CHAPTER 4

RUSSO – CHINA RELATIONS IN THE REGIONAL CONTEXT:
CENTRAL ASIA AND SCO

4.1 Russia and China in Central Asia

The Central Asia in recent past came to be divided between the Russian/Soviet and the Chinese state systems or 'empires', Tibet and the eastern Turkestan or the Xinjiang region came under the Chinese possession and the western Turkestan (comprising the present Central Asian republics) became a part of the Tsarist Russian Empire and subsequently of the Soviet Union. Inner Mongolia became a part of China and the Mongolian People's Republic gravitated towards the Soviet bloc. India and Central Asia have maintained contacts since the times immemorial. The developments in Central Asia have always impacted on India. The British rulers of India participated in the 'great game' over Central Asia and Afghanistan in the last century with a view to consolidating their hold on their prized Indian possession, but they abstained from seeking direct possession.

By mutual consent through the Treaty of 1907, Afghanistan was turned into a buffer state between the Tsarist Russia and the British India. The weak Chinese empire in the 19th century sought to play on the contradictions of various imperialist powers and maintained a nominal sovereignty, even as it was divided into spheres of influence of various European powers. Envisaging greater challenge from the more dominant and expanding Russian empire, the British rulers of India tended to uphold the Chinese claims to sovereignty over Central Asian regions over which imperial Chinese hold was just nominal.

The Twentieth century witnessed the rise and fall of the mighty Soviet Union, the emergence of independent India after the creation of Pakistan as well as the birth, of the People's Republic of China. The disintegration of the Soviet Union completely changed the map of Central Asia and Eurasia. Geopolitical and strategic balance of power in the region and the world at large underwent a radical change. Soviet leviathan suddenly
collapsed and independence was thrust on Central Asian republics that had not asked for it. Russia, the main successor state, went into convulsions accompanying the post-Soviet systemic change and economic and military decline. China that was already since 1978 experimenting with free market economic boom while retaining the tight political control by the communist party, viewed the developments leading to the Soviet collapse with considerable trepidation and caution. China's own democratic movement was crushed with a heavy hand at Tiananmen Square in 1989. (Garnet, 1998:213-235).

The Soviet disintegration into 15 independent states presented both challenges and opportunities to Beijing. With the decline of geopolitical weight and power of Moscow, that of Beijing rose correspondingly. Emergence of independent Central Asian republics opened up possibilities of enhancing Chinese influence in the geopolitically important and resource rich Central Asia. At the same time, Beijing rulers were stung by the lurking apprehension of growing ethnic assertiveness and separatism among the restive Uighur Muslim minority in their Xinjiang province bordering on the Central Asian states. Beijing, therefore, opted for proceeding cautiously in dealing with Central Asia as well as Russia by laying greater store on the maintenance of peace and stability in the region.

At the same time, China tried to commit the Central Asian regimes to China's unity and territorial integrity and abstain from any assistance or encouragement to Uighur separatism in Xinjiang. China also abstained from trying to take any advantage of the difficulties of Russia and the Central Asian states in the immediate post-Soviet period. It was constantly recognized in the Chinese writings that despite its current difficulties, Russia remains a great power with immense potential. China, therefore, joined hands with Russia in developing an abiding framework for peace and cooperation in the region. In the long term China, in fact, hopes to gain much more in terms of extending its influence in the region through cooperative security mechanism rather than through a short-sighted overtly ambitious and adventurous policy.

During the bipolar Cold-War years Moscow was locked in hostile relations with the West and subsequently with China also. Economically and militarily a much weaker Russia has reversed the gears and is now seeking friendship and accommodation with all the
countries around it including the West as well as China and India. Although, initially the orientation of the Russian policy was totally towards the West, but subsequently growing disenchantment with the West appeared to have contributed to the emergence of a broad consensus in the Russian strategic community regarding the need for a balanced and 'multidirectional' policy. (Lo, 2002:113-125).

There is little doubt that the developments in Sino-Russian relations in general and their partnership or otherwise in Central Asia hold considerable importance for India and its overall geopolitical interests in the region.

4.2 The Beginning of Shanghai Five

The Shanghai Five grouping symbolizes the formal structure of what may be regarded as Sino-Russian strategic partnership in Central Asia. Improvement in Sino-Russian relations prepared the ground for wider cooperation among Russia, China and the bordering Central Asian republics- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, known as the Shanghai Five. During the decades of the Sixties and the Seventies high tension prevailed on the long border between the Soviet Union and China. The intense politico-ideological and strategic rivalry between the two communist giants was further complicated by the border dispute. The breeze of change in Sino-Soviet relations had started blowing in the mid-eighties. It was realized in Moscow that continuation of military confrontation on 7,500-km long Sino-Soviet boundary was a big drain on Soviet resources.

The then Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was reported to have remarked in 1991 that by the most modest estimates, confrontation with China cost the country 200 billion rubbles. In his Vladivostok speech Mikhail Gorbachev took a major initiative to improve relations with China. The way for resolving the border dispute between Russia and China was paved by the signing of Soviet-Chinese border agreement in the eastern section on 16 May 1991 and the Sino-Russian agreement on the western sector of the border on September 3, 1994. (FBIS-SOV-94-104, September 5, 1994).

It is worth noticing that while analyzing different views in Russian strategic community regarding China, Alexei D. Voskressenski of the Moscow State Institute for International
Relations comes to the conclusion that Russia has currently no alternative but to develop "ties with 'Greater China' and its dominant power, the PRC" (Voskressenski, 1997: 18). Therefore, whatever might be the reservations, concerns and apprehensions in certain Russian circles, forging of extensive cooperative ties with China remains one of the main thrusts of the current Russian policy.

The example set by Russia and China was followed by other Central Asian states. Presidents Nazarbayev, Karimov, Akayev, Niyazov, and Rahmonov from the Central Asian countries all visited China and documents defining good neighbourly relationships between each of these countries and China were signed. In 1994, Premier Li Peng of China paid an official visit to Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Premier Li Peng sought to assure the Central Asian leaders and stressed that China will follow four basic policies in developing relations with the Central Asian countries:

- to maintain friendly relations and peaceful co-existence;
- to develop mutually beneficial cooperation and promote common prosperity;
- to respect people's choices and not interfere in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries; and
- to respect the independence and sovereignty of Central Asian countries and promote regional stability. (Kanet and Vrokizhemiekin, 1997:211-223).

He asserted that China will forever be a good friend of the Central Asian countries, and that China will not pursue a sphere of influence in Central Asia, political or economic. China offered the land-locked Central Asian states outlet to the Sea on its Pacific coast. He also offered that China is ready to join forces with the Central Asian countries to build the new Silk Road, designed to fulfill the needs of the 21st century (Kui, 1996: 51). The Chinese took particular credit that in early difficult years border trade with China helped Russia and other Central Asian states in warding off severe shortage of food and consumer goods.

A series of negotiations took place between Russia and the bordering Central Asian states on the one hand, and China on the other hand on resolving the border issue and adopting
military confidence building measures in the bordering areas. Also, in 1994 the border treaty between China and Kazakhstan was signed. In September 1995 the 17th round of negotiations on disarmament and military confidence measures in the bordering areas was held in Moscow with the participation of the five countries concerned. Substantial results were achieved. All parties reached unanimous agreement on the treaty. Thus the stage was set for the signing of the "Agreement on Strengthening Military Confidence in Border Areas" on April 26, 1996 at Shanghai by Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and came to be known as the 'Shanghai five'. The agreement stipulated that the troops of the sides stationed in the border areas would not attack each other. It called for the reduction of military units along the border.

The signatory states also agreed that they would neither attack nor direct military exercises against one another along the border. As CBM measure, it was agreed that the signatories would notify the other side about large-scale military exercises. They would invite observers from the other side to military maneuvers and exercises. Friendly contacts among the military personnel of the sides would be encouraged. In addition, the five presidents signed a series of agreements to promote economic trades, scientific and cultural exchanges.

The first step in building the structure of Sino-Russian partnership in Central Asia, thus, comprised of confidence building measures in the entire former Soviet-China border area. Other steps gradually followed. In the previous decades the entire border was highly militarized and fortified and was a flash point of tension. The priority before the post-Soviet Russia and the Central Asian republics was domestic politico-economic systemic transformation. For this they needed a stable and favourable external environment and peace on the border. China also accorded highest priority to the task of economic modernization that required peace on the borders. Russia was not in a position to re-impose or hold on to its historical control and influence over the region. China's population and economic power are largely concentrated on its eastern coastal part. Thus, China's position on its western front in Central Asia in the immediate post-Soviet period was rather defensive. It wanted to forestall the possibility of the assertion of the Uighur demand for independence in Xinjiang. (Nathan and Ross, 1997:213-229).
The newly independent states of Central Asia were extremely fragile in political, economic and military terms. Both Moscow and Beijing were concerned that any instability and turbulence in Central Asia would spillover to their bordering areas. The two, therefore, decided to join hands for ensuring peace, stability and confidence building measures in the region. The basic objective of the Shanghai April 1996 declaration was to make declarations aimed at assuring one another about the non-threatening intentions of the sides that would instill mutual confidence.

One important feature of the border negotiations that took place in Central Asia was that the three Central Asian Republics negotiated together along with Russia with China within the framework of four plus one. Significantly, this practice has been given up in November 2000. The Central Asians from now onwards shall be negotiating bilaterally with China, which, in fact, goes in China's favour.

a) Annual Summit Meetings of the Shanghai Five

In their second summit meeting in Moscow in 1997, the Five signed the" Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas". The agreement provided that in the 100 km zone on each side of former Soviet-China border, the total strength of the Army, the Air Force and the air units of the Air Defence Force should not exceed 130,400. The agreement also established supervisory mechanism over the military forces on the borders. The second agreement, thus, was aimed at reducing the number of the border forces to the level of defensive purposes only. The sides' reiterated not to use force or the threat to use force, not to pursue military supremacy and agreed to exchange of information on border military force. The objective was to promote transparency and mutual trust and make military activities on the border predictable and subject to supervision. (Sherman, 1995:216-222).

Both Russia and China and the concerned Central Asian leaders are extremely upbeat about their achievements within the Shanghai Five framework. It is regarded as a new type of constructive and practical diplomacy that imparted stability and predictability along more than 7,500-km long border through military confidence-building measures.
Thus, President Jiang Zemin was reported to have remarked that the Shanghai Five presented a model distinct from the Cold War mindset. The Russian President called it a unique document in the world. President Nazarbaev hailed it as unprecedented in the contemporary world (Mingshan & Xiquam, 2000: 3-4).

The beginning of the Shanghai Five processes has coincided with the change of the stewardship of the Russian Foreign Ministry. In January 1996 Andrei Kozyrev was replaced by Yevgeny Primakov. Although disenchantment with the totally Westward orientation and a certain shift in the country's policy had begun much earlier in 1993-94, still Kozyrev bore the tag of being pro-West. Primakov laid greater stress on a more balanced policy between the West and the East and is associated with the concept of pursuing a 'multipolar' world.

The third summit was held at Alma-Ata in June-July 1998. President Yeltsin did not attend the Alma-Ata summit of Shanghai Five. In his place Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov attended the summit. The joint declaration underlined the readiness of all the parties to continue to foster an atmosphere of "genuine friendship and complete trust" along the border. The joint declaration also outlined the progress made in border demilitarization. All the speakers took note of the threat to regional security posed by the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, the growth of drug trafficking, and mounting religious extremism, separatism and aggressive nationalism in the region. The declaration included their commitment to fight these forces. (Myasnikov, 2002:43-56).

