central Asia Policy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 277-293.

¹⁸ Ibid.

lot better coordination. Despite the continuous flux in the balance of priorities and resource constraints, Russia's moves in the region became far more decisive than any time before. There was a tendency towards greater security policy consciousness in determining its actions in the region. USA's presence was a cause but the coming up of the new non-traditional security threats and Russia's long-term and larger geopolitical, security and energy policy goals was no less formidable as reasons. The civil war in Tajikistan and the rise of Taliban had raised eyebrows in Moscow in the past but very less could be done owing to its acute earlier weaknesses. However, now, terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, its nexus with the criminal networks in drug and weapons trafficking, that had a transnational reach, could not be ignored particularly in a region that had traditionally been its strategic buffer since times immemorial . The CIS, that had in the 1990s been unable to protect Russia's vital interests in the region, was considered for a reorientation under the changed circumstances post September 11. Putin accepted the need to share the republics' security responsibilities. Thus a plan to create a CIS Anti-Terrorism Centre was developed which was planned to be headed by Russia's Federal Security Service.¹⁹ Putin attempted to balance off USA's presence by developing military relations on both bilateral and multilateral levels and by coordinating the several proposals of regional anti-terrorist structures in Central Asia. More than synergy, therefore, the mood of a dynamic rivalry was more than evident. The adversarial tenor was also implicit in the reactivation of plans to create joint CIS rapid reaction forces under the framework of the collective security system of the organization.²⁰ The CSTO was also assigned with ambitious tasks in order to deal with the new security threats under a joint military command that was located in Moscow. A rapid action force for Central Asia, a common air defence system and processes to establish coordinated action in foreign, security and defence policy was established so as to reinvigorate CSTO's recognition as at least a security actor coequal with NATO.²¹ Russia under the interest of making Central Eurasia as the forward security base was seen making many efforts. Its opening of a new airbase in Kant in Kyrgyzstan, the presence of Russian interceptors in Dushanbe, a division of about 5.500 service men in other parts of Tajikistan, the several strategic military facilities such as the Sary-Shagan test site, the Engels air base and the Kapustin-Yar Test site in Kazakhstan that was the most

¹⁹Roy Allison, "Strategic Reassertion in Russia's Central Asia Policy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 277-293.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

stable and significant Central Asian partner testified Russia's strategic assertiveness in Central Asia.²² The Sea of Peace anti-terrorist operations, the Russia-Turkmen security cooperation and the Russian Caspian Flotilla comprising of 15000 servicemen were significant cues gauging Putin's desire to check USA and not let the same take away its prize.²³

Energy was also used as a strategic instrument to keep a check on the republics' security and foreign policy choices. Russia, by seeking to attain the position of being the principal-most-transit country for oil and gas resources of the northern Caspian, post 9/11, sought to wrest the changing strategic currents against its interests. Russia's monopoly control over the Transneft state pipeline within its territory was the major instrument used to extract concessions in the area of security policy in broader negotiations from the Central Asia counterparts.²⁴ The semi-state controlled Russian monopoly Gazprom also played a significant foreign policy role. It exerted leverage through the dependence of the Central Asian states on the former Soviet gas pipeline system. Putin had also joined hands with China in forming a somewhat 'Axes of Convenience' to keep USA and its allies actions tethered to the ground. Both, in this regard were concerned about the latter's role in boosting democracy promotion efforts adding on to the insecurity in the region. However, USA's power in the region did have limits. This was testified when it was evicted from the air base it had in Uzbekistan post to the action of Washington joining the international community in condemning a bloody government crackdown in the eastern city of Andijan that was said to have killed hundreds of civilians. The latter's formal handing back of its transit centre in Manas with Kyrgyzstan slowly aligning itself closely with Russia in 2014 also proved this point. True to the neoliberal streak of understanding, the adversarial equation in terms of influence building and the sense of paranoia that Russia had with USA did not, however, stop it from cooperating with the latter and aiding it in its operations in Afghanistan. Russian experience regarding the difficult terrain of Afghanistan has been used by USA extensively in its anti-terror actions. Russia's assistance to USA in allowing the latter to use the NDN to transport supplies and equipments off to Afghanistan was particularly significant. Apart from this, efforts at making regular information and intelligence exchanges along with the joint actions to nab with the transnational terrorist and drug trafficking networks has not been too

²² Roy Allison, "Strategic Reassertion in Russia's Central Asia Policy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 2, pp. 277-293.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

shabby. Thus there is a dual policy in play. One that cooperates with U.S.A. on important issue areas, especially those that churn out common benefits and at the same time, one that opposes its military penetration into the region beyond a certain point (or even at all). The way the *perezagruzka* came to be carried out bears testimony to such an attitude.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has led Russia to reconsider its position in the Central Asia. Though it was much more active in the said region in the post 9/11 period than it was in the 1990s, the security vacuum never got eliminated. The preverification in the attitudes of both Russia and USA did reduce but it never disappeared. This showed that, though, post 9/11 period the strategic salience of the Central Asia as a geostrategic region saw a rise, it could not regain the position of being the sole 'core' in global politics. At best, it remained the 'core' of the peripheries. The security vacuum that had developed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, therefore, remained under the skirts. Instead of being eliminated, the dynamics of the vacuum changed as adversities came to be played out in the open. USA, despite its military withdrawal, hardly plans to make a complete exit from Central Asia. The New Silk Road Initiative that was flagged off by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton bears testimony of such a mindset. The Georgia Ukraine Uzbekistan Azerbaijan Moldova (GUUAM) also remains in place that apart from securing cooperation among the states for anti –terror operations and economic interactions, clearly aims at hindering Russia's palm-grip on both the Caucasian and the Caspian states. Russia too has been cautious of its moves. Presently, the Eurasian Economic Union that was flagged off by the Putin government back in 2014 has been its chief instrument in solidifying the former's control in the region in areas of trade, economic and customs integration and energy. To deal with the U.S. policy of promoting geopolitical pluralism in the region to keep Russia under the bar, the latter has been building regional alliances with China and Iran to stabilize its hegemony (though such condominiums has its own limits). The formation of the EAEU was significant for it clearly had bearings on the security vacuum. The act was symbolic because the formation of this new 'economic' alliance came just two years later to the departure of the 1st batch of the U.S. combatant forces from Afghanistan under the phased withdrawal programme as had been declared by Obama. Notwithstanding the Ukraine fall out, pragmatic cooption as against coercion has been the dominant tone of the power play that characterizes Central Asia.

3.4.4 China : Its Newfound Confidence

China's role in Central Asia has expanded post 9/11 owing to the bloating of its interests in the region. As the new international terrorism made entry into the post millennial world order, China's primary concerns relating to Central Asia grew. Maintaining stability was the chief interest because that would have a direct impact on the insurgency bubbling in the Xinjiang province. Ensuring a limited engagement of USA was also an imperative, though, its actions to suppress terrorist mobility in the region were bolstered with the former coming into the region. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were of particular significance because these were the states bordering the Xinjiang province. China has been particularly active, therefore, to secure cooperation from these states to deal with the Uighur extremists that had vertical networks penetrating deep into these Eurasian republics and at the same time flowing horizontally off into Afghanistan. Roping in Kyrgyz government to end any Kyrgyzstan based support to the Uighur separatism was a part of its action to obtain strategic benefits in the region.²⁵ Several steps were also taken to stabilize the region that was being affected owing to the extremist spill overs from Afghanistan despite USA's war on terror effort in the former. A focus was also made on the ethnic issues connecting Xinjiang and Central Asia to deal with the predicament in the former with greater efficiency. China's increasing security consciousness made it meat up its strategic presence in the region. Its proximity to the so called pivot led to its inexorable ascendancy in the new millennium which was reinforced by the expanding trade and communication links whose ground work it laid in the years that soon followed the disintegration of Soviet Union. It has been, since then, particularly committed in developing meaningful economic partnerships with the region. The result of this has been extremely positive. While the trade figures has been increasing the girth of investments have also seen hikes. Also, China's advance of soft loans to these states to induce infrastructural and economic developments and carry forward welfare activities along with nation building tasks brought the Central Asian Republics further close to the former. China's economic partnership with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan remains particularly significant in this regard.