In addition, the signatories showed common interest in developing "pipeline infrastructure among the five states, with connection to other countries." The main reference was to the large-scale project to build a 3000-km long oil pipeline from western Kazakhstan to western China. Russia was reported to be showing interest in it, as the Russian companies expected a share in the construction contracts (Pravda, July 4, 1998).

The Alma-Ata summit provided an opportunity to President Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan to publicise his pet project of holding a conference of confidence-building measures in Asia (CICA), which was endorsed by the summit. The summit also endorsed the favourite
proposal of President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan (sent by correspondence) of declaring Central Asia a nuclear-free zone.

However, the fact that President Yeltsin did not attend the summit and subsequently his inability to attend the ceremony of the presentation of the new Kazakhstan capital Astana, were regarded as a slight by the Kazakhs. The personal bond between the leaders of the post-Soviet republics was regarded as the main cementing factor in the former Soviet space. Novyiye Izvestia commented that in the absence of Yeltsin, the meeting at Alma-Ata of the leaders of Shanghai Five became "purely a formality" (CDPSP, 1998:18-19).

The Shanghai Five has provided a platform both for real achievements in the field of CBMs in the border and has speeded up the process of settling the border disputes and demarcation of the border alignment on the ground. At the same time, Shanghai Five has also been used by the parties as a platform for voicing good intentions, and adopting self righteouse position in a world driven by power politics. Thus, the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan came in for criticism at the Alma-Ata summit. Foreign Minister Primakov made use of the occasion by contrasting the tense relations between India and Pakistan with the example of cooperative security set by the Shanghai Five and called upon India and Pakistan to emulate the example of the Shanghai Five. In fact, ITAR-TASS remarked regarding Nazarbaev's CICA proposal that it was a "conceptual rehash of an idea once put forward by Mikhail Gorbachev ... "All these things", added the paper, "are repeated in various forms year after year. The vast majority of them have about as much chance of implementation as the Russian President's appeal in a recent letter to Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, that India sign the Treaty on the Non Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons without delay" (Myasnikov, 2002:34-43).

The fourth summit of the Shanghai five took place at Bishkek on August 25, 1999. The background to the Bishkek summit was provided by NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, an event that brought Moscow and Beijing closer to each other in a joint struggle against hegemonism and the use of force without UN sanction. On his arrival at the Bishkek Airport, President Yeltsin remarked about his readiness for a battle "especially with Westerners". Softening the impact of President Yeltsin's words, the Foreign Minister of
Russia, Igor Ivanov, however, remarked that, "the closer the Russia-China relations, the
greater the stability in the world" and added" the more the constructive cooperation with
the US, the greater the stability in the world." However, testifying to the mood prevailing
in post Yugoslav situation, it was noted in the media that the proceedings of the summit
were conducted in utmost secrecy. No traditional meeting with the press was held (Daily

Replying to questions by Kommersant (Sergei Prikhodko) deputy chief of Yeltsin's staff,
said on the occasion that the original task set at Shanghai (1996) - to build up confidence
and give an additional impetus to border cooperation, has been fulfilled. New tasks were
now emerging. These were, the struggle against international terrorism, illegal drug
trafficking and arms smuggling, as well as illegal emigration and other forms of across-
the -border criminal acts. The Bishkek declaration referred to the agreement on
appropriate joint measures in 1999-2000 on these issues. Commenting on Bishkek
summit, the official media stressed that Shanghai Five is not a political military bloc. Its
main objective is to pursue sub-regional security. It also said that the Shanghai Five is not
directed against other countries (SWB, FE/3623 E/1 August 26, 1999). Bishkek
declaration also upheld the concept of multi-polarity as the general trend for the
development of the present day world.

The sides expressed the intention to develop trade and economic cooperation between the
five countries on a bilateral basis and to step up at the same time a search for ways to
boost multilateral interaction in this sphere. The sides supported the idea of reviving the
"Diplomacy of the Silk Road", put forward by the Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev.

At the Dushanbe summit (July 5, 2000), the cooperation in the field of combating
national separatism, international terrorism, and religious extremism as well as weapons
and drugs trafficking and illegal immigration was pushed to a new stage. For this purpose
the Five countries agreed to work out multilateral programmes, sign multilateral treaties
and accords and hold regular meeting of officers from their justice, border and customs
It was reiterated on the eve of Shangahi Five summit in Dushanbe that the purpose for which the Shanghai five was created, viz., agreement on CBMs and the reduction of troops in the border areas are being implemented. But new threats have appeared in the region in the form of international terrorism and drugs and weapons trafficking. During the summit, talks were also held between the law-enforcing bodies, special services and defence ministries of the sides on how to deal with the new challenges.

The border CBMs entered the new stage of implementation of the Shanghai agreements. Izvestia, for instance, reported that the sides coordinated the parameters of presence in the 100-km zone on both sides of the border for the first time in the history of their relations. The troop ceilings after reduction were carefully analyzed and were recognized as optimal for ensuring the national security of the sides. The paper also reported that the first mutual inspection under the Shanghai Five framework has just ended in Russia's Maritime Territory, and another inspection would be held in the adjacent region in the north-east of China. Observers from all five states can take part on a voluntary basis in each such inspection (The Hindu, July 6, 2000).

A look at the declaration adopted at Dushanbe shows that it provided a forum to the big two - Russia and China - to document their general positions on larger regional and world issues and carry the Central Asian member states along with them. Thus the declaration endorsed the concept of multipolar world. Respect for human rights was mentioned with the rider that the historic specifics of every state should be heeded during the application of this principle. The application of this principle should not run counter to other generally recognized principles of international law. NPT, CTBT should be universally joined. The declaration endorsed NFZ in Central Asia as well as CICA proposal.

The declaration opposed the use of force in international relations without prior permission of the UN Security Council. It stressed that the UN role should be strengthened as the main mechanism for maintaining international peace and stability. The declaration also underscored the unconditional need for preserving and unfailingly observing the 1972 ABM treaty, which banned the creation of national ABM systems. The ABM treaty was seen as the cornerstone of strategic stability and the foundation for
subsequent strategic offensive arms cuts. The parties also opposed US plan to build NMD (National Missile Defence) system and the deployment of TMD systems in the Asia-Pacific region and supported the position of China, which opposed plans to incorporate Taiwan into such a system.(Cheng, 2004:53-75).

The Dushanbe declaration expressed support for "the striving and efforts of China to maintain unity in the country in accordance with' one China' principle and for "Russia's stand on the settlement of the situation in the Chechen Republic". In view of the Western criticism of Russian military action in Chechnya, the support of the Shanghai Five appeared to be a welcome relief for the Russian authorities. In all the formulations China equates the Taiwan issue with that of Chechnya. It is advantageous to the Chinese as the Chinese do not have any control over Taiwan, while Russians have Chechnya under their effective military control, despite continued militant violence in the region.

President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan for the first time participated as an observer. He did not sign the declaration. President Putin proposed that the Shanghai Five should be called Shanghai Forum. Hints were also given regarding its possible extensions with the participation of other states of the region (The Hindu, July 8, 2000). While in Dushanbe; President Putin made it clear that the Russian troops would remain in Tajikistan said, "Unless our servicemen are present in the republic, the positive achievements of the settlement of the Tajik conflict will be lost". (Denda, 2000:97-116).

b) China's Policy towards Central Asia: Initial Emphasis on Transport, Trade and Economic Links

China's policy towards Central Asia is determined by its desire to have a belt of good-neighbourly states on its sensitive western borders across Xinjiang, where it is facing the problem of Uighur separatism. China is keen to ensure that the newly independent Central Asian states do not give any support and encouragement to the Uighurs in Xinjiang. There are around 200,000 Uighurs in Kazakhstan and around 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand there are small Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik minorities in
Xinjiang. Second Chinese objective is to get an access to the energy resources of Central Asia. (Crocker, 2003: 32-44).

Lastly China is interested in the Central Asian markets and enhancing its economic influence in the region. For the present the task of ensuring security of Central Asian region is largely left to Moscow, the traditional guarantor of security in the region. China has concentrated on enhancing transport, trade and economic links. Russian commentators have appreciated the gesture that China has agreed to settle the border issue with the Central Asian states together with Russia in the framework of Four plus One, which is seen as the Chinese recognition of Russia's special role in the region. However, present author was informed by a visiting Russian scholar from the Institute of Far East, Moscow, that in November 2000, a decision was taken that from then onwards the border issue would be bilaterally dealt by China with the CARs. It would appear that without directly questioning Russia's traditional role in Central Asia, China is persistently making inroads in the region by filling up available spaces. (Crocker, 2003: 32-44).

Significantly, China is also seeking to establish military contacts with the Central Asian states. Reports of growing military exchanges between China and the CARs and offers of military assistance by the former to the latter are also appearing of late. The Chinese military delegations are visiting CARs. The Turkmen defence minister visited China in September 1999 and expressed interest in cooperation with China in the field of military training and use of equipment. China extended aid of 11 million Yuan to the Kazakh armed forces during the visit of the Kazakh defence minister to China in April-end 2000. Chinese military delegation pledged aid to Kazakhstan. On July 13, 2000, the Chinese military delegation visited Tajikistan (Xinhua, July 15, 2000).

Immediately after the emergence of independent states in Central Asia, the Chinese quickly established rail and road links with the bordering CARs. Cheap Chinese consumer goods flooded the region. China has also extended access to the sea to the landlocked Central Asian states to its ports on the Pacific Ocean. Traditionally, all transport and communications links of Central Asia have been through Russia. Access to the sea across the Chinese territory helps the CARs in their search for alternative routes and in
that measure reduces their dependence on Moscow. The revival of ancient Silk Road network linking China across Central Asia to Europe and Middle East has caught the imagination of all concerned. Moscow is keen to ensure that Russia is not by-passed in the transport and pipeline building activities in the region. It would like to be connected with them. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union Russia is keenly projecting itself as a bridge between Europe and Asia through transport network across the Russian territory. It has enthusiastically supported the route from China across Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, to Poland as the northern branch of the 'Silk Road'. (Rossabi, 1999: 19-20).

China has a vital interest in getting access to the vast energy resources of both Russia and Central Asia in view of the increasing energy requirements of its growing economy. In view of ambitious Western projects to take Central Asian and Caspian oil and gas are not delivered only to the West. Moscow, which was the sole custodian of Central Asian and Caspian Sea energy resources and pipeline network under the Soviet Union, has reasons to be greatly concerned at the Western interests and presence in the region. The Russian analysts believe that to a certain extent it is possible to collaborate with China with a view to jointly resist Western pressure and designs in the Caspian Sea and the Central Asian regions. This is regarded as the economic logic behind the two powers calling for a 'multi-polar' world. (Kedrov, 1999: 13).

In the field of energy, the economies of Russia and the CARs on the one hand and China on the other hand are mutually complementary. In fact, Moscow regards the Central Asians as its competitors as energy suppliers. However, the best practical option before Moscow is to create mutual dependence with China by way of building oil and gas pipelines from Russian Far East and Siberia to China. Moscow is also seeking a share in the Central Asian energy network. Thus, in June 1997 during the visit of Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov to China, the two countries signed an agreement on cooperation in oil and natural gas production and pipelines. Under the agreement the two would cooperate in the exploration of gas in Irkutsk in Russia's Far East and gas supply from Kovykta gas deposit from Irkutsk district to China by a 3360-km pipeline across Mongolia. (Lukin,1998:831-835).
It has been projected that after the year 2005 Russia and CIS countries will be the main sources of natural gas for China. China is reported to be "conducting an active policy of attracting the gas resources of adjacent states". Russia Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are main partners of China. On September 24, 1997, China and Kazakhstan signed a $9.5 billion agreement for the development of oil and gas fields in western Kazakhstan with the Chinese aid. China is to receive 60 percent of the oil thus produced. The agreement envisaged the construction of a 3000 km pipeline from Kazakhstan to China. China is particularly interested in getting access to Turkmengas and thus ensures future energy security. The China-Turkmenistan joint statement issued on July 6, 2000, at the time of President Jiang Zemin's visit to Ashgabat attaches special importance to strengthening mutually beneficial cooperation in the energy field. The two sides have agreed to conduct feasibility study on the project of laying a natural gas pipeline linking Turkmenistan and China. The pipeline is going to be 8000-km long and cost upward of $12 billion. Such a route was first discussed several years ago. In the intervening years, it appeared to be dead because of high construction cost. However, China's growing energy needs appear to have rekindled the discussion. (Rappal, 2002:64-77).