China's concern in the area of security was not divergent from its general interest in the energy resources of the Caspian. Owing to its high growth rates, energy security became a

²⁵ Last Accessed on 15-12-2019, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg440af.9>

crucial most focal point of Chinese policy movement in the region particularly in the post 9/11 period. To diversify oil source, China's state owned major oil producers entered and thereafter expanded their presence in Central Asia. Kazakhstan has seen most of Chinese expansion in the area of energy production and pipeline construction. The Central Asia-China pipeline, passing through the territories of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan deserves special mention for it not only involves China but also Russia.²⁶ This has immense symbolic significance given that it boasts of the Russia-China nexus to attain common objectives. Chinese involvement in the Russia led EAEU and the linking of the former with China's cherished Belt Road Initiative in the recent years is of particular importance especially in a context where the complete withdrawal of US led forces (including the non combatant ones that are still there assisting the civil government to deal with the complex issues) from Afghanistan has become a reality.

3.4.4.1 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

Apart from leading security, energy and commercial initiatives in the region, China's crucial most venture in Central Asia has been the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Projecting a China-centric strategic vision in the region, the SCO was a means to carve a strategic space for the former. Injecting elements of regional integration, it emerged as a vehicle of expanded cooperation in security and economic affairs. Involving Russia, the organization not only forwarded the geostrategic interests of China, it also tried to establish cooperation among the member states in dealing with issues of anti-terrorism, drug trafficking, small arms and human trafficking and networks in criminal activities. Since the 9/11 the SCO has been extremely critical to the security scenario of Central Asia. The counter terrorist exercises that has been undertaken by it in the region to keep a check has been extremely valuable. The Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism (2001) and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) deserves special mention in this regard.²⁷ In the recent years, especially post the declaration of the One Belt One Road Initiative, SCO become the most important instrument forwarding Chinese interest in the region. Therefore, it has been due to this reason that in the recent years, China has been particularly active in securing support from all the

²⁶ Qamar Fatima, Sumera Zafar, 2014, "New Great Game: Interests Strategies and Central Asia", *South Asian Studies*, vol. no. 29, No. 2, July-December 2014, pp-623-652

²⁷ Last Accessed on 01.02.2019, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ett24h898.9>

great powers, both regional and sub-regional to make SCO's efforts at increasing China's strategic space a smooth sail. Having said so, it must be stated that post the withdrawal of USA in near future the role SCO in the area of security would only increase. Cooperation in items of trade, infrastructure building, economic development and energy would follow. It has already heavily involved itself in developing land links among the regional states, telecommunications networks and infrastructure especially since 2014. Since the withdrawal from USA has been considered as a threat by the SCO, in the area of security, several agreements have been to coordinate activities relating to combating smuggling of weapons, drugs, ammunitions, explosives, illegal immigration, narco-terrorism, extremism, organized transnational crimes, cyber terrorism, mercenary troop activities and prevention of the use and proliferation of WMDs.²⁸ Attempts to check financial flows to individual and organizations suspected of being terrorist sympathies have also been made. Close cooperation has been sought by Beijing in coordinating security-laws and regulations among the member states and cooperating while researching for and developing new technologies and equipment for coping with new challenges and threats. The SCO has seen an expansion of its activities in Central Asia in the last few years that in the years to come would be reinforced by the growing Chinese assertiveness in this part of the world.²⁹ Despite such assertiveness, China continues remain cautious regarding not upsetting Russia or getting involved in any strategic burdens relating to the various internal non-traditional problems the region faces

3.5 New Great Game: Examining its Saliency in Light of the Idea of Security Vacuum

From what is evident from the above, now that the study on involvements individual state actors projecting themselves as stakeholders has been done, the tenacity of the conceptual injunction of the New Great Game in the post 9/11 Central Asia can be taken forward.

Always at the centre of the great power ambitions, Central Asia was never irrelevant to international relations. The end of Cold War and the evaporation of Soviet Union from existence brought in a security vacuum that could not be filled up by any of the powers projecting itself as stakeholders in the region. Post 9/11 the geostrategic canvas of the region changed. USA, Russia,

²⁸ Last Accessed on 01.02.2019, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ett24h898.9>

²⁹ Last Accessed on 15-12-2019, available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg440af.9>

China were extremely involved in projecting power in the region but the security vacuum was far from being away. It must be stated, here, that the growing vacuum and schismatic inter-state structure in Central Asia was basically a reflection of the broader processes of international relations that are at best fragmented. The dysfunctional ties between the great powers, lack of consensus and the dearth of leadership had caused the chasm of credibility to widen. The faultlines in global leadership and the unwillingness to take responsibility has concocted the security vacuum in Central Asia. It showed the clear lack of unity the globalised, multi-polar post- 9/11 new world order was suffering from in spite of the growing interdependence among the states.

The security vacuum caused uncertainty that led to scrambles for more power and influence at the cost of other. The tenor of adversariality was noticeable which resulted in the strategic pundits suggesting that a New Great Game reminiscent of its historical counterpart yet quite different from the former in its nature and expansiveness was in play. The extra-regional great powers, the regional and the sub regional states were involved in a competition to wrest the greatest share for themselves. The competition was for hegemony and that happened at multiple levels in multiple areas for example security, energy and trade. The competition was dynamic in nature for it was not close ended. While the issues of regional security, access to oil, building of pipelines, tanker routes, setting forth of divergent geostrategic visions put the stakeholders in rival relationships, they were also enjoined with each other in cooperative ventures to attain common objectives.³⁰ This was because the era of globalization had increased interdependence to unbound notches. Even the attainment of narrow self-interest requires cooperation. The New Great Game therefore was a lot about co-option as against coercion. Projection of hard power did not see an end but the dynamics of soft power played an extremely important role in shaping the security context. In Central Asia, the ability to coopt became in fact a better tool than the use of brute force. The region saw scrambles between not only the states but also the regional security complexes they formed. These scrambles, further, had multiple dimensions that could hardly be summarized in single factor analyses. Soft balancing laying the foundations of hard balancing, cooperative integrations, streaks of bandwagoning have constituted the Central Asian power and security architecture.

³⁰ Last Accessed on 12-04-2019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

Russia has a predominant role in the region. Its interests are structurally part of the internal arrangements of these states and its fate is historically tied to that of these republics. It has been due to this reason that maintaining stability and ensuring a modicum of security has been a priority for Russia. The attempts that has been made by it through bilateral and multilateral linkages and formal and informal means to maintain its hegemonic position particularly in the area of security has been extremely bold. But Russia's ability to maintaining its dominance in the Central Eurasian Pivot Region has been at best limited. Its inability to consolidate its control over the region post the latter's independence led to a decline in Russia's hegemonic position and increase in the security vacuum. Its reduced economic and military capabilities placed several constraints and therefore in spite of being intensely interested in in checking the region's growing engagement with the outside powers, it failed to make much headway. Putin's arrival to the Kremlin chair did lead Russia to make renewed attempts at gaining back its position but such attempts could not achieve much. Russia's position as a declining hegemon remains established today that is powerless in preventing incursions to the region. However how it uses the EAEU to sail into the region remains to be seen.

USA made an entry into the region as a global hegemon and a regional challenger. As its strategic interests in the region increased post 9/11 owing to the security needs generated by the War on Terror, U.S.A. used the region as a base. Its interest in getting a control of the energy resources in the region also was formidable. However, as of now, with the withdrawal process at its fag end, USA's future position in Central Asia remains extremely uncertain. U.S.A.'s attempts at establishing multilateral and bilateral relations, too, have seen not much development. Though the Partnership for Peace Programme of NATO (it was never and is not a prelude to any kind of alliance) does include Central Asia, it has not been able to record much success as a consultative mechanism. The Central Asian states have been, of late, extremely cautious of its moves regarding the U.S.A. especially after the Ukraine episode. The debates regarding a security vacuum and the great game have, therefore, reemerged with a new vigor impinging on the power structures and the geopolitics of the region.

China resides as an emerging regional and a global hegemon in the region. Far more focused than what it was in the 1990s and the early half of the millennium, USA's expanding presence in Central Asia has been a matter of concern for the former. It has joined hands with

Russia to keep a check on American and the West European march. SCO has been of extreme utility given that it has not only put the case of China's geopolitical narrative in the region but it has also been successful in bringing about cooperation among the republics and the other stakeholders to jointly deal with the nontraditional security threats. Its potential to bring about regional integration is also high. In the coming years, the more the world would draw closer to the day when USA would withdraw from Afghanistan and ends completely its military presence in Central Asia, the SCO's part in shoring up security cooperation would only increase. Also in the geopolitical rivalries it would be a heavyweight though it would not be in a position to eliminate the security vacuum.