4.3 Russia Remain Big Brother in Central Asia

Russia is the largest and the most dominant and is gradually fortifying its own position in the former Soviet republics. It retains nearly three-fourth of borders, Russian border guards are withdrawing from the Soviet territory and accounts for nearly half of the Soviet other republics. However, in view of the threat posed by population at that time, Russian population is declining and is partly replenished by immigration of Russians from other former Soviet republics. (Kager, 1997: 5). The CARs are all ruled by ex-Communist ruling elites, who have now adopted the ideology of nationalism and are trying to adapt to market economy and integration with the world economy. They are prepared to come to terms with cultural Islam, but are opposed to political and extremist Islam that aims at wresting political power. In view of the threat that Russia is itself facing from Sunni Wahabi Islamic extremism in Chechnya, Oagestan and other areas of Caucasus and southern Russia, Moscow and the Central Asian elites have ideological affinity and sympathy for each other. (Lo, 2004:121-134).
At the time of Soviet disintegration, the newly independent states of Central Asia were militarily, politically and economically weak and naturally came within the security parameters of Moscow. When civil war broke out in Tajikistan in 1992 between the ex-communist ruling elite and the Islamic elements that were getting support and sanctuary in Mujahideen-ruled Afghanistan and from the Islamic elements of Iran and Pakistan, Russia stepped in as the main guarantor of security of the Tajik government with the consent and participation of all other Central Asian states. In May 1992 a CIS collective security treaty was signed in Tashkent for the protection of the CIS borders. (Lo, 2004:121-134).

In August 1992 except for Turkmenistan all other Central Asian states along with Russia created a 25,000 strong Russian-Central Asian force to protect the Tajik-Afghan borders to keep the Islamic militants at bay. Russia deployed its 201st Motorized Rifle division and units of its Federal Border Service in Tajikistan. At this time a 'two border' strategy was evolved whereby the defence of the external borders of the CIS or the former Soviet borders was considered crucial for the security of Russia. The former Soviet borders were well guarded and fortified while Russia's new borders were not. As the border defence units of the new republics have been formed and trained and Russia is gradually fortifying its own borders, Russian border guards are withdrawing from the other republics. (Rahm, 2002:153-161).

However, in view of the threat posed by Taliban controlled Afghanistan, Russia decided to maintain its military presence in Tajikistan, which has a more than one thousand km. long border with Afghanistan. In February 1999 Russia also decided to establish a military base in Tajikistan. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Russia is also trying to strengthen the collective security treaty to meet the challenge of international terrorism, extremism and drugs and arms trafficking emanating from Afghanistan – Pakistan belt. (Crocker, 2003:32;44).

Owing to a steep decline in Russian economy (Russian COP fell by 40 to 50 percent in the first few years of economic reforms) and its continued economic woes Russia was in no position to maintain its traditional and historical hold over Central Asian economies.
All the CARs have diversified their political and economic ties with the outside world, more particularly the Western countries that have surplus capital and modern technologies. Central Asia and Caspian region being rich in hydrocarbon resources and other valuable minerals and metals became particularly attractive to Western countries and multinational corporations. Their geopolitical location in the heart of Asia close to the borders of Russia, China, the Indian subcontinent, Iran and the Middle East added to their value in the eyes of the West. Russia's trade and investment in the CARs declined while that of the Western countries, Japan and South Korea and China, etc. increased (Kerr, 1998:216-231).

The failure of Russian military to subdue the rebel republic of Chechnya in the first Chechen war (1994-96) exposed its military decline and gave a further blow to Russia's prestige. On its part, the USA has declared the promotion of 'geopolitical pluralism' in the former Soviet space as its goal. The most populous state is Uzbekistan in Central Asia, oil-rich Azerbaijan in Transcaucasia, and second most powerful and advanced former Soviet Slavic republic of Ukraine invited special US attention in this effort. With the Western blessing and encouragement a pro-Western grouping of southern and south-western former Soviet states called GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) was formed mainly for economic and partly for political purposes.(Crincione, 2000:212-136).

To the challenge the Moscow, the West is promoting and sponsoring East-West transport route TRACECA and lying of Baku-Ceyhan and Baku-Supsa oil and gas pipelines that would bypass Russian and Iranian territories. US policy in Central Asia and Caucasus is a cause of concern for Russia. Russia is trying to protect what it considers its vital interests in the region, but it does not wish to enter into direct confrontation with the USA. The US decision to extend the country's command responsibility zone to the former Soviet republics aroused particular Russian concern and the issue was repeatedly taken up by Russia with the USA at the highest level (Bakshi, 1999: 1585-86).

In view of its limited resources and capabilities, Russia has sought selective integration with the inner core of the former Soviet republics, which, for various reasons, are more
willing for it. On March 29, 1996 a Customs Union was signed between four republics, viz., Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Subsequently Tajikistan also has joined the Customs Union. With three out of five Central Asian states being within the Customs Union, Russia remains an important player in Central Asia. Uzbekistan chose to adopt an independent pro-Western course while Turkmenistan from the very beginning declared to follow a policy of neutrality. (Akana, 1996:231-243).

Moscow has been constantly wooing Uzbekistan because of its large population and considerable geopolitical weight in Central Asia. Thus, on October 12, 1998 during his visit to Tashkent, President Yeltsin signed with President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan and President Imomali Rahmanov of Tajikistan a tripartite agreement for countering aggressive fundamentalism and extremism in the region. President Karimov is carrying on a determined struggle against Islamic militants in the country that are especially strong in the Fergana valley on the tri-junction of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In February 1999, Russian position in the region suffered a setback when Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova decided to leave the collective security treaty. Moscow-led collective security treaty was thereafter renewed with six members only, viz., Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. However, the collective security treaty and the Customs Union ensure that Russia maintains its presence and clout in Central Asia.

There has been an undisputed growth in the Western interest and influence in the region. Increase in the Western investments in the region has also created a vested interest of the US-led Western countries in the security set up in the region. Much to the chagrin and consternation of Moscow, the USA has pronounced Central Asia and the Caspian region as areas of special US interest. In July 1994, all the former Soviet republics along with Russia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. In September 1997 military exercises for the first time took place in three of the CARs- Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan under the PfP programme with the participation of troops from USA, Turkey and other Western countries. Russia, felt deeply concerned as the area had thus far come under total security cover of Moscow. But Moscow opted for avoiding
a showdown with the West and acquiesced by sending its own contingent in the exercises. Since then the exercises have become an annual feature. (Voskressenski, 2003:354-369).

However, the fact remains that Russia happens to be the next door big power in Central Asia. Whatever small military establishments, equipment and training facilities the newly independent Central Asian states have been able to assemble, are still largely based on the Russian pattern and assistance. In the complex Central Asian situation West seemed at the time not to be in a position to commit hoops. In fact, Aleksei V. Malashenko of the Moscow Centre for Carnegie questioned the Western ability to provide "internal stability" in the region. He even suggested that to some extent Russia could become a "guarantor" of West's mercantile interests in the region. (Bakshi, 1999: 1585-91).

It has been argued that in view of Russia's military, political and economic weakness, it may not be able to impose its will on the region. But the Russian publicists at the same time expressed the belief that Russia still remained in the position of obstructing others from achieving their goals in the region at the expense of Russian interests.

**a) Islamic Extremism and Militancy a Common Threat**

Growing Islamic militancy and extremism in the region have emerged as a common threat for the countries of the region as well as Russia and China and also for India. The Taliban controlled Afghanistan and its mentor Pakistan emerged as the springhead of international terrorism, illegal drugs and arms trafficking and Islamic extremism. Beginning with the capture of Kabul in September 1996, the Taliban militia made significant gains in capturing almost ninety percent of Afghan territory. It was universally believed that but for the support given by Pakistani army, a mere religious militia that the Taliban were, could not gain such spectacular successes. Saudi financial assistance and drug money also contributed to Taliban gains. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were the only three countries that recognized the Taliban government.

Initially the Taliban forces enjoyed Washington's covert backing. Taliban's objective was to bring peace and unity to the war-torn land although under a hard line and strict
The puritanical Sunni Wahabi code of conduct. Taliban's supporters hoped that they would help in laying overland routes to Central Asia across Afghanistan and make it possible to build oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia across Afghanistan to Pakistan thus reducing the region's dependence on northern routes via Russia. Washington is keenly promoting western routes bypassing both Iran and Russia. It is also interested in the southern route across Afghanistan bypassing Iran. US multinational UNOCAL and the Saudi multinational Delta have been interested in gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan and beyond. (Anderson, 1997:32-41).

However, subsequently, Taliban fell out of favour of Washington owing to its dismal human rights record and harsh treatment of women, its involvement in the drugs trade and above all its refusal to surrender Saudi billionaire Osama bin Laden accused of a number of terrorist acts against US targets.

It is widely known that a large number of terrorist camps existed in Taliban-controlled territory of Afghanistan. India in Kashmir, Russia in Chechnya, China in Xinjiang and the Central Asian states in the Fergana valley area and southern belt bordering on Afghanistan are facing the problem of international terrorism. In view of Islamic militants' attacks in southern Kyrgyzstan and southern Uzbekistan, the CIS and staff exercise. Such a joint exercise was reported to have taken place for the first time. The purpose of the exercise was to prepare for a joint response not to any conventional enemy, but to international terrorist gangs. In the Shanghai Five summit held in Dushanbe in July 2000, the problems of combating international terrorism, separatism, drugs and arms trafficking were given top priority. (Ivanov, 2002:152-170).

The advent of young and energetic Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia is widely regarded as symbolizing the resurgence of new Russia. Within a short span after coming into power, President Putin adopted a new National Security Concept, a new Military Doctrine and a new Foreign Policy Concept. The basic goals of President Putin's policy are to strengthen the Russian state, pursue a pragmatic and realistic foreign and domestic policy aimed at protection of Russian interests as well as geared to speeding up the country's economic recovery. Putin did not chart out a radically new course different
from his predecessor. But he infused a new energy and vigor in the pursuit of the country's foreign policy in all directions.

Under President Putin a new impulse was provided to the integration process within the former Soviet space, including Central Asia. Russia has been working within the limits of its possibilities and resources, but it significantly activated all its policy options. Thus, at the Minsk summit of the Customs Union and Collective Security members on May 24, 2000, it was decided to further strengthen the collective security and turn the Customs Union into a full-fledged Eurasian Economic Community (SWB, Su/3953 G/1 Sept. 23, 2000).

It was, for instance, reported that so far the six member collective security treaty did not have collective military element. It was decided at the Minsk summit to raise the effectiveness of the treaty. New security challenges and threats were identified as international terrorism, illegal arms trade, illegal migration, organized crime, etc. On October 12, 2000, another summit meeting of the collective security member states took place in Bishkek. At Bishkek summit it was decided to strengthen collective security structures and mechanism by creating regional collective security forces that include three directions: (1) East European direction comprising Russia and Belarus, (2) Caucasus direction based on bilateral agreements between Russia and Armenia and (3) the Central Asian direction aimed at setting up regional collective security forces in the Central Asian region. The objective was to set up collective rapid deployment forces on the basis of bilateral relations between Russia and each Central Asian country, especially keeping in view the threat emanating from Afghanistan and international terrorism (Daily Review, May 25, 2000).