3.6 Afghanistan and the Specter of Non-Traditional Security Threats

Adding to the complexity of the region has been the intriguing factor of Afghanistan. Always at the centre of the axis of imperial ambitions, situated at the crossroads of Asia, Afghanistan has devolved through the modern era from the status of being a buffer state between the territories of the Great Powers, to a Cold War battlefield, to the so-called hideout spot for the Islamic outfits post 9/11, to, now, finally being a political unit struggling to be a viable state.³¹ The land has been subjected to numerous invasions and incursions throughout its history that, in turn, has left a permanent impression on its territorial identity denting into its social and demographic transformation. Afghanistan, as of today, stands as a classic example of a "weak-state syndrome".³² Its political frailty is a result of a web of issues ranging from history, ethnicity, geopolitics to economics that has together made the region a conflict-prone state. Its location among major security complexes, the harsh topography, and the lack of economic development has had an isolating effect on Afghanistan. This, in turn, has magnified the problems the region had already been facing. Furthermore, Afghanistan's deep and complex cleavages along the ethnic, linguistic, tribal and sectarian lines, its primarily tribal and deeply alienated population, its location among meddlesome neighbours has made acute its state of

³¹Arpita Basu Roy, "Afghanistan Beyond 2014: Regional Security Concerns for India and Central Asia" in P.L. Dash, Anita Sengupta, Murat Bakhadirov eds., 2016, *Central Asia and Regional Security*, University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Uzbekistan, K.W. Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 127-128

³²Larry P. Goodson, 2001, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics and The Rise of Taleban*, Seattle and London University of Washington Press, p.12

being a collapsed political unit. It is this quandary that has fuelled the rise of Islamic extremism inside it and has made it a safe abode for terrorism to foster.

The ethnic and religious ties that Central Asia shares with Afghanistan enjoin the fates and the geopolitical dynamics of both the regions together. This fact has been felt with greatest intensity since the advent of the Taliban regime in the latter state. Later, the phenomenon of 9/11 led to a change in the strategic positioning of the region. Central Asia became a prize for U.S. as the region's support became indispensable for the War on Terror effort. The leaders, here, were more than happy with their bloated self importance that they had suddenly come to enjoy from the stakeholders both regional and extra-regional. But there were newer concerns to worry about. Post 9/11 the region's the potential of the Central Asia's instability increased exponentially. Its use as a corridor by the Islamic extremists moving in and out of Afghanistan hiked. The latter also became the lynchpin joining the criminal networks in drug, human and illegal weapons trafficking. This made the region vulnerable to the nefarious activities of all the anti- socials. Ethnic conflicts in between the various groups went rampant and it became increasingly clear that the nation building activities had to a large extent fallen on the abyss of fruitlessness. With an exception of Kazakhstan, the other states had a lot to worry about. The US presence along with that of Russia, China and E.U. in the region did prevent a brimming over of the ethnic cauldron (Zbigniew Brezezinski, 1997) but that did not reduce the threats the region was facing especially the non-traditional ones. Indiscriminate corruption of the state structure, pseudo authoritarian state structures that had hardly any care for the grass-root concerns, the schismatic identity crises that had been a gift of its history, lack of egalitarian social and economic growth, the weakly institutionalized civil societies, looming environmental threats especially post the shrinking of the Aral Sea, youth unemployment and the seething discontent leading a culture of civic violence and impunity in general led to an extremely rough social fabric that made conditions extremely precarious. Post 2014 with the declaration of a potential pullout of the US led coalition forces the geopolitical equations have once again changed. The national reconstruction process in Afghanistan is a little better than being in complete haywire. The Taliban forces that had never melted away are once again on the rise. Terrorist activities have been on the rise in Afghanistan and the civil government along with the military architecture of that state has unable to deal with that. Though U.S. did talk about joining the

nation building efforts with the New Silk Road Policy Programme, the tenacity of such a marriage to pull off the concerns and mitigate those remain cloudy. Dealing successfully with the crises that would arise from Afghanistan and the non-traditional security threats, especially those related to identity, ethnicity and religion that have exacerbated under the influence of the forces of Globalisation would require a critical security approach. Resolution of such threats and conflicts would require sensitivity to the post-colonial nature of the republics. Immunity can only be attained if the idea of security is seen not in zero sum terms but in terms of emancipation. The humane element in the security kinetics of Central Asia would only become crucial with time, more so, now that a potential withdrawal of U.S.A. from Afghanistan will be becoming a near reality. Be it the CIS, the CSTO, the SCO or the EAEU or the OSCE or the Partnership of Peace Programme of NATO or even the policy initiatives of the New Silk Road led by U.S.A and the One Belt One Road policy led by China that will have important bearings on the security structure of the region has to induce the humane element into its plans and make it wholesome as against being exclusive and discriminatory.

3.7 Conclusion

The security situation in Central Asia is one of multileveled complex hegemonic interaction. The rival powers see their ability to secure their interests in the region in zero sum terms and security dilemma is a characteristic phenomenon but that does not bar the states from cooperating on issues of common interest.³³ Ethnically and religiously diverse and geo-strategically located in the frontline of the most unstable part of the world, Central Asia is an unstructured regional formation or security quasi-complex.³⁴ Conventional power politics in the region remains formidable alongside the host of non-conventional security threats that has to be seen from a critical standpoint introducing the humane factor in understanding. The chapter provides a detailed insight of the power dynamics of Central Eurasia critically examining the roles of each of the stakeholders both before the 9/11 and after and the reasons behind their involvement. Alongside, it also studies the conceptual intricacies of the security vacuum and the injunction of the New Great Game. The security complexes that constitute the Central Asian power

³³ Last Accessed on 12-04-2019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

³⁴ Last Accessed on 12-04-2019, available at: <https://www.cairn.info/revue-1-europe-en-formation-2015-1-page-106.htm>

architecture have also been studied. Further, an attempt has also been made to look into the conditions in Central Asia, the positioning of the security vacuum and the contingencies thereof now that the U.S. combatant forces withdrawn from Afghanistan. The joint mechanisms to address the security threats arising out of a turbulent potential post withdrawal Afghanistan for Central Asia has been considered as well. Having said so, the analytical context to bring India into the discussion seems ready. Therefore, in the next chapter an in depth analysis of India-Central Asia relations has been carried out with special emphasis on the implications such a security scenario might have on the former's interests that has the pricking issues of a bitter neighbour and a turmoil stricken Kashmir to worry about. A look would also be casted on the steps that have been taken by both the India and the states in Central Asia to face the conventional and non-conventional security threats in the region.

CHAPTER 4

TRACING THE TRAJECTORY OF INDIA-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS: SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The End of Cold War

The end of Cold War changed the geopolitical imperatives constituting international Relations. Bipolarity as a logic determining state behavior no longer seemed to be viable for one of the superpowers had already escaped into obliteration leaving behind an empty playfield to be occupied by its adversary. Thus it did not come as a surprise when, by the middle of the 1990s there were scholarly works by strategic pundits pointing to the unprecedented phenomenon of The End of History. At the other end of the spectrum were scholars claiming of an impending Clash of Civilizations overtaking the world bringing into open the ethnic, religious, cultural and civilizational streaks of conflict as against the ideological cleaves that had dominated world politics for so long. Forces of globalization that were let loose with the end of Cold War changed the dynamics of interstate relations. Further in a globalized world, there were not only state actors who were capable of meaningful political action, the non-state actors, the regional, inter-governmental and international organizations were equally potent in their abilities at shaping the direction of global politics. This became a major point to worry about because the certainty that characterized Cold War order of the day was nowhere to be found. There were assertions about an impending American century and liberal democratic political systems with free markets ruling large, calling the shots and determining the directions of International Relations but with the last decade of the 20th century closing off, the pitfalls of such an idea became clear. The fluidity and the precariousness of the post-Cold War global order was understood. The initial unipolarity was turning its skin off into a somewhat uni-multipolar condition where, in spite, of its superior conventional capabilities, the indispensable mega power, USA, was failing to get things done in ways it wanted.¹ Such a form of International Relations not only changed the geostrategic salience of world regions giving it new meanings but it also made it indispensable for nation states to change their old policy stances and strategy frameworks.

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, 1999, "The Lonely Superpower", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2, pp. 35-49.