On October 10, 2000, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed the treaty on the creation of Eurasian Economic Community in place of the customs union. The treaty stipulates the creation of a common market of five states. As Sergei Rogov pointed out, "Unlike its predecessors, the EAEC (Eurasian Economic community), modeled after the EU, could lead to the creation of an effective mechanism for the development of integration in the post-Soviet space. For the first time in post-Soviet
history, five countries agreed to create supranational structures, whose decisions will be binding on all EAEC members". It was agreed that an integration committee would take the decisions by a majority of two-thirds of the vote. The vote quotas were decided in this way: Russia would have 40 per cent of the vote, Belarus and Kazakhstan would have 20 per cent each and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would have 10 per cent each. Their contributions to the EAEC budget would be commensurate too (Sherman 2000; 3).

Thus, under President Putin Russia sought to consolidate its presence in Central Asia both in economic and security fields. It is believed that Putin has been pursuing a pragmatic and even tough policy with the former Soviet states, particularly as regards the debt repayment. For instance, it was reported, Russia was seeking co-ownership in major defence industries and raw-material complexes of Kyrgyzstan as a mode of repayment of that republic's debt to Russia (Bakayev 2000: 14-27).

With Uzbekistan, which refused to join these military political and economic structures, Moscow entered into bilateral security arrangements. In view of the challenge emanating from the south-from the Taliban and the Islamic militants - it was made clear that Russia would provide Uzbekistan with arms but not with troops.

Russia repeatedly stressed in all its policy formulations that the CIS countries remain a priority for Russia. However, Russians also seemed hesitant to call the CIS a zone of Russian strategic interests' or influence .It was increasingly realized that the countries have become independent subjects in international relations as independent states. At the same time, the need for greater integration with the CIS countries in various fields has also been increasingly felt. It was stressed that Russia's national interests in economic, political and military spheres should determine the nature and degree of such an integration, while taking account of the legacy of the former Soviet Union, from whom the CIS has inherited energy, economic development of the region. China is planning to transport and communication network. (Bakayev, 2000:14-27).

Analysts argue that under Putin Russia is likely to be more assertive in promoting Russia’s economic interests in Central Asia. Putin wants economic and political interests
to align (Warner, 2000: 10). Despite the weakening of Russia's economic position in Central Asia, the structures of Soviet time integration of Russian Central Asian economy still persist. Thus, large enterprises in Russia still depend on cotton imports from Uzbekistan, especially in Ivanovo. A Reuter dispatch from Moscow on October 13, 2000, reads: “The West has provided welcome investment, especially in resource rich Kazakhstan, but Russia under Putin in re-emerging as the number one influence in the region.” The fear of radical Islam, especially in Afghanistan is binding Russia and Central Asia together.

b) China’s Campaign to develop its Western Regions

China also launched its 'Great Western Campaign' to develop the backward western regions of the country. The objective is both to reduce the glaring disparity in the developed eastern regions and the backward western regions as well as consolidating China's hold over the minority regions through promises of economic development. It is even feared that the growing economic disparities may threaten the unity of the country. Moreover, 8 million out of 17 million residents of Xinjiang are Uighurs, who are Muslims of the Turkic stock and resist assimilation by the dominant Hans. Although the separatist violence in Xinjiang has not acquired a threatening proportion, but the Chinese authorities apprehend that "separatism and the struggle against separatism will go on for a long time in Xinjiang". Between January 1997 and April 1999, Amnesty documented 210 death sentences and 190 executions in the province. Most of those executed were Uighurs convicted of terrorism and subversive activities. (Cheng, 2004:253-273).

The Chinese are concerned at Uighurs taking part in armed Islamic movements abroad from Afghanistan to Uzbekistan and even Chechnya. On returning home they can create problems for China. The Chinese hope to keep Uighur separatism in check through economic development of the region. China is planning to develop a number of infrastructure and oil and gas pipeline projects in the region. It was reported in September 2000 that in next five years Beijing hopes to spend over $ 12 billion on 70 major projects. Some money will come from Beijing. It is also looking to the wealthy eastern provinces to help (The Hindu, Sept. 16, 2000).
It seemed likely that the economic development of the western regions of China, including Xinjiang, might help in the projection of Chinese economic power further west in the Central Asian states and may change the current equilibrium of balance of power in the region in China's favour.

The infrastructure and pipeline development projects in Xinjiang, through which China hopes both to win over and further assimilate the disgruntled minorities, are creating new contradictions. They have resulted in the increase of Han migration into the region which is deeply resented by the Uighurs. The Uighurs believe that the benefits of development projects are mainly going to the Han settlers and not to the minority community. (Bazhanov, 1998:212-233).

Visitors from the neighbouring Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian state that has joined the WTO point out that China is vigorously trying to flood the Central Asian markets and economies by dumping cheap Chinese goods. Kyrgyzstan, which has a relatively free economy, is used as a transit point to the rest of Central Asia. The Chinese are reported to be resorting to unethical trade practice of labeling their low quality goods of mass consumption as 'made in Kyrgyzstan'.

c) Potential Rivalry Between Russia and China in Central Asia

The Chinese policy of developing the western regions as well as the Russian policy of promoting regional integration by forming Eurasian Economic Community and strengthening the collective security treaty underscored their vigorous efforts aimed at consolidating positions in their respective parts of Central Asia albeit in different ways. At the same time, they cooperate with each other within the Shanghai Forum. It has been decided by the Shanghai Forum to set up an anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek.

China appears to have largely succeeded in its bid to enlist the support of the Central Asian regimes in curbing Uighur separatists. It also sought to formally commit Russia and the CARs to 'one China' concept. However, an apprehension was expressed at the time that if Islamic extremist groups come to power in Central Asia or Central Asia slips into chaos, it may be more difficult to prevent support to the Uighurs coming from
neighbouring regions. Therefore, both Russia and China, for their own reasons, have a deep interest that Central Asia is not destabilized. (Gilbert, 1998: 92-113).

China adopted a policy of not to question directly Russia's traditional positions in the region but at the same time trying to seep into available spaces in the region, that include not only growing economic but also military contacts. In Kazakhstan, China's direct foreign investment reached $1.1 billion in 1999. Thus, Morris Rossabi remarked that China "harbours aspirations of replacing Russia as the dominant economic force in Central Asia, thus placing Beijing in a better position to address its domestic policy concerns". It has been pointed out that if China's economic and military power continues to grow while that of Russia declines, China might even step in to play the policeman's role to protect its economic and geopolitical interests in Central Asia. (Philip and Rhinelander:2001:57-68).

One factor binding China with the CARs is the authoritarian political culture. Although Russia has developed all the paraphernalia of democracy, still democratic culture and institutions are new in Russia and Russian ruling class finds no difficulty in dealing with authoritarian regimes. Indeed, the CAR regimes are increasingly becoming wary of Western insistence on human rights and democracy. In fact, authoritarian Chinese model combining strict political control with a free market economy appears to be increasingly more attractive to the CAR regimes.

It may be assumed that China can hope to achieve much more in terms of extending its influence in Central Asia and further west through peace dividends. China appears to have enthusiastically adopted the 'Eurasian project', which includes the vast region with immense resources, comprising Russia, China and the Central Asian member states that constitute the Shanghai Forum (Gang, 1999: 25-28).

Indeed owing to its size, population and economic and military power, China is bound to make its weight felt in the grouping, especially in view of the fact that after the Soviet collapse, Moscow's power and influence have shrunk and those of China are on the rise. Moscow is painfully aware of it. But it would avoid direct confrontation with China, or
for that matter, with the West. It would rather h-y to place itself in the position of the 'balancing pole' of contending powers and interests in the region. To an extent it would also imply Russian reconciliation with the presence of the Western as well as other interests in the region. In the similar vein, a more active Indian role in Central Asia may be rather welcomed by Russia.

Russia has been trying to craft together an anti-terrorist alliance of the major powers. It set up joint working groups on Afghanistan with both India and the USA to meet the threat of international narco-terrorism emanating from there. Both Russia and the USA sponsored the UN Security Council resolution of December 19, 2000, that imposed additional sanctions on the Taliban unless the latter closed the terrorist bases on its territory and surrendered Osama bin Laden within a month. It is extremely significant that China along with Malaysia chose to abstain from the Security Council resolution. Thus, on the question of dealing with the Taliban challenge in Afghanistan, the positions of China and Russia were not identical despite the fact that the Shanghai Five have repeatedly emphasized the need for joint fight against religious extremism and international terrorism. Indeed, it was clearly the strategy of the Taliban and their supporters in Islamabad that all the neighbouring countries should not unite against them and they were able to deal with each neighbouring country separately by offering promises of good behaviour.

Piqued by Taliban's recognition of the independence of Chechnya in January 2000 and its support to Chechen rebels, Russian officials in May and June, 2000, voiced the possibility of pre-emptive air strikes against the terrorist training bases in Taliban-held territory. Taliban's threat to carry on reprisals against the neighbouring Central Asian countries seems to have frightened Uzbekistan and other CARs to distance their position from Russia. Russia itself backed out from the threat of air strikes. Taliban seemed to be particularly trying to reach out to China. In fact, a certain duality in dealing with the Taliban phenomenon could be discerned in the policy of all the countries of the region. Russia regarded the protection of the southern borders of the CIS crucial for its own security. It remained the main guarantor of security of the region. At the same time, after its 'earlier experience in Afghanistan, it did not like to again get involved in another
Afghan war. It seemed that it would like to act in coalition with other powers and through the UNO. (Gilbert, 2000: 541-553).

The Western analysts invariably dwell on prospects for and tensions in Sino-Russian Relations". (Ovchinnikiov, 2000: 19). Indeed, potential of rivalry and conflict does lie beneath present day bonhomie between Moscow and Beijing. However, neither Moscow, nor Beijing seemed willing to disturb the apple cart of their ‘strategic partnership’ in Central Asia. The two regard Central Asia as the’ strategic hinterland' of each other. Russia seemed to favour greater mutual dependence with China through increased trade, transportation links and pipeline networks as an insurance for peace and security on its eastern front for the likely challenge to its interests in Central Asia posed by China's policy of developing the western regions, some Russian politicians and scholars, including former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, put up a brave face by arguing that China’s western regions and Russian far East can be developed together (Myasinkov, 2000: 19-20).

During Shanghai summit of the grouping on June 14-15, 2001, Uzbekistan formally joined and it was renamed as Shanghai Co-operation Organization (SCO). Uzbekistan, that had been facing increasing challenge of Islamic extremism from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) decided to join the SCO, while it withdrew earlier form Russia-led CIS collective security treaty. It could be seen as a manifestation of Uzbek desire to manoeuvre between Russia and China within the SCO. The highlight of the summit was the signing of the Shanghai Convention on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism.

It was decided to formulate a long-term programme of multilateral trade and economic co-operation. The member states agreed to hold annual meetings of the Foreign and Defence ministers in order to cooperate in resolving major international and regional issues, above all relating to the strengthening of security and stability in the Central Asian region.
The Shanghai June 2001 declaration refers to the possibility of admitting new members on the basis of consensus. The declaration says that those states can be considered for new membership that "Share the objectives and tasks of cooperation, the principles stated in point 6 and also other provisions of this declaration".

The point 6 reads:

"Shanghai Organization of Cooperation has been formed on basis of the agreements on strengthening of trust in military sphere and on mutual arms reductions signed in Shanghai and Moscow in 1996 and 1997. The principles reflected in the above-stated agreements determine the basis of relationship between the states- members of Shanghai Organization of cooperation" (SCO Press Release, June 15 2001).

Thus, the possibility of admitting new members has been kept open. New members are to be admitted by consensus among the present members. The rules are to be finalized at the St. Petersburg summit of the grouping scheduled for June, 2002. At the same time, it is indicated that there is no immediate hurry to admit new members. (Ruishong, 2002:87-102).

At times countries as far apart as Mongolia, Iran and even the USA have been mentioned as the countries that would like to join the SCO besides India and Pakistan. In talks with the Kazakh scholars in October 2001, the present author was told that India's admission to SCO would depend on the course of India-China relations, thus, giving an inkling of who called the shots in the organization. It produced the impression that in view of lack of consensus on other members, perhaps Mongolia would be the only country that might be expected to join in the near future.

As these developments were taking place in the region in its direct proximity, India has been watching them closely with considerable interest. Significantly, the process of confidence building measures between China and the former Soviet bordering states has been accompanied by the signing of India-China agreements on the maintenance of peace and tranquility and confidence-building measures in the military field in the border areas
along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in 1993 and 1996 respectively. It is a very positive development impacting on India's perception of the Shanghai process.

Indeed, there existed an opinion in this country that India would prefer to be invited to join the organization and with due cognizance of India's legitimate interests rather than apply for it. While India has been thus reticent, Pakistan's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan submitted a formal request to the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry on January 3, 2001, for an observer status at the Shanghai forum. It was like following in the footsteps of Uzbekistan that participated in Shanghai Five's Dushanbe (July 2000) summit as an observer and was admitted as a full member in Shanghai summit in June 2001. But within two days of Pakistan's formal application, the President of Tajikistan, Mr. Emomaly Rahmanov expressed his strong opposition to admitting Pakistan in the grouping. He stressed that he was even opposed to discussing the issue (Frank, 2004:212-227).

At the Shanghai summit of the SCO in June, Beijing was reported to have strongly lobbied for Pakistan's entry. It is likely that Pakistan's application was made with a prior understanding with China. There was no consensus as Tajikistan (and also perhaps Russia) opposed it because of Pakistan's support to the Taliban forces that were exporting terrorism in Central Asia (Bakshi, 2001: 174-176).

Ever since the Soviet disintegration, Pakistan has nurtured the ambition of expanding its influence in the former Soviet Central Asia. In view of difficulties in opening trade, transport routes and laying oil and gas pipelines across turbulent Afghanistan, Pakistan, has been seeking to lure the Central Asian republics by offering road and rail outlets to the Arabian Sea ports across Indus Basin corridor passing through Karakoram highway across Chinese Xinjiang linking up with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as well as Tajikistan (Bakshi, 2001: 176-177).

4.4 Russia Moves to Strengthen CIS Collective Security

While Russia is prepared to cooperate with China within the framework of the Shanghai organization, it is also trying to consolidate its traditional influence in the region in political, security and economic spheres. Thus, on October 10, 2000, Russia, Belarus,
Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a treaty on the creation of the Eurasian Economic Community. Moves were also made to strengthen the collective security treaty of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

On its part, China has also launched its "great Western campaign" to develop the backward western regions of the country. Thus, both Russia and China seem to be trying to consolidate their positions in their respective parts of Central Asia.

On the eve of the Shanghai summit of June, 2001, the six member states of the CIS collective security treaty (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) held a summit meeting on May 25 in the Armenian capital of Yerevan. They decided to proceed with the creation of a 30000 man rapid reaction force, providing one battalion each. The joint statement issued on the occasion affirmed the readiness of the member states to repel any incursions by the Islamic militants into Central Asia. The headquarters of the rapid reaction force were to be in Bishkek. Yury Yarov of Russia, the Executive Secretary of the CIS, particularly stressed the importance of participation of Uzbekistan for making the collective security more effective in the Central Asian region. A unit of 2000 forces as the rapid reaction force for Central Asia to fight the potential insurgency, in the area was expected to be ready by August 2001 (Times of Central Asia, June 17, 2001).

Thus, Russia-led collective security treaty members were taking measures to beef up the security of Central Asia when the events of September 11 overtook them. In fact, it was reported that the main responsibility for providing security to the region was to be shouldered by Russia-led collective security treaty. For instance, Times of Central Asia (Bishkek) remarked that "The SCO anti-terrorist Centre, however, may do little more than coordinate information between the six member states". The Chinese gain, according to the paper, was an additional summit agreement, which stipulated that at the request of one or more Central Asian member states of the SCO, China can send troops into Central Asia (Times of Central Asia, June 17)
China's declared policy is to change with the changing times, to synthesize between contradictions and antagonisms by highlighting the common points and "reserving disagreements" in order to reach a "win-win" situation for all. In the meanwhile, China wants to continue to amass political, economic and military power or the comprehensive national power, so that when the time of reckoning finally arrives, China is able to pave its way even without a shot being fired. The Chinese are particularly sanguine about the achievements of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its precursor the Shanghai Five over the past five years, which, incidentally, bears the name of a Chinese city.

For the time being and in the foreseeable future, the primary Chinese objective is to maintain peace, stability and friendly dispensation in the neighbouring Central Asian states while extending its economic, trade, transport and energy cooperation with the countries of the region. China has shown readiness to recognize the traditional Russian predominance in the security field in the region, although it has also been extending its military contacts and exchanges with the countries of the region (Bakshi 2001: 168-171).

It is quite likely that behind the diplomacy of mutual benefit and win-win situation for all, there exists a shrewd and long-term geopolitical design of extending Chinese influences and reach in the strategically important region of southern Eurasia comprising Central Asia, Transcaucasia and the former northern frontier province of Pakistan, Iran and turkey. It is through this region that important trade, transport and oil and gas pipeline routes are expected to pass, including the revived silk route TRACECA (Transport corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia). In fact, Francesco Sisci has highlighted the scale and magnitude of the Chinese objectives and ambitions in the region. It is apparent that the Chinese and the Russian interests do not always coincide. For instance, the Russians are interested in promoting the Trans-Siberian railway as the main connecting link between Asia and Europe. The Chinese are believed to be rather cool to the idea. They prefer the southern route to Europe across Central Asia-Transcaucasia-Turkey to the Mediterranean coast. According to Francesco Sisci, it would provide China's western regions

"a new geo-strategic importance in a way, such a move would not simply expand Chinese influence from Xinjiang to the Caspian Sea. It
would project China into the Middle East, the Mediterranean as well as South Asia, including India. The proposed Chinese railway from Qinghai in the far west to Tibet will not only link the restive Tibetan region to the rest of China, it will also link China's economic heart to India, through roads and railways that could one day move passengers and goods from Lhasa to New Delhi". China is seeking to achieve all this not by antagonizing Russia, but by assuring the latter that China's expanding economy should not be viewed as a threat". (Sisci, Asia Times, June 23, 2001).

The West tends to view SCO as the Chinese and the Russian attempt to be the decision-makers in Central Asia to the exclusion of others. In the wake of growing Sino-Russian strategic partnership in Central Asia within the framework of the Shanghai process, concern had been felt in the USA at the rather 'indecisive nature' of Western influence in the region. Indeed, some of the Western think tanks emphasized the desirability of the USA acquiring military bases in inner Asia even prior to the tragic events of September 11.

Prior to September 11 China was being viewed as the "strategic competitor" of the USA. Thus, the formation of the SCO was seen as being aimed at "combating American hegemony", promoting "multipolarisation", and a potential counterweight to NATO. After all, the Shanghai grouping comprised about 1.5 billion people or one-fourth of the entire humanity and almost 60 percent of the landmass of Eurasia. The access to vast oil and gas reserves of the region would help fast growing China to achieve national ambitions in both economic and military fields. The Western media took particular note of the fact that the defence ministers of the six member states also met at Shanghai and discussed military cooperation, including joint exercises and research and development of weaponry. In contrast to the cautious dictum of Deng Xiaoping which said, "adopt a low profile and never take a lead", President Jiang Zemin was seen as making much headway in forging a regional grouping with Russia and Central Asian states and then also signing a 25 year treaty with Russia on July 16, 2001 (Lahrn, 2001: 5).
Thus, before September 11, 2001, SCO projected the image of a powerful regional organization with increasing cohesion and purposefulness. It seemed to provide the rising China a forum whereby it could hope to expand its influence westward on the vast Eurasian landmass.

4.5 Post-September 11, 2001 Developments in Central Asia

a) US Military Presence in Central Asia

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 and subsequent developments leading to the defeat of Taliban-Al Qaida forces in Afghanistan completely changed the geopolitical equation in the region. Wounded USA cobbled together an international coalition against terror being perpetrated by Taliban leaders and Osama bin Laden from the soil of war ravaged Afghanistan. Russia promptly offered support to the USA in the war against terrorism. In Russia's strategic thinking the real threat to the country's security is seen as emerging from the 'arc of instability' in the turbulent southern periphery of the country. Russia hoped to gain from new improved relations with the USA in multiple ways. Russia offered the sharing of intelligence and the use of its air space and bases to the USA for search, rescue and humanitarian purposes. It also took the credit of influencing the Central Asian members of the CIS collective security treaty to extend facilities to the USA in the strategically important region bordering on Afghanistan.

It is true that ever since the Soviet disintegration; the used West has been trying to promote 'geopolitical pluralism' in the former Soviet space, including Central Asia. The Central Asia and the Caspian Sea region were declared an area of 'special US interest'. The region was included in the 'zone of responsibility' of the US Central Command. Since September, 1997 annual multinational military exercises are held in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan under NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme with the participation of troops from the USA and other NATO countries. However, the US presence in Central Asia in the security field had remained very limited before September 11. Moscow remained the main guarantor of security in the region. (Weede, 2003:32-45).
The war against the Taliban provided the USA an unprecedented opportunity to register and further entrench its military presence in the inner Asian region of immense strategic importance as the borders of major powers - Russia, China, the Indian subcontinent and Iran meet here.

Uzbekistan offered military bases to the USA without consulting SCO partners, which was a setback to the grouping. The US-led war against Taliban-Al Qaida network provided Uzbekistan an excellent opportunity to forge security ties with the most powerful country in the world in a bid to achieve multiple gains, including military action against the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which received sanctuary and support in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. In return, Uzbekistan sought security guarantees from the USA. Noticeably, Uzbekistan did not participate in the meeting of the CIS Chiefs of General Staff held in Moscow on September 26. Neutral Turkmenistan was the other country, which did not send its representative to the meeting (Nemets & Torda 2001: 13).

It appears that other Central Asian states coordinated their stand with Moscow. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all offered air bases for the US troops operating in Afghanistan. However, the USA did not accept the offer of Kazakhstan for air bases to avoid further antagonizing Russia and China. Kazakhstan has a 7000-km long border with Russia with a sizeable Russian population (more than 30 percent). Kazakhstan also shares a long border with China in the east (Peuch, 2002; 5).

It appears the Central Asian states offered bases to the USA due to geopolitical as well as financial considerations. By doing so, they hope to gain maneuvering space vis-a-vis Russia and China as well as make significant monetary gains. On December 6, 2001 Uzbek press published reports of an agreement with Washington of about $100 to $150 million US loans and aid for economic reforms in the country. The then Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiev was reported to have remarked that the presence of thousands of American soldiers would be a gold mine for his impoverished country. Kyrgyzstan claims that the lease of Manas air base has been coordinated in advance with
partners in the CIS collective security treaty and the SCO, meaning thereby Russia and China (Pravda (English) Feb. 18, 2002).