4.2 Changing Foreign Policy Framework: An Indian Case

India was not an exception in this regard. Organized roughly under the principle of non-alignment, India's foreign policy during the Cold war was divided into two distinct divisions. Sir David Malone put the *Nehruvian* decade i.e. from 1950s to 1960s under the rubric of '*Unified Idealism*' and the decades heading from the 1970s to the 1980s under the appellation of '*Intermittent Realism*'.² While the first seemed moralistic to the outsiders despite its calculated pragmatist undertones, the latter was realist in its overt character. The broad framework of nonalignment remained but there was a general drift towards power politics. Lip service to anti-imperialism, disarmament, secularism, international peace, Third World Solidarity went on concomitantly with a tilted non alignment. India grew close to Soviet Union considering it to be its close ally.³ Such a thing, however, changed with the end of Cold War. The overnight disintegration of Soviet Union left India in an extremely constricted geostrategic space. Further an overhaul in its economic policy led to a change in its need basket. The 1991 liberalization of the Indian market and the elimination of the east versus west bloc politics made a change in the strategic framework of policy making necessary. Thus leaving aside the pretensions of idealism, the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi decided to take a pragmatic turn, keeping in purview the country's present requirements, its growing stature and its refurbished goals. The first step taken in this direction was the declaration of the Look East Policy. The next step took shape when the country simultaneously decided to make strategic forays into the vast expanses of land that laid to its north west beyond the problematic scapes of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

4.2.1 India's Footfall in Central Asia: A Historical Approach

This was Central Asia, a region that had recently been born out of the womb of an erstwhile superpower, discredited post its failure in the Cold War that had raged on for decades. India's relations with Central Asia dates back to historical times. Joined by the ancient Silk Road, the contacts were particularly strong during the Greek and the Saka rule. It reached its peak under the Kushana Empire and from then onwards there was no looking back. Babar, the progenitor of the Mughal Empire in India was from Fergana Valley. Having lost his empire in

² D. M. Malone, 2011, *Does the Elephant Dance? : Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, pp. 47-53.

³ Ibid.

Central Asia he made an incursion into India to try his fate. He succeeded in grabbing control over Delhi and what happened next is history. The *Mughal* rule opened the doors of intense interactions. People to people connections, socio-cultural, religious and economic exchanges between India and Central Asia continued unbounded. Though association between the two regions did reach a plateau with the beginning of the British rule in India and the Tsarist annexation of Central Asia, post the latter's independence, however, interactions revived once again. Mediated through Moscow India's relations with the Eurasian pivot during the Cold War was primarily cultural. Music, dance, movies, literature, and philosophy bound the region close to the subcontinent transcending the geographical bottlenecks that were in no way less daunting. The historic visits by the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who was accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi, to Tashkent, Almaty and Ashgabat in 1955 put in place the stepping stones to a flourishing political bonhomie. In spite of this, however, the formal propinquity in the India-Central Asia relations was far from anything that was substantive, given that during the Cold War, the former was busy dealing with the other parts of the world deeply imbued in the principle of non-alignment. The end of Cold War made India realize of the strategic salience of Central Eurasia. The great powers, both regional and extra regional and the smaller sub regional neighbors of the newly emerged Central Asian republics, had desires to cut out for themselves their respective spheres of influence in the region now that the traditional keeper had decamped from the chair, leaving behind nothing but a legacy of a sea of pricking problems starting from ethnic strife to a floundering economy and a throbbing security vacuum. India, back then, was not a case apart. With an economy that was taking its baby steps at increasing growth rates, Central Asia to India was valuable in a number of ways. While on one hand, there were security issues- both conventional and non-conventional that had to be addressed with immediate urgency, on the other hand, safe and sustainable access to credible energy resources in Central Asia attracted India's attention. Further, the fact that the former could be a prospective market to India's nascent manufacturing sector, also became a factor determining Indian foreign policy postures back in the 1990s.

4.2.2 India's Look North: A Beginning

The journey of India's 'tryst' with Central Asia began with the former upgrading its missions that were already present in Alma-Ata and Tashkent. Full embassies were thereafter opened in all the other remaining states. The relation took off to some meaning when the Uzbek President Islam Karimov and the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited India in 1991 and 1992 respectively. Things reached an all-time high when Prime Minister Narasimha Rao undertook visits to 4 of the 5 newly independent republics. The first tier of the visit was wrapped up by stopping over at Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The second tier, that was the most important of all the visits that had been undertaken until then, came in the year 1995 when Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan were targeted. In Kyrgyzstan, during his sojourn, while making a phenomenal delivery on the pressing issues facing the India-Central Asia relations in the post-Cold War era, he cleared, on behalf of his nation, the desire to establish honest and an open friendship with the objective of promoting peace, stability and cooperation in the region.⁴ He announced that Central Asia was its extended neighborhood and therefore, a region of high priority where it wished to remain engaged far into the future.⁵ This was taken to be as the beginning of a new era. The stone had been set rolling as the discursive prelude to an organized strategic policy framework relating to Central Asia had already been made.⁶

4.2.2.1 Look North Policy: An Analytical Profile

The Look North Policy (LNP), subsuming within itself the historical undertones, the security, energy and economic imperatives, became the driving force guiding India's strategic mobility in the region. Since the Central Asian stability was crucial to India's overall wellbeing particularly in that of Kashmir, the LNP harped on setting up direct links with the region shoving aside the geopolitical hindrances of a not-so-friendly China, a perennially bitter Pakistan and a problematic, Islamised and Talibanised Afghanistan. The idea was to forge mutually beneficial relations based on liberal democratic and secular values for India believed that it was only by doing so that its larger objectives could be fulfilled which undoubtedly was to prevent Central

⁴ Anita Inder Singh, 1995, "India's Relations with Russia and Central Asia", *International Affairs*, vol.71, no.9, pp.69-81.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Asia from becoming a bastion of friendly states to Pakistan or a base from where anti India insurgents could be catapulted into Jammu and Kashmir. Years of benign yet vibrant cultural exchange and the secular, non-violent, pluralist underpinnings of the Indian state made India's task in attempting at gaining a foothold in the region easier. The geopolitical narrative that was used by India justifying its look north was that of it being a grand old bridge builder between extremes, a civilizational state that had at its core the Gandhian values of assimilation, love and tolerance. To concretize the relations, under the general rubric of LNP, several agreements were signed starting from trade, information communications, energy and pipeline issues and cultural exchanges.

With the ushering in of the new international terrorism post 9/11 and the move of America led coalition into Afghanistan with a view to bring the perpetrators of the terrorist attack on its soil to justice toppling the Taliban regime, the LNP was upgraded to set it at par with the security implications this new phenomena held. Strategic partnerships were forged with each of the Central Asian states. Further Pakistan's activities in the region, that saw the security vacuum as a budding opportunity to play the Pan Islamism card to influence the Central Asian states on Indo-Pakistan issues raised concerns in New Delhi.⁷ The very fact that it had been advocating a view which stated that inter-Asian relationships should have a geographical limit stopping at Pakistan's border with India was a matter that LNP had to address.⁸ Their argument in this regard was that - the region stretching from Pakistan to Turkey and from Kazakhstan to Iran and the Gulf was after all a logically integrated strategic security region.⁹ Its aim, undoubtedly, was to become a partner of all such security arrangements that would come up, to the complete exclusion of India (predominantly) and other powers relevant so as to possess ultimate domination over the military entity in any sub-regional arrangement, diplomatic or strategic discourse. Further, the budding Sino-Pakistani nexus in the region was also a matter of extreme disquiet.¹⁰ The very specter that the security vacuum could well be filled by forces of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism that now was fluid and transnational and was being

⁷ P. Stobdan, 2004, "Central Asia and India's Security", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 54-82.

⁸ Stephen Blank, 2010, "India's Rising Profile in Central Asia", *Comparative Strategy*, vol.22, no.2, pp.139-157.

⁹ J.N. Dixit, Emerging International Security Environment: Indian Perceptions with Focus on South Asian and Central Asian Predicaments, K. Santhanam, R. Dwivedi ed., 2004, *India Central Asia : Advancing the Common Interest*, IDSA, Ananamaya Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰ Ibid.

financed by the international drug and weapons trafficking networks was extremely agonizing. The fear of those extremist forces being well buttressed by Pakistan and then being pushed into the South Asian dynamics, destabilizing the strategic environment in which India posited, was something that the LNP post 9/11 wished to address. Afghanistan was the other point of contention. The coalition forces had discredited the Taliban regime in Kabul but it was never defeated. Instead they melted off into the remotest part of the country and carried on their operations putting new challenges not only for the administration in Afghanistan but also in the Central Asia. The spill-overs from the former created conspicuous destabilizing tendencies in Central Asia that in turn, again, put costs on the precarious equilibrium on which South Asia as a geostrategic region sat. LNP was given limbs to deal with this. Further, India understood that the policy could not singly harp on the issues of security and stability and that they had to be predicated by mutually beneficial policy relating to commerce, infrastructure and pipeline building projects, educational and cultural exchanges, confidence building measures, policies relating to the training of personnel, industrial development, information exchange, civil aviation contacts and joint mechanisms to deal with the twisted issues relating to narco-terrorism, transnational criminal networks and trafficking of illegal weapons, broad-based energy along with scientific and technology and defense supplies cooperation etc. Therefore, a number of attempts were made to reinforce the security cooperation following the above said means. A multifaceted relation was an essentiality that the policy sought to fulfill and thus attempts were made to deal with all issues in a systematic manner based on the principled approach of non-interference, peaceful coexistence and mutual benefit. Both bilateral and multilateral relations were mined to reap the dividends. While on the bilateral level direct relations were forged, under the policy framework of LNP, multilateral organizations in the region were also engaged with, so as to bring about a wholesome sense of stability, unity and purpose. It was in order to cement the relations with Central Asia and push LNP's strategic capacity up the ladder; Prime Minister Vajpayee undertook visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in 2002 and 2003 respectively. The sojourn to Tajikistan was particularly significant and symbolic because the country shared direct borders with the POK. Therefore, it was not without reason that India tried making its presence felt in Central Eurasia by establishing and funding the Farkhor and Ayni airbases in Tajikistan Prime Minister Manmohan Singh too did not leave Central Asia aside. In 2006 and thereafter

again in 2011 he made rounds into the region. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were his points of concern.

4.2.2.2 Look North Policy: Pitfalls

However, although the efforts made through LNP were not minimal, at the end of about 16 years to the completion of the policy, the concrete results achieved were extremely less. Its interests in the region were, at best, haywire. The strategic influence of its adversaries, particularly of China and Pakistan were on the rise. Its access to energy resources was extremely narrow. Its security interests - those relating to terrorism, drug and weapons trafficking, border control and rise of extremism remained unprotected. India's position seemed extremely weak as it had not been able to transform the good will that LNP had generated into a meaningful strategic clout. Instead it had left the ground empty for others to occupy. The creative capacity of LNP could never reach its fruition owing to the neglect on the part of the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi. Such an attitude seemed stark for India knew the strategic worth of the Central Asia. The region was, not only, an energy-mitochondria that could pump out hydrocarbons wheeling India's economic growth, it was also a precinct whose stability had the capability of ensuring peace in Kashmir and greater South Asia. In fact India was in the LNP was conspicuously absent from the ideological energy diplomacy. Failing to live to the expectations, double costs were inflicted on India. On one hand, the latter was unable to reap the benefits out of the security vacuum like the other stakeholders, who had dived into the region post the republics' independence to take partial and selective control suited to their respective national interests, on the other hand, India was forced to deal with the negative spillovers of the great power competition in the region that had been termed as the New Great Game. Failure of the discursive construction of the foreign policy establishment to present, the regional actors, with an alternative vision of the world that could distinguish it from the other participants led to the proliferating narratives of India's rise to global prominence seem empty.¹¹ Unlike China, who had successfully presented itself as the alternative global power, India's claims of being the emerging power were shoddy and weak. The international identity of New Delhi did not have

¹¹ Emilan Kavalski, 2011, "Looking North: Central Asia and the SCO", in David Scott ed., *Handbook of India's International Relations*, Routledge, London, pp.208-209.

any attribute that could be emulated. Thus under the LNP India remained one among those states that was always ‘emerging’ but never ‘arriving’.¹²

4.2.3 Connect Central Asia Policy: A Beginning

The realization of this led to introspection and soul searching among the decision makers. By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a need was felt to end the ambiguity and sense of neglect that India’s Central Asia Policy was facing. There was a sense of urgency among the policy makers because the interests had long been left unattended and uncatered. There was a lot to be done. The concern that India had lost out in the strategic battle was understandable when the Honorable Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari called for the redefinition of India’s strategic interests in the region under the changed circumstances. Thus 28 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, India rearticulated its moribund and impotent policy framework of Look North. In a key note address at the first meeting of the India Central Asia Dialogue, a Track Two Initiative, Minister of External Affairs, E. Ahmed put in place the formal idea of the Connect Central Asia policy (CCAP). He was clear that India was insistent on reviving the stagnant India-Central Asia relations.¹³

4.2.3.1 Connect Central Asia Policy: Meeting the implications of the Security Vacuum

The motive behind the redefinition of the policy stance was to meet the challenge of the implications that the security vacuum and the new great game held for India and at the same time protect India’s diplomatic and strategic objectives that had undergone a slight modification. The change in the policy clearly reflected India’s shift to pragmatism. It was keen at claiming the title of that of ‘an emerging power’ that was no longer supine in its approach at dealing with issues at hand. Bold and eager India, therefore, was seen making meaningful efforts at establishing durable partnerships that would help it gain a foothold in the region, an objective on which LNP could deliver nothing beyond a limbo. Further, what stroke the CCAP apart from its predecessor, was its proactive niche, its practical acceptance that its security horizon had increased under changed conditions of the New World Order. The acceptance of the fact that the girth of India’s

¹² Emilan Kavalski, 2011, “Looking North: Central Asia and the SCO”, in David Scott ed., *Handbook of India’s International Relations*, Routledge, London, pp.208-209.

¹³ Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, “The New Great Game and India’s Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges”, *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

energy and commercial interests apart from the security interests in the region had also increased which needed to be pursued put it at a higher pedestal. The LNP was aware of the significant differences between the Central Asian states, the heterogeneity the region was marred by, but when it came to dealing with practical issues it almost inevitably held Central Asia as a unified landmass. This was LNP's major drawback. CCAP aimed at correcting this precise issue. It attempted to seek a balance between considering Central Asia as a part of a homogenous strategic space and at the same time being mindful of the stark differences in the nature of the states in the region and the divergent interests they pursued. China's growing clout in Central Asia - all strategic, economic and energy; preventing Pakistan to expand any further in the same and the Afghan cauldron that was seething with discontentment over its state building project which was a quasi-failure and a resurging Taliban were the major security imperatives of the CCAP. The non-traditional security threats were no less formidable. The human security dimension powered by the critical perspectives on security was worth noticing. Unlike LNP that had under its conceptual intricacies a divided understanding of traditional and non-traditional security, CCAP attempted to integrate both the dimensions into a whole. Such an act was indispensable under the new conditions of international relations.

In the area of energy, commerce and infrastructure development in Central Asia, the CCAP recorded major successes. More than any time before, the government ambitiously started promoting the entry of state oil ventures into Central Asia. ONGC Videsh (It had been working in the Satpayev oil block in Kazakhstan. In April it had bought 25% of the stakes in April, 2011) and GAIL, the OMEL entered the Central Asian energy market, pharmaceutical steel industries were also not far behind in doing good business in the region. Apart from this, India became particularly involved in these states in the area of defense supplies. The Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) has to be mentioned for it has been particularly successful in pulling a number of young individuals to gain training in banking, rural and agricultural development, IT etc. It has also been able to provide a fillip to the overall economic cooperation. The India Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) is also important in this regard for it has gone a long way in organizing several trade fairs in the region providing the Central Asian markets a great exposure to pull in the Indian investors. An impressive development was recorded in the area of infrastructure development. The 1680 km long TAPI pipeline project, the International

North South Corridor (INSTC) from Bandar Abbas in Iran to Anzali and then to the Caspian port of Astrakhan were actively steered.¹⁴ Significant contributions were made to the building of the Trans Afghan Railway and the IPI (Ira-Pakistan-India) pipeline that has been also termed as the peace pipeline.¹⁵ The Central Asia-Persian Gulf Corridor was supported for it sought to boost the transport of goods via rail, sea and land that could prove particularly helpful for India.¹⁶ The core of India's CCAP has been the development of the Chabahar port in Iran (it began with an initial investment of a hundred million dollars) which once done will bring about concrete results for India in Central Asia. Bypassing the geographic road block of Pakistan, the port will provide India with an alternative route, an unfulfilled goal of the LNP. India's involvement in the construction of the Delaram Zaranj Highway worth six hundred crore rupees was a part of this.¹⁷ The 222 km long electric transmission line joining Uzbekistan (Pul-e-Kumri) and Afghanistan (Kabul) is of particular importance in this regard.¹⁸

The CCAP has been significant with regard to the fact that it has not been torn apart or compartmentalized from India's policy overtures in South Asia and West Asia. This was because the implications security situation of Central Asia and the threats that it posed enjoined them with the dynamics of the geostrategic region of South Asia and the shatter belt of the Middle East. The issue area of Afghanistan that was and continues to be the wellspring of instability, the involvement of Iran, issues of terrorism, drug and weapons trafficking were the chief the vectors responsible for concocting such a joint. Related to this was the problem of Islamic extremism and terrorism in Central Asia and the possible impact that it could have on a restive Kashmir where the problems had hardly found any resolution. The CCAP unlike the LNP was given the strategic liberty to deal with the problem.