Ostensibly the US forces are in Central Asia mainly to complete the still unfinished task of completely routing Taliban Al Qaida network and, therefore, for a temporary period. In fact, there even exists an opinion in Russia according to which the US war against terrorism in Afghanistan and religious extremism in Central Asia also serves Russian interests and to that extent is acceptable. But the prospects of prolonged US military presence in the region, particularly in Central Asia, arouse deep concern in Moscow, Beijing and other capitals in the region.

Understandably, the projects of laying oil and gas pipelines from Caspian-Central Asian region to the west and south-branching away from their tradition routes across Russia are also at the heart of the USA’s geo-strategic and geo-economic game plan in the region.

At the same time, it appears that the USA wants to tread cautiously in the complex geopolitical game unfolding in inner Asia. Instead of annoying and antagonizing them, it wishes take the three big powers in the region along with it, namely, India, China and Russia. However, US policy in Central Asia is currently placed on the horns of a dilemma. Enhanced support to the authoritarian regimes in the region is bound to invoke criticism from human rights and democratic groups, while pressing for the latter would put off the regimes.

As regards China, the impact of post-September 11 developments has been a mixed one. China gained as combating international terrorism became the number one task of US policy instead of China being projected as the emerging strategic rival of the sole super power. It supported the US war against terrorism with certain conditions. At the same time, US military presence close to its western borders is detrimental to China’s larger geopolitical goals and ambitions. (Kevin, 2000:121-133).

In the post September 11 period, the SCO did not play any significant role in the developing situation in and around Afghanistan, including the neighbouring Central Asia. It became apparent that the security set up of the sea countries was not in place. However,
regular meetings of the officials of the sea members at various levels have kept the show going. Moscow and Beijing also kept in constant touch and kept each other informed about their foreign policy moves.

At the instance of the Chinese, an extraordinary meeting of the foreign ministers of the sea countries took place at Beijing on January 7, 2002, to discuss the issues of regional security and cooperation as well as recent events in Afghanistan. The joint statement made no mention of the US role in the region, but it emphasized the leading role of the United Nations in the struggle against international terrorism. It stressed that the scope of anti-terrorist struggle may not be extended arbitrarily and should not lead to interference in the internal affairs of the sovereign states. More particularly, the statement emphasized that the central role in the anti-terrorist struggle must be played by the countries of the region themselves. The statement read:

"The SCO member states believe that the global system of counteraction against terrorism should be based on regional, sub-regional and national structures and firmly intend to complete the creation of a sea anti-terrorist structure in Bishkek in the near future" (SCO Press Release Jan. 7, 2002).

As a measure to further beef up the sea, during the St. Petersburg summit in June, 2002, a charter of the sea was adopted, whereby the grouping has become a formal regional international organization. In keeping with the wishes of Beijing, it was decided to set up a permanent secretariat of the organization at Beijing. The decision to set up an anti-terrorist centre of the grouping at Bishkek was reaffirmed. The need for a broad expansion of trade ties among the member countries was emphasized: The declaration of the summit called the development of economic partnership an especially important task.

However, in view of the US military presence in the region, sea lost its monopoly as the main regional grouping aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the area and combating the menace of terrorism and extremism.
Security organisations can differ in their scope of activities and in deepness of their mutual cooperation. For instance, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) nowadays pays homage to the broad concept of security: security not only encompassing military but also political, economic, social and environmental factors (NATO Handbook 2006: 18-19). Among other things, this comprehensive approach to security includes aspects such as free and fair elections; well-organized administrative, law enforcement and judicial organs at national, regional and local level; employment; housing; education and health services. If all of these dimensions of security are provided in the areas where NATO operates, such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, then a stable and secure situation has been reached.

However, in 1949 NATO started as an organization with an exclusive military objective, namely to deter an eventual attack by the Soviet Union and its satellites against European (NATO) countries. Especially during its operations in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the Western alliance realized that its concept of security should include other aspects than military, in order to achieve a stable international security environment. As to the intensity of cooperation among its member-states, NATO started with the most essential elements of political and military cooperation only. It took NATO many years to establish its current integrated political-military structure and activities, such as frequent political deliberations, joint forces and allied operations far beyond its territorial borders. (Pan, 2006: 46-64).

This article focuses on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), sometimes rather prematurely referred to as ‘The NATO of the East’. In concentrating on its security-related aspects, this work will analyse the SCO’s development towards a full-grown security organization i.e., on its way to an alliance with a span of activities and a depth of cooperation similar to that of NATO. However, in doing so the focus remains on the SCO, not on a comparison with the Western alliance.

The SCO is a regional international organization comprising states in Europe, the Near East, Central Asia and South East Asia. The SCO has China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as member states and Mongolia, Iran, Pakistan
and India as observer states. SCO member states have a population of nearly 1.5 billion people, which is about a quarter of the total world population. Including the four observers, the SCO encompasses nearly half the world’s population. In addition to the member states Russia and China, the observers India and Pakistan bring together in the SCO four states with nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the Chinese and Russian armed forces are amongst the three largest armed forces in the world. The SCO provides cooperation in political, military, economic, energy and cultural fields. Important ingredients of economic cooperation are (conventional) arms trade with Russia as supplier and energy, of which Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Iran are big exporters – while China and India are significant importers. Russia and China, however, remain the leading actors of the SCO. (Stobdan, 1996:513-520).

Although the SCO started as a security organization extending from confidence-building measures at the borders to anti-terrorist activities, SCO members frequently state that this organization is primarily meant for political and economic cooperation and that military coordination focusing on domestic security plays a minor role. For instance, the Russian Deputy Defence Minister, Sergei Razov, denied allegations that military cooperation among SCO members is a top priority and stated that economic cooperation and security are the main interests. Likewise, at the SCO Bishkek Summit of August 2007, President Putin denied that the SCO would develop into a full-grown security organisation such as NATO. So far, neither individual members nor the organisation itself has made any statements towards the intention to create what some Western commentators call a ‘NATO of the East’. (Yakovlev, 2002:101-113).

Furthermore, SCO members disagree upon vital issues of security, as was the case with the anti-Western positions in the declaration of the 2005 Astana Summit concerning Western military deployment in Central Asia and also on other issues of security cooperation. For instance, in terms of the international legal connotation of security, there is common understanding within the SCO that ‘non-interference’ in internal affairs is a leading principle. Accordingly, SCO members refuse Western criticism on their human rights practices. However, when it comes to collective action against domestic, non-violent uprisings, the March 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan demonstrated disagreement.
within the SCO whether to act or not, with China allegedly in favour and Russia against military intervention considering its recent security activities, is the SCO developing into a ‘NATO of the East’ as it was regularly described after the anti-Western flavor of the 2005 Astana Summit.

In the last couple of years, the SCO indisputably made huge steps in intensified security cooperation, operational (military exercises), as well as political (policy concepts). A number of events and agreements in 2006 and 2007 indicate a cautious development of the SCO towards a full-grown security organization. In analyzing the current and future developments of the SCO, this article concentrates on indications of increased security cooperation, the relationship with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), energy security and the connections with the West. (ITAR-TASS, 23rd July, 2007).

In spite of the frequent denials of the military nature of the SCO and the differences between members regarding military and security cooperation, five recent developments can be discerned which point in the direction of the SCO gradually moving towards a full-grown security organization. Firstly, the features of military and political activities were combined. For the first time a political summit (Bishkek 2007) was amalgamated with war games (‘Peace Mission 2007’). Moreover, until then defence ministers were the highest ranking officials to watch SCO military exercises.

The Heads of States’ presence at the war games, for the first time in the history of the SCO, was probably to demonstrate the growing significance of the military component within the SCO but also signalled their determination to be in command of the security situation in this region.

Secondly, there is the phenomenon of ‘military assistance’ as a concept. Perhaps the most significant development with regard to the security policy aspects of ‘Peace Mission 2007’ was the scenario in which military assistance played a central role. One of the vital ingredients of a mature security organization, which also applies to the CSTO, is military assistance. Although a development towards inclusion of such an article into the policy documents of the SCO cannot (yet) be discerned, the scenario of ‘Peace Mission 2007’
unmistakably revealed a de-facto application of military assistance. (ITAR-TASS, 23rd July, 2007).

Thirdly, since 2002, the military exercises of the SCO have become increasingly ambitious, developing from a bilateral or multilateral level to a joint all-SCO level, and including not only counter-terrorism but also external security policy connotations. Furthermore, prior to the 2007 Bishkek Summit, on 27 June 2007 the SCO ministers of Defence reached agreement on a structural arrangement for joint exercises. According to the Kyrgyz Defence minister, Ismail Isakov, this agreement would lay the long-term organisational and legal foundations for such activities in the future (Xinhua July 29, 2007). Fourthly, the 2006 Shanghai Summit affirmed that, in case of threats to regional peace, stability and security, SCO members would have immediate consultations on effective response to the emergency. Furthermore, the intention was expressed of formulating a mechanism for measures in response to threats to regional peace, as well as a study on establishing a regional conflict prevention mechanism within the SCO framework. The projected drafting of such security mechanisms, which are also found in NATO, were repeated at the 2007 Bishkek Summit (ITAR-TASS, June 15, 2006).

A final development indicating that the SCO might be developing towards a mature and comprehensive security organization, is the intensifying relationship between the SCO and the Russian-led military alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Since this might become a crucial aspect of the SCO’s move towards a more comprehensive security organization, the relationship between CSTO and SCO will be dealt with in more detail below.

b) SCO and the CSTO Presence in Central Asia

The origin of the CSTO is that in May 1992, within the framework of the CIS, a treaty for collective security (CIS Collective Security Treaty, CST) was signed in Tashkent with a currency of five years and the possibility of prolongation. The treaty comprises the desire of parties to renounce the use or threat of force. Furthermore, in its Article 1, the treaty
forbids parties to join other military alliances. Just like NATO, the CST has a military assistance provision (Article 4), which states that aggression against one party will be considered as an attack on all parties. In 1999, the presidents of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed a protocol to prolong the CST for five years. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan – who in the mean time had followed a policy away from Russia towards the West – refused to sign the protocol and subsequently withdrew from the treaty. (Zhu, 2000: 1489-1501).

In 2002, the six remaining CST parties signed a charter, which transformed the CST into an organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In 2005, until then US ally Uzbekistan demanded US forces to leave the base on its territory, as a result of US and European criticism of the beating down of the unrest in Andijan by Uzbek authorities earlier that year. Subsequently, Uzbekistan looked for closer ties with Russia. On 23 June 2006, Vladimir Putin announced that Uzbekistan would (again) join the CSTO as a member.

Russian analysts think Uzbekistan’s President Karimov’s main argument for joining the CSTO is his need for Russian protection against a regime change like the ones that took place in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan (Socor, 2005: 10). According to the Russian President Putin, the main responsibilities of the CSTO are cooperation in defence, the manufacturing of weapons, training of military personnel, and peacekeeping activities. Other areas of cooperation are a common integrated air defence system and the fight against terrorism and narcotics, which particularly concerns the CSTO in Central Asia (Kaczmarski, 2005: 10).

The CSTO has at its disposal a joint headquarters in Moscow and a collective rapid reaction force. This collective reaction force consists of 4000-4500 soldiers, and is composed of three battalions from Russia and Tajikistan, two battalions from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, units of Russia’s military base in Tajikistan, as well as the military aviation group of Russia’s airbase in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. On 6 October 2007, at a CSTO Summit in the Tajik capital Dushanbe, the organization announced decisions to increase
military cooperation. At the request of Russia, the member states agreed to buy military arms and equipment from Russia at domestic Russian prices. (Pravda, October 10, 2007).

Furthermore, it was decided at the 2007 CSTO summit that its collective rapid reaction forces in Central Asia would be supplied with modern materiel before the end of 2010. Another Russian initiative adopted at the 2007 summit was the foundation of a joint military force for peacekeeping operations. The concept of a joint peacekeeping force encompasses the formation of brigades capable of conducting peacekeeping missions, if necessary also outside the territory of the CSTO. According to the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Lavrov, contingents will not be deployed in the so-called ‘frozen conflicts’ in the South Caucasus i.e., the separatist regions in Georgia and the Nagorno Karabakh area.