¹⁴ Qamar Fatima, Sumera Zafar, 2014, "New Great Game: Players, Interests, Strategies and Central Asia", *South Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 623-652.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Kadira Pethiyagoda, 2018, "India's Pursuit of Strategic and Economic Interests in Iran", *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper*, no.23, pp.5-33.

¹⁸ Ibid.

4.2.3.2 Religious Fundamentalism and the Connect Central Asia Policy: Special emphasis on problem of Kashmir and the involvement of Pakistan

- *Wherein Lies The Roots Of Extremism*

Islam arrived in Central Asia in the mid seventh century and by the eighth century it was already dominating all the civilizational aspects that the region constituted of. Under Soviet rule however, participation of Islam in political life was suppressed. Religious activities of the Central Asians were kept under strict control and the region was cut off from all its Muslim neighbors. Thus it was not surprising that at the time of independence, most of the Central Asians had rudimentary know of Islam.¹⁹ The governments that were formed in all the Central Asian republics, after their liberation, were conspicuously secular as the national elites were the erstwhile communist rulers who had received their political training from Moscow. But despite that political participation of Islam increased.²⁰ The governments, by virtue of being inefficient, corrupt and oppressive lacked in the ability to check their lurching economies. Widespread inequality, illiteracy, unemployment and sense of seething discontent led to unhappiness among the people especially the youth.²¹ Disenchanted, they looked for a separate system that could bring about solution to their problems. The only viable alternative they found in this regard was the Islamic model of life.²² It was here that the seed of Islamic fundamentalism was sowed.²³ The geographical contiguity of the Central Asian states with Afghanistan and North Pakistan helped fomenting the rise of religious extremism as hundreds of disillusioned Central Asian youth, unemployed yet able, taking advantage of the porous border system moved into the terrorist camps of in the Af-Pak region. Considered as the greatest, threat to mankind, the reason behind terrorist attack of 9/11, that changed the face of international relations with a single blow, religious extremist terrorist groups from South Asia thus started spreading tentacles into Central Asia through Afghanistan and Pakistan putting the region's stability under extreme contingency. At present there are a number of terrorist outfits in the region. Fluid in their territorial makeup

¹⁹ Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

²⁰Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

they peculiarity lies in the fact that they are transnational, loosely organized and has goals that are ambiguously defined. They have linkages with several of the global terrorist networks and in many cases also received clandestine support from certain states. Apart from Al Qaeda, Hizb-ul-Tahrir, groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (the IMU) and the Uighur Liberation Organization (ULO) have the capability of wreaking havoc on the whole Central Asian security architecture.²⁴ Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan would be the worst affected if anything of that sort happens.²⁵ What vexes the condition more is that the world's most expansive criminal networks in drugs, weapons and human body trafficking crisscrosses Central Asia and these networks have developed channels into the terror industry fostering what could termed as the narco-terrorism. The nearness of Afghanistan to these Central Asian republics has presented major challenges to the governing authorities of the latter. Heroin produced in the former state streams out into the European market through the networks piercing the Central Asian Republics. This almost inevitably has immense societal impacts. Violent crime rates and instability have increased exponentially. Though the great powers have taken a number of measures to deal with these issues on both bilateral and multilateral levels, their rate of success is limited.

- *India's Interest: Security Vacuum, Pakistan And The Problem Of Kashmir*

India's interest in all this is natural. It is motivated by the desire of curtailing radical Islam given that it has the capability of creating major disturbances in Central Asia that will inevitably spread off to the Jammu and Kashmir through the problematic regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁶ Tajikistan is of immense significance in this regard given it is the gateway of the region into South Asia. Further Pakistan has been particularly interested in attaining strategic depth in the region with regard to India. Not only is it involved in procuring formal support from the Central Asian leaders on Indo-Pakistan issues including Kashmir, it is also active in recruiting and training Central Asian youth for carrying out terrorist activities in India once they are injected into the latter's territory. There has been a recent rise in the number of terrorists and war veterans from Afghanistan, Central Asia and Pakistan joining the terrorist outfits in Kashmir as mercenaries. This, undoubtedly, has had a telling effect on the insurgency in Kashmir. India

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

fears that if the field, where already a security vacuum thrives, is left unclaimed, it will surely become an active recruiting ground for extremist outfits in Pakistan Afghanistan and even the Xinjiang province leaving a telling impact on the subcontinent's stability. It also worries about the Kalashnikov culture- one that is of impunity and violence and the drug addiction spreading into South Asia and the subcontinent. India has presented itself as a interested stakeholder in Afghanistan for it does not want the Taliban to gain control of the region for if that happens Central Asia will surely be pierced through by innumerable radicalized societies that spreading violence and hate would hold immense implications for India's territorial integrity. India's fears are not ungrounded. The elements of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) have a strong presence in Central Asia.²⁷ The Kashmir solidarity days receive much of media coverage in the republics.²⁸ Privately, people in general keep a sympathetic approach to the fate and cause of the Kashmiri people. Developing of the military outpost Ayni and Farkhor, in Tajikistan that is separated from POK by a 20kms Afghan stretch of land should be seen in this light. The base has a symbolic impact. It reminds the stakeholders in Central Asia of an unmistakable Indian presence, helps India check the extremist forces and also aids the latter in keeping an eye on both Pakistan and the developments in a restive Afghanistan. Further, it assuages the long term concerns of India in Central Asia relating to the security of the region (India worries that in the days to come when the Central Asian states will have petro cash surplus, the conditions in Kashmir might deteriorate).²⁹ This very act of developing defense assets in the region shows the pragmatic strikes India wishes to make under the policy framework of the CCAP. To deal with the nontraditional threats as this, India has cooperated with the multilateral organizations in the region. Its recent entry into the China led SCO has been significant and has been graded as the greatest achievements of the CCAP. India has understood the problem of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia lies in the faulty developmental and state structure. The nation building task remains unfulfilled and it is precisely this that has led to major discontentment. Therefore, any permanent solution will need a redressal of these root causes. Since equitable, sustainable and socially sensitive economic development can be a way to such redressal India has carried forward economic projects, promoted Indian investments and aided the republics in development tasks and most importantly advocated the value of tolerance. Such actions are

²⁷ P.Stobdan, 2004, "Central Asia and India's Security", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 54-82.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹P.Stobdan, 2004, "Central Asia and India's Security", *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 54-82.

clearly inspired by critical human security perspectives whose elements have been beautifully subsumed into the dynamics of the CCAP.

4.2.3.3 Connect Central Asia Policy: Dealing with the issue of U.S. Drawdown

A year before the declaration of the CCAP by the Indian strategic community, USA announced its desire to carry forward a plan of a phased drawdown from Afghanistan. This changed the geopolitical underpinnings in Central Asia once again and the CCAP was modified to some extent. Under the changed circumstances, the increased China Pakistan nexus in Central Asia has grabbed eyeballs in New Delhi. The Sino-Pakistani alliance has through its actions been able to tie India's strategic mobility in region almost imperceptibly.³⁰ Undoubtedly, therefore, this has emerged as a threat. Though Pakistan's presence in the region has limits, China's ability is far superior to that of India and this could be used by the former to put breaks on the rise India's strategic posturing. India has been worried about the extent till which the alliance could tether India from gaining access to the Caspian energy basket or create joint strategies to marginalize India in the region so as to elbow it out of every dynamic. The possibility of the latter is extremely rare given that the other powers would hardly want that to happen. Both USA and Russia see India's presence in the region as essentially balancing with regard to China that has recently grown extremely assertive in claiming its perceived interests. While USA has cut out for India a significant place in the Silk Road Initiative that has been also integrated to the Afghan state building activity, Russia has been extremely supportive of Indian ventures in Central Asia. Not only has it pulled India into the Sakhalin Oil Pipeline project led by Japan but it has also boosted the TAPI and the INSTC projects. India membership into the SCO was supported heavily by Russia. In spite of this, the recent Russia-Pakistan camaraderie has been of major concern to India.³¹ The Sino-Russian axis of convenience has also increased the discomfort of India. Despite Prime Minister Modi's proactive makeover to the CCAP, the latter has been unable to find a way out of this. A lot has to be done to smoothen the edges on this front.

³⁰ Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

³¹ Nistha Kaushiki, 2013, "The New Great Game and India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Strategic Perspectives and Challenges", *Journal of International and Area Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 83-100.

The U.S. drawdown is a threat to the status quo that had forged a modicum of stability in the region all these years. It has been in order to deal with the drawdown that India has been seen actively forging relations with all the other stakeholders. Steps to exchange information and intelligence to deal with the non-traditional security threats - especially those related to terrorism and drug trafficking - have been taken. There have been attempts to deal with interstate divergences and conflicts in a peaceful manner. Both bilateral and multilateral relations have received a boost especially under Modi's efforts at rejuvenation of policy stances. Not only has India involved itself heavily through the SCO, it also remains intensely tied to the Eurasian Economic Union. The oil and uranium imports from Central Asia have increased in the recent years. Further, the Indian companies have involved themselves in development of rail networks and roads, upgrading highways, establishing power stations and laying down electric transmission lines. Many of these projects are scheduled to be financed by international agencies and multilateral banks like ADB, EBRD and IBRD etc. India has recently taken to addressing the problems relating to the information deficit between the former and the region. The stabilization programs in Afghanistan has also been pumped up in speed given that it will have direct impact on the quality of peace prevailing in Central Asia. Not only has India worked with the regional powers like Russia, China, Turkey and Iran, it has also cooperated with the extra regional great powers like U.S.A and the E.U. to ensure an all-round security and peace in Central Asia. Prime Minister Modi's maiden visit to the region, Kazakhstan to be precise set the tone for the coming years that will see a complete withdrawal of the coalition forces. Now it is only time to see how things unfurl. The success of the CCAP, under such situation, will lie in its strategic planning and not on the principle of adhocism that it has been following since a long time back.

4.3 Conclusions

The security vacuum and the great power competition have had a clear impact on India's move in Central Asia. From the early 1990s till the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the LNP could not register much development. A lot was left undone and it was to address these uncatereed issues that the CCAP was inducted in. Energy, economic and security cooperation that were languishing under the preceding policy framework got a new lease of life. India registered remarkable progress in Central Asia. However, despite all the achievements, a lot remains to be

done. India's investment in the region is dismal when compared to the others. The Central Asians consider India to be their reliable partner but the latter's lack of understanding and scholarship has led to a wavering away of that trust. The dearth of in depth knowledge about the region's historical, political, linguistic and socio-tribal structural underpinnings has led to constricted results. Therefore, information and scholarship has to be worked on for better results. India has to work at rebalancing the Central Asian security dynamics that would require integrated, balanced and multifaceted policies. Short term goals should be set in ways that parries along with the fulfillment of the long-term and strategic goals. Soft power should be used well, for given the dynamics of Central Asia; the power to coopt would be more useful than the power to coerce. It is in this regard that India should, under the CCAP; look for more avenues to expand its commercial presence in the region. This is because it is only by making itself commercially and economically indispensable, that the broader security interests could be protected. It should have a proclivity towards a discursive projection of the Indian as blueprint for Central Asian development.³² It should aim at developing a global narrative, a unique ideology to attract the Central Asians. It is only then that it can turn from being a *Great Power Candidate* to being a power that holds *Great Power Status*.³³ The discursive success of the CCAP would lie in its ability to position India as one of the potential poles of attraction in an international relations that is marked by extreme turbulence and a regional environment that pecked by the presence of a number of actors.³⁴

Once the foothold is made following this path, *modified structuralism* (this concept was the brainchild of Stephen Krasner that though decision makers operated in "a world of sovereign states seeking to maximize their interest and power" but under certain conditions they choose to transcend "individualistic calculations of interest") (Krasner, 1983) tempered with sensitivity for human security issues would be its way to go.

³² Emilan Kavalski, 2011, "Looking North: Central Asia and the SCO", in David Scott ed., *Handbook of India's International Relations*, Routledge, London, pp.208-209.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Central Asia, since times immemorial, has remained the focus of great power politics. Though it did escape active international attention during the Cold War era, it got back its traditional position of being the centre of international attention after the Soviet Union's tragic demise. A weak Russia that was bogged down by a failing transition from communism to liberal capitalist democracy and the political independence of the Central Asian republics, who were now independent to chart their own ways out, created peculiar conditions in the Eurasian pivot. Internally the corrupt, patrimonial, inefficient and authoritarian state structures led to crisis-like conditions. Specters of ethnic conflict, religious extremism, lack luster economies and failing nation-building projects led to major instabilities within the states. Outside, in absence of the traditional chaperone and the security impotency of the constituting republics, a security vacuum grew, that in turn, attracted attentions of the great powers in International Relations. While Russia, despite its weakness, remained the dominant entity, other powers like China and most importantly the mega power or the lonely superpower as Huntington had graded it to be, U.S.A. entered the Central Asian domain. The sub regional powers like Iran, Turkey and Pakistan too dived in cut out for themselves their own strategic space. The region's geostrategic location amongst world's greatest civilizations and its ownership of invaluable and scarce hydrocarbon resources made it a butt of competition. The rivalry that one could see in Central Asia was for hegemony. However, the hegemony that the powers vied for was not a complete and wholesome one, instead there were strings attached. All the states who posed themselves as stakeholders in the region wanted control only over selective areas evading any strategic burden. They were, after all, aware of the problematic and knotty geopolitics of the region. Russia was keen in keeping the republics under its thumb but it did not have enough of military or economic might to take control of the region and resolve the issues of economic stagnancy, unemployment, religious extremism, ethnic conflict etc. U.S.A., on the other hand, had concrete interests in the region for it wanted to gain control of the Caspian energy ensemble, build alternative pipeline

routes to bring the Central Asian oil to the international market so as to reduce the region's dependence on Russia and remove the nuclear materials of the erstwhile superpower from the region but still, despite having the capability, it remained hesitant to commit a complete involvement. A budding China, on the other hand, was intensely interested in gaining access to the region's energy base and in attaining a foothold in its market, but it, too, shied away from asserting itself strongly in the region. It kept itself satisfied with procuring the long term interests. Such an order of things made it clear that though Central Asia still was considered important, it, however, no longer held the core character like it used to in alleys of history. Further, the limited involvement of the state powers in the region acted directly in accentuating the already existing security vacuum that led to the cropping up of major problems.

Such an order of things changed with the ushering in of the New World Order post 9/11. The terrorist attack of September 11 revolutionized the prior-held concepts of security. Along with that it also changed the geopolitical mosaic of Central Asia. As U.S.A. moved into Afghanistan to avenge the starkly criminal act of the terrorist perpetration in its homeland starting off the War on Terror, its deliberate strategic ambiguity in the region ended. Being on the frontline of Afghanistan, the Central Asian states, now, were a geostrategic necessity in U.S.A.'s war effort. Therefore, in four of the five states in Central Asia, U.S.A. established its military bases that acted as the spring boards assisting it in its anti terror operations. The military presence of USA was initially accepted by Russia and China, for they, too, had long been hounded by the problem of terrorism that had a lot to do with Afghanistan. However, with passing years, both found the activities of the former in the region, a matter of major disquiet. Russia's economic improvement lessened its weakness and this increased its wish to keep the near neighborhood under a strict supervision, away from the western orbit, which was being barred to a large extent owing to the presence of U.S.A. China, too, found its strategic mobility in the region hindered by the latter. Despite this, however, both Russia and China never stopped at asserting themselves. They built regional security complexes keeping themselves at the helm and led out their plans to rope the Central Asian republics into their orbit. While Russia kept control through the CIS and CSTO, China maintained its position through the SCO (taking care of not hurting the Russian sensibilities). Apart from security, competition could also be seen to gain control over the energy resources in the region and building pipelines to transport the

hydrocarbons to the international market. Access to markets, building infrastructure to facilitate communication were also issues in which rivalry was discerned. However, here too, none of the states posing themselves as stakeholders were interested in involving themselves in the internal problems that the Central Asian States faced. The ethnic crises and developmental issues that went unattended and unaided by the great powers testified the reality of their tethered approach with respect to their involvement in Central Asia. Therefore, the security vacuum was never away from the Eurasian pivot. Post 9/11, it bred silently under covers and it was this vacuum that stoked of intense competition for power bringing back memories of the 'Grand Old Great Game'. This time, the Central Asian chessboard saw the New Great Game being played out by the great powers in its strategic environment. The New Great Game was novel in many dimensions. Not only was it expansive in scope, given that it included a number of powers, all eyeing the region's scarce resources, attempting to establish control over the state's foreign and security policies; it also included the non state actors. The existence of the non-traditional security threats coming up in form of terrorism- its clandestine multi-state channels into the region's drug and weapons trafficking industrial complex, Islamic fundamentalism, civil violence and networks of transnational crimes added a new dimension to the power rivalry in the region. It is here, that mention must be made of a peculiar phenomenon. Though adversariality in the relations between the stakeholders in the region was more than visible, that, however, did not bar them from cooperating on issues of mutual interest. Cooperation over mitigating the non-conventional security threats under the rubrics of the various regional bodies was and continues to be a commonality in Central Asia. This, in itself, is a classic example of the realist-neorealist and neoliberal theories working in unison to shape international relations. Constructivism has also been helpful in understanding the perceptions- how the state units see each other. It must also be stated that post 9/11, seeing security in Central Asia in terms of survival has beholden its limits. The nontraditional sources of threats to the state structures has necessitated that the critical perspectives on security, the concept of human security etc. are put to use since resolution of the former would not come from the statist and state-centric, narrow and constricted approaches.