The CSTO has divided its area into three military regions: a European, a Caucasian and a Central Asian grouping. Recent CSTO documents and statements by officials put the emphasis on Central Asia and to a lesser extent on Europe or on the Caucasus. The return of Uzbekistan to the CSTO in 2006, after the related forced withdrawal of US forces from that country – is one of the indications of the increased focus of the CSTO on Central Asia. Evidence to this fact is also the desire of the CSTO to deploy a considerable military contingent in that region, consisting of units of the Central Asian member states.

The organization has already stationed its collective rapid reaction force in the area but, according to CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha, it will further enhance its military build-up in the Central Asian region. The endeavours of the CSTO in Central Asia have an influence on its relationship with other security organizations active in this region. In terms of NATO, for instance, the CSTO has expressed its intentions to develop relations with this Western alliance, but has also criticised NATO and the US for causing instability in Central Asia. (Saat, 2005: 2).

Likewise, NATO could well view the enlargement of the CSTO military contingent in Central Asia as a step to counterbalance its eastward expansion and to keep CIS countries under Russia’s military protection. In relation to the SCO, the CSTO has proposed to
work together on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. According to Bordyuzha, the CSTO together with China and the SCO should prevent the Taliban to regain power in Afghanistan.

The development of closer ties between SCO and CSTO has not been an easy process. First, Uzbekistan prevented a strengthened connection and later on China took that role. Already in 2003 Russia had the intention to bring the two organizations closer together, for the purpose of increasing the fight against terrorism and against drug trading, but probably also to form an ‘Eastern bloc’ against Western military involvement in the Central Asian region, in and around Afghanistan. In the process of enhancing the link between the CSTO and the SCO, Uzbekistan threatened to leave the SCO as a result of its aversion of the CSTO. A second reason for the resistance of Uzbekistan against closer ties was its power struggle with Kazakhstan on hegemony over Central Asia. Thirdly, Uzbekistan spoke out against military exercises of the SCO on its territory, which it rather conducted in cooperation with NATO. Resulting from this stance, in 2003 Uzbekistan did not participate in joint SCO drills in Kazakhstan and China, because of a possible involvement of the CSTO in these manoeuvres. (Luzhavin, 2003: 10).

In 2006, the year that Uzbekistan returned as a member state of the CSTO – chances for a deepening of the relations between the SCO and the CSTO seemed to improve. In May of that year, SCO Secretary General at the time, Zhang Deguang, stated that the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SCO had instructed the SCO Secretariat to arrange cooperation with the CSTO in the field of security. However, a year later, in April 2007, expectations had proved to be too optimistic. The negotiations on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between both organizations – of which the text was completed and only awaited signing – had come to a deadlock, as a result of Chinese reluctance.

According to China, the CSTO, with its collective military force and a military assistance article, is primarily a political-military organization, but the SCO should remain to be a political-economical organization. China fears that a closer relationship between the CSTO and the SCO might give the impression to the outside world that the SCO endeavors to become a ‘NATO of the East’. Since China would like to keep all (trade)
doors open, it regards such a development as counterproductive to its economic and political interests. In addition to delaying the MoU, China also prevented the CSTO from contributing to the ‘Peace Mission 2007’ military exercises of the SCO. In November 2006, China had rejected the proposal of the Russian Chief of the General Staff, Yuri Baluyevsky, to make the 2007 drills a SCO-CSTO event (Deguang, 2007: 2)

Apart from China's fear for a transformation of the SCO into a military alliance, another reason for its objections to further CSTO-SCO cooperation is probably that this might strengthen Russia's position in the SCO by bringing in two of its satellites, Armenia and Belarus.

In spite of the Chinese reluctance, the CSTO continued its efforts to strengthen the cooperation between the two organizations. For instance, in July 2007 the CSTO called for joint action with the SCO with regard to Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the Chinese posture, probably at the request of Russia, the Bishkek 2007 Summit of the SCO in its final declaration optimistically mentioned the growing cooperation between the SCO and the CSTO. The declaration by the Heads of State specifically stated support for a further deepening of the relations between the two organizations, with the aim of coordinating efforts on strengthening regional and international security and counteracting new challenges and threats. On 5 October 2007, during a CIS summit in Dushanbe, the signing of the MoU between SCO and CSTO finally took place.

Presumably, to receive consent from China, the agreement comprised a MoU between the Secretariats of both organizations and not between the organizations themselves, although in practice that will not make any difference. The fields of cooperation, as mentioned in the MoU, are:

- ensuring regional and international security and stability;
- counteraction against terrorism;
- the fight against drug trafficking;
- the fight against arms trafficking;
- counteraction against transnational organized crime; and
• other areas of mutual concern.

At the singing of the MoU, CSTO Secretary General Bordyzha explicitly stated that this cooperation between the two Eastern organizations was not directed against NATO. On 4 December 2007, SCO and CSTO held their first meeting on the areas of cooperation, as declared in the MoU, in Moscow (Blagov, 2007: 14-15).

A sequence of events in 2007 has demonstrated considerable progress towards a closer relationship between the CSTO and the SCO, namely:

• the CSTO’s proposal for joint action towards Afghanistan;
• the presence of CSTO observers – although not as participating organization – at the ‘Peace Mission 2007’ exercises;
• the final declaration of the 2007 SCO Bishkek Summit; and finally
• the signing of the MoU between the SCO and the CSTO as the climax.(Blagov, 2007:14-17).

Since the CSTO is a purely military alliance, the cooperation will undoubtedly reinforce the military component of the SCO. Therefore, in the near future, joint SCO-CSTO action may possibly develop. If the SCO will endeavor to proceed on a way towards a full-grown security organization, then closer ties with the CSTO will be helpful. Essential elements of a professional security organization, such as rapid reaction forces and a military assistance article, are part of the framework of the CSTO. With the majority of the states sharing membership of both organizations, it will be easy for the SCO to adopt such instruments as well, if so desired.

c) Energy Security : SCO Energy Club

In addition to military-political issues, energy security, which increasingly is identified as a vital element of security policy, is gaining ground in the SCO. In July 2007, the SCO Energy Club was established, with which the SCO may aim for a common energy approach, above all in strengthening energy security. Thus, as with the military maneuvers, bilateral or multilateral energy cooperation among SCO members is
developing into a common SCO energy approach, although it is still unclear what this would entail.

At the Shanghai Summit of 15 June 2006, energy was publicly put on the agenda as a major issue for the first time. At this summit, Russia’s President Putin announced the intention of the founding within the SCO of an Energy Club, in order to develop a joint SCO course of action in the field of energy. At a meeting of the Heads of Government Council of the SCO in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 15 September 2006, a common energy policy was further discussed. At the outset, priority areas of cooperation concerning energy, transportation and telecommunications, were defined. The creation and launch of special working groups in the fuel and energy sector, as well as for modern information and telecommunications technology received special emphasis. Furthermore, decisions took place on implementing the initiative voiced by Vladimir Putin at the Shanghai Summit, where he proposed to set up a SCO Energy Club.

The Heads of Government tasked a special working group on fuel and energy with studying in the shortest time the possibility of forming a SCO Energy Club. The Kazakh and Russian parties would present to the SCO Secretariat their proposals for all parties to be discussed in 2007 at a meeting of the heads of fuel and energy departments of the SCO member states. On 3 July 2007, the SCO Energy Club was established in Moscow. The regulations of the Energy Club – in which the SCO observers also take part, explain that the Club unites energy producers, consumers and transit countries in coordination of energy strategies with the aim of increasing energy security. At the 2007 Bishkek Summit of 16 August 2007, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister Lavrov confirmed an active role for the SCO observers in the Energy Club, for instance participation by the energy companies of the observers. Although so far energy deals have been made bilaterally, the foundation of the SCO Energy Club is a step towards a common energy policy, even though the intentions of the Club remain unclear (Lanov, Ria Novosti, Aug. 16, 2007).

Western assessments sometimes view the SCO as increasingly becoming a mechanism to oust the USA and its Western allies from Central Asia, and thus to threaten Western security interests. The SCO Energy Club could likewise be regarded as a threat to
Western (energy) security. Iran's proposal to set gas prices and to control its gas flows together with Russia, as a so-called 'gas OPEC' only reinforced this fear, even though Iran's proposal is to large extent propaganda. However, SCO member countries that export oil and gas are not only partners, but also rivals on the promising markets in East and South Asia. China, for instance, is attempting to get a foothold in the energy sectors of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The latter three countries are beginning to threaten Russia's position in Central Asia based on a monopoly on export gas pipelines to Europe. Thus, there is much diversity among SCO members and observers on energy cooperation among themselves as well with the West, instead of a simple unification on or against such issues. Whether a common SCO energy policy will change this diversity, remains to be seen.

Security organizations tend to become involved in energy security, in the sense that they realize that security nowadays not only entails military, but also energy issues. This applies to NATO, but also to the CSTO. The security of oil and gas pipelines against terrorist attacks has already become a task of the CSTO. Since 2004, the CSTO has been responsible for the protection of railway lines, which, like energy, is related to strategic economic interests. As to the guarding of energy installations, the Anti-Terrorist Centre of the CIS has conducted an anti-terrorist exercise – with units of the CSTO participating at a nuclear energy station in Armenia in September 2006. (China Daily, January 11, 2006).

Earlier, in August 2005, this CIS Anti-Terrorist Centre had held an exercise around the Kazakh city of Aktau, while on the Caspian coast armed forces were to counteract terrorists that had seized an oil tanker. Furthermore, during the CSTO's joint military exercises in June 2006 in Belarus, one of its objectives was the protection of gas and oil pipelines. which further confirmed the CSTO's conceptual development towards energy security tasking (Plungatarev 2006: 2).

So far, the SCO does not have rapid reaction forces, and thus no specific joint military tasking. Nonetheless, in the light of the aforementioned steps of the SCO towards a mature security organization, as well as the emergent cooperation with the CSTO and the
recently started SCO Energy Club, this situation might well change. Since the SCO states also have to cope with terror attacks, possibly also against their energy infrastructure, it is not unlikely that the SCO will create standing reaction forces in the near future with security of energy infrastructure and of transport routes as one of its tasks.

The SCO is unlikely to turn into an anti-Western club. Russia wants to use the SCO for its anti-Western aims but others, for instance China and Kazakhstan, who maintain strong economic cooperation with the West, will probably not allow it. Although the West at present does not have anything to fear from the SCO, the SCO’s current endeavors in the security dimension might encourage the West at least to observe further activities of the SCO closely, if not possibly also to seek cooperation with this organization. In spite of the anti-Western stance as declared at the Astana Summit of 2005, the SCO has the potential to become a partner of NATO. The SCO’s Secretary General at the time, Zhang Deguang, stated that the SCO is open to cooperation with NATO on issues of mutual interest (Weitz, 2006: 357).

d) Co-operation between NATO and SCO

NATO has arrangements for cooperation with all SCO states except China. Since the beginning of the 90s, this alliance has had bilateral cooperation with the five Central Asian states within its Partnership for Peace framework, as well as a special relationship with Russia, which since 2002 is called the NATO-Russia Council. China frequently states its suspicion towards NATO’s actions in the South East Asian region. The concept of forming ‘global partnerships’ with countries such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, that already cooperate with NATO, for instance in Afghanistan – a matter still lacking consensus within NATO – especially annoys China. China disapproves of NATO’s military action in the region, which it considers to be its sphere of influence. Furthermore, NATO and China both seem to be hesitant to enter into a dialogue with each other. (Black, 2004:131-146).