Post 2011, now that the world is the seeing unprecedented phenomenon of the U.S withdrawal from Afghanistan, the geopolitics of the region has changed once again. The security

vacuum has popped up its head from the covers making the competition in the region even fiercer. China spearheads its agenda in the region with the OBOR and the SCO; U.S.A. has its New Silk Road programme in place; the E.U. has been making great strides with its OSCE and Russia has been making its voice felt through the EAEU. While these programmes and alliances are not separated and filled into water-tight compartments, they are, to a large extent, divergent in terms of the geopolitical narratives that they imply. Despite the difference, however, all the powers in the region especially Russia, China, E.U. and U.S.A. do see Afghanistan as a potential cause of instability in the region. Therefore, all have been developing a number of joint mechanisms to stabilize the latter in the first place and thereafter stop the spilling over of the forces of instability into the Central Asian dynamics. The RATS, as has already been mentioned, is an excellent example of a joint mechanism with the aim of throttling the terrorist communication networks and the funding channels. Thus, what can be said is that the structures of insecurity in Central Asia will remain as competition, in this part of the world, turn fiercer. Not only will the conventional power politics be an issue of concern, non conventional security issues will also raise eyebrows. Only a broad understanding of security will be the path to 'emancipation', under such conditions.

Central Asia has been extremely significant to India. Their interactions date back to ancient times. Linked by the old Silk Road, the Indian civilization has influenced Central Asia to great extents and has been influenced by it in return. Though the imperial conquest of India saw a general wavering away of contacts, relations were once again revived during the Cold War era that saw the flowering of the Indo-Soviet friendship. These relations were essentially based on the exchanges of literature, culture, movies, philosophy and religion. Political, commercial and strategic involvements were limited. However, after the end of Cold War, with the demise of the Soviet Union, as Central Asia evolved into five republics without its traditional keeper, attracting other states to fill up the security vacuum that had been created, India too made a dive in effort. Embassies were opened in all the states at the earliest and state visits were undertaken by the leaders. A shift was noticeable in the Indian attitudes and this crystallized in the speech that was given by Narasimha Rao during his visit to Kyrgyzstan. He declared that under the changed geopolitical calculations, it had become indispensable for India to involve and engage itself in Central Asia. The region's strategic location, hydrocarbon basket and precarious security

conditions that could be a threat to India's Kashmir issue made it indispensable for the latter to build concrete mechanisms to fulfill what it perceived to be its vital interests in the region. Thus came the Look North Policy. Attempting to bypass the geopolitical hindrances to the engagements in the region, the LNP set the tone for India's attempts at making strategic forays into the region so as to fulfill its interests. Accordingly, the latter involved itself in a number of ventures. While the Indian investors were encouraged to invest in the Central Asian market, trade with the region was given a boost. Training and exchange programmes, people to people contacts, track two initiatives to safeguard its interest in the arena of security were formulated. Deflecting Pakistan's attempts at presenting itself as a friendly state in Central Asia and thereafter, influencing the Central Asian leaders' opinion on Indo-Pakistan issues or using the region to create instability in Kashmir that was, back then, stricken by insurgency was one of the major goals of the LNP. Attaining sustainable access to the Caspian energy pool was what came next on the agenda. The LNP also attempted to bring about stability in the region by checking the forces of religious extremism and the drug and weapons trafficking networks whose strings were almost inevitably attached to Afghanistan. The geostrategic narrative, the policy used to put forward the Indian cause was that of the latter being a bridge builder between extremes. The ideas of secularism, non-violence, non-interference appealed the republics and the amount goodwill that was generated was immense. Post 9/11, LNP was replenished with more energy. Steps were taken under it to deal with issues of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. Drug and weapons trafficking were also kept in a check. Pakistan's activity in spurring anti-terror from the Central Asian soil was considered. It is in this context, that bases in Tajikistan were set up. The idea was to ensure security of India's security interests, keeping an eye on Pakistan from the rear. Despite such steps, however, by the end of a decade into the 21st century, it became clear that the LNP had achieved very less and had left the ground in Central Asia for others to occupy.

The realization of such a fact, led to a soul searching on the part of the foreign policy establishment in New Delhi and out of that emerged a refurbished foreign policy framework that came to be known as the Connect Central Asia Policy (CCAP). Unlike the former, it underpinned a proactive and a pragmatic approach. Accepting the broadening of the security horizon, the CCAP was mindful of the new challenges that India faced in Central Asia. Unlike the LNP that saw security from a narrow perspective, the CCAP was better capable of dealing

with the nontraditional security threats particularly that of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism for it attempted to find solution to the problem from its roots. The dynamics in Afghanistan were considered while taking steps to secure its vital interests in Central Asia. Further, the CCAP was also informed of the heterogeneity that the Central Asian states had in spite of belonging to the same geostrategic region. The policy, ending the strategic ambiguity that was inbuilt in the structurations of the LNP, allowed India to move more assertively to promote its economic and energy interests in the region, none of which were considered apart from its larger security interest in the region. Equipping India with the capability at barring Pakistan's capacity to gain strategic depth in the region and thereafter use it against Kashmir was significant. That Central Asia's internal instability could be used as an opportunity by Pakistan and the terrorist organizations active in the region to turn the former into an active recruiting and training ground for both international jihad and anti-India terror was a fear that the CCAP sought to address.

The withdrawal of the USA from Afghanistan has brought in new challenges. Under that light, the CCAP has been modified by the Prime Minister Modi. While on one hand, India has involved itself in a number of infrastructural and pipeline building projects e.g. TAPI, INSTC, IPI etc., that will add on to its energy security, it, on the other hand, has engaged itself heavily in developing the Chabahar port in Iran that will establish itself strongly in Central Asia. Further, to ensure throttling of the terrorist and drug trafficking networks India has also developed partnerships with the regional multilateral security and complexes in the region. Its recent entry into the SCO, its involvement in the EAEU, its engagement the New Silk Road shows the pragmatism on which the policy framework of the CCAP sits. Apart from the cooperative efforts India has been active in developing its bases in Ayni and Farkhor that are strategic owing to their nearness to the POK. Despite the faring well of the policy on various, the CCAP has been struggling to deal with the Sino-Pakistani alliance and the recent Russia-Pakistan camaraderie.

Finally what needs to stated is that the catch to success of India's CCAP policy lies in making itself economically indispensable to the region. Further, critical perspectives on security, sensitivity to the post colonial, issues in human security and the historical variations will be extremely useful to the development a wholesome plan to secure the nation's vital interests under the new challenges of the post 2011 declaration of the U.S withdrawal and the continuing security vacuum in Central Asia. A balanced approach to the power play in Central Asia has

been harped on by the above study for it only thereby that an imperceptible rebalance can be brought about in the latter's dynamics. This, however, will be a time consuming affair. Therefore, India should have its eyes set on the long term goals particularly those that relate to security in the region. Stability in Afghanistan will have to be the major focus so that the ability of the forces of disruption are locked up and thereby prevented from spilling over. Tying Pakistan's efforts at attaining the strategic depth will be the second in order of importance. However, being mindful of not turning its policy posture in Central Asia as Pakistan-centric will also be a significant task. Its policy should have a positive orientation that would include an emphasis on facilitating economic growth, domestic peace and social harmony in the region. Cooperation and cooption should be the catch concepts in its policy framework that should aim at using the strategic benefits of soft power that India has been successful in generating after years of peaceful and dynamic engagement. Lastly, it must be said that the security vacuum (it is something that will remain in the years to come) in Central Asia which is nothing but a reflection the broader processes of disunity; dearth of leadership and fragmented understandings among the great powers in the globalised uni-multipolar international relations (Huntington, 1999) and New Great Game necessitates a multi-pronged approach that would put equal emphasis on all the areas where cooperation is possible. For India, security, energy and trade will hold the key to its policy-fruitition.

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