With the cautious development of the SCO towards becoming a mature security organization and NATO operating in Afghanistan, and considering global tasking, it
certainly seems time for action. In a way, the current situation in South East Asia is comparable with Eastern Europe in the 90s. At that time, the Warsaw Pact as well as the Soviet Union had collapsed and the newly independent states were seeking closer ties with NATO. Likewise, the regional power, Russia, was suspicious and critical of these developments.

When it became clear that former Warsaw Pact states would be allowed to join NATO, the alliance realised that an appeasing effort towards Russia was necessary to maintain the dialogue with this power and to avoid disputes. Thus, a special partnership with Russia was established. Equally, with a comparable situation in South East Asia, NATO should take such a step towards China. A special partnership, similar to the NATO-Russia Council, could be created with China, within which views can be exchanged and military cooperation can be arranged. Such a move would build confidence and thus diminish any possible suspicion on both sides.

The same applies to NATO and the SCO developing a special partnership. Until now, NATO has been reluctant to cooperate with the CSTO. However, in the case of the SCO, the organization is not only led by Russia but also by China, which prevents it from being an instrument of Russian (anti-Western) security policy. In November 2005, the SCO established a contact group with Afghanistan. At the Bishkek Summit, the SCO, member states stated their concern about the destabilizing situation in Afghanistan, which affects Central Asia.

Considering their geographical and military presence around Afghanistan and the threats with which both NATO and the SCO are confronted, namely drug trafficking and terrorism by Taliban and Al Qaida, joint activities are feasible. The CSTO has proposed joint action with the SCO in preventing the Taliban from returning to power in Afghanistan. China, who is usually disinclined to have closer ties with the CSTO, while being aware of the threats in the region, might consider cooperation between SCO and NATO a better way to deal with these problems (ITAR-TASS, July 31. 2007).
Since the SCO and NATO clearly share an interest in improving security and stability in Afghanistan, it would be wise to combine efforts and forces. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether the Central Asian states – although stressing their self-determination in regional security – would be able to counter threats such as those of the Taliban and Al Qaida by themselves. SCO states could join NATO with contingents in ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) in Afghanistan. Thus, SCO armies would be incorporated in an experienced military-operational infrastructure to fight mutual threats. Such an effort would be beneficial in two ways. Firstly, it would strengthen the capabilities of ISAF in the war against the Taliban. Thus, this would promote stability in Afghanistan and subsequently also elsewhere in Central Asia, as desired by the SCO states.

Secondly, operational cooperation between the SCO and NATO would also improve the political relationship between both organizations. In addition to participating in a NATO-led operation, the SCO could also join NATO in exercises, which would also contribute to operational experience as well as political relations. In cooperating in such ways, the SCO and NATO can reduce distrust but also work together to improve stability in the Central Asian region. This will not mean that divergent views will then have disappeared, in particular when it comes to human rights and promotion of democracy, but these issues can also be openly discussed in a cooperation platform. Such an approach is better than maintaining the current wait-and-see policy of NATO and SCO. (Christoph, 2000:67-73).

NATO’s Bucharest Summit of 2-4 April 2008 has brought a possible NATO-SCO cooperation on Afghanistan a step closer. At the Summit, Russia agreed to grant transit rights to NATO, when transport of non-military goods from the West to ISAF in Afghanistan is involved. Furthermore, the Summit was also attended by the presidents of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Transport from Europe via Russia to Afghanistan inevitably has to pass Central Asian states. At the conference, Uzbek President Karimov stated that he too was prepared to allow transit of NATO freight over the territory of his country. Later on, Turkmenistan also granted NATO such transit rights. This willingness of Russia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan might mean a break-through in not only bilateral ties between former Soviet republics and NATO but also in cooperation between NATO
and the SCO, which would be beneficial for Afghanistan and Central Asia in general but also for improved relations between the two security organizations.

The SCO has developed itself from (originally) a border arms control-oriented organization, via a regional counterterrorism body, to a truly international entity. The developments in the military field and in energy security display the growing importance of the security dimension as part of the SCO framework in the international arena. In addition, these developments can be regarded as at least a partial maturing of the SCO as a security organization. Until recently, the nature of the organization was mainly political and economic. (Lijun, 2001:132-141).

However, the developments as described indicate a closer cooperation in the field of security. With its capacities and experience in joint military forces and a military assistance concept, the CSTO can be a vital partner in supporting the SCO to transform into a comprehensive security organization. Nevertheless, the SCO still lacks a considerable number of essential elements, which NATO, as a mature security organization, has, namely an integrated military-political structure with permanent operational headquarters, a rapid reaction force, and continuous political deliberations.

Furthermore, an essential difference between the organizational development of the SCO and NATO is the fact that NATO is aimed primarily at external security risks whereas the SCO concentrates strongly on security within the territory covered by its member states. Especially China seems committed for the time being to maintain this situation. Moreover, SCO member states and observers cooperate in many areas but also illustrate large differences, such as contradictory political and economic interests. These internal differences might prevent further progress of the SCO, also in the development of its security component. (Lijun, 2001:132-141).

However, in spite of these shortcomings and inward-looking focus, the intensification of the SCO security policy is such that a cautious development towards a more full-grown security organization – with a scope of activities and an intensity of cooperation similar to that of NATO – can no longer be excluded. If this is the desire of the SCO member
states, such development will still take a considerable number of years before the SCO can truly be described as the ‘NATO of the East’.

4.6 China’s Response to Russia-China Conflict

a) Background of the Conflict

The recent conflict in Georgia has a history of mayhem and tensions which could be traced back to the 1920s, when South Ossetia attempted to declare independence but failed and as a consequence ended up as an autonomous region within Soviet Georgia after the Red Army conquered Georgia. Once again in 1989, when the process of disintegration of Soviet Union began, South Ossetia made efforts aimed at either joining North Ossetia in Russia or gain independence. With the declaration of independence from the Soviet Union by Georgia, a conflict broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia in 1991, resulting in the estimated deaths of 2000-4000 people and displacement of a large population. Russia intervened to mediate and brokered a ceasefire in June 1992 between the warring factions. Under the agreement a peacekeeping force was created comprising 530 Russian and 300 each from South Ossetia and Georgia. The peacekeeping force was deployed in the security zone around Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provided facilitation for confidence building and the security zone was patrolled by their monitors.

In the following period, Georgia increasingly came under EU and US influence, while Moscow consolidated its grip over South Ossetia. The ground reality in strategic terms in fact had pitched Russia directly against Georgia. Therefore, on August 7, when Georgia used heavy long-range artillery against South Ossetia, the very next day, Russia came out with a strong military response against Georgia without giving any chance to mediation or any other means of settling the dispute. With the French President Sarkozy’s mediatory efforts Russia agreed to a six point formula which included Russian troop’s withdrawal. On August 12, Russian President Medvedev declared “the aim of Russia’s operation for coercing the Georgian side to peace had been achieved and it had been decided to conclude the operation... The aggressor has been punished.”
Russia’s aggression of August 2008 against Georgia has posed a major dilemma for Chinese diplomacy. China believes in and advocates certain principles, based on internationally established norms for conducting state-to-state relations, which have been grossly violated by Russia, while committing aggression against a smaller and weaker sovereign neighbouring state. It is, therefore, hard for China to condone Russia’s act, despite the fact that it has a strategic partnership with Russia and both share geopolitical interest in the region. The Russian act of aggression was essentially to punish Georgia for leaning towards the EU and US, and especially in joining NATO. In the past as well, Russia has been explicitly expressing displeasure over NATO’s overtures to woo Georgia into its sphere of influence. China has been equally concerned over NATO’s increasing ingress in the Eurasian region. China considers American and NATO moves to bring Georgia into the network of Western security pacts as a threat to a close Chinese partner.

The Article 9 of the “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation” reads: “When a situation arises in which one of the contracting parties deems that peace is being threatened and undermined or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats.” (News from Russia 2001: 15-30). Ideally speaking, if Russia considered the Georgian situation threatening to its security interests, then under the treaty obligations China was expected to help Russia remove the threat. However, the situation in reality progressed differently.

Russian aggression against Georgia has resulted in the creation of two new states, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which have declared their independence. Russia has formally recognized the independence of both the states. Following the August 8 military offensive in South Ossetia, President Dmitry Medvedev argued that recognition was necessary to protect the republics from Georgian acts of aggression.

Such ad hoc creation of new states sets an inherently dangerous precedence for China and its territorial integration, especially in the case of Taiwan and to a lesser extent, Xinjiang and Tibet. Therefore, since the eruption of the crisis in Georgia, China has cautiously
maintained a low profile on the issue. China's dilemma lay in the fact that it could not clearly condemn the invasion of Georgia without offending Russia, a strategic partner, nor could it condone the act as it would contradict its stated policy and undermine its own territorial interests. On the other hand, not doing anything and simply accepting the Russian position would create an image problem for China as it would be seen adopting double standards.

b) China-Georgia Relations

Georgia, located between Caucasus and the Black Sea, has had traditional links with China, since the time of 'Silk Roads'. However, in the recent times, this historic relationship was re-discovered when Georgia declared its independence from Moscow, and the governments of China and Georgia signed the ‘Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations’ in Tbilisi on June 9, 1992 — officially establishing diplomatic ties at the ambassadorial level and beginning a new era of bilateral ties.

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations there has been a regular interaction and exchange of high-level visits between the two countries. In June 2007, the two countries celebrated the 15th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations. At this occasion, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yang Jiechi, stated, "We are happy to see the smooth growth of bilateral ties since the establishment of diplomatic relations. Believing in equality of all countries regardless of their size, China and Georgia treat each other with respect and sincerity. We render each other understanding and support on major issues concerning national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity". (ITAR-TASS,SWB,SU/2598 B/11-12,15th June,2007).

Since 2006, the Georgian government has been supporting China on all major issues of China’s concern such as Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang. The Chinese Government, while appreciating Georgia’s support on several issues of their national interest, has offered over the years economic support and in categorical terms support to Georgia's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. In April 2006, China persuaded
Georgia to renounce official relations with Taiwan, in turn, agreeing in a “Joint Statement of the two presidents” that “Abkhazia and South Ossetia are internal affairs of Georgia and should be properly handled through peaceful negotiations based on respect of Georgia's state sovereignty and territorial integrity.” (Peoples Daily, Apl. 10, 2006).

c) Chinese Response to the Russia-Georgia Crisis

Russian aggression against Georgia generated mixed signals from China. China’s response to Russian invasion of Georgia has been very cautious and ambiguous by design.

Initially, the Chinese response was virtually non-existent, as the opening ceremony of Olympic Games coincided with the Russian invasion of Georgia on August 8. Beijing showed no concern when on August 9 Chinese President Hu met with the Russian Prime Minister Putin. In their meeting, Hu praised China's relationship with its Russian “strategic cooperative partner” as “advancing across the board precisely in accordance with our commonly declared goals.” (Ribao, 208: 1).

China’s ambiguity on the issue was deliberate. Open support to the Russian action would have a) amounted to legitimizing claims by Taiwanese, Tibetans and Uighurs for independence from China; b) it would have been contrary to the opinions expressed by the international community on this issue. On the other hand, for China, Russia is too important an ally and it simply cannot afford to take any position that opposes Russia, either by condemning aggression or supporting Georgian and international community’s position. However, at the same time it was important for China that it must exhibit its concern over this development. In order to do so, China chose to use the forum of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit which was convened on August 28 in Dushanbe (twenty days after the August 8 events).

China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told a news conference ahead of the SCO summit that “leaders will expound their shared position on issues of interest within the framework of the agenda, and the South Ossetia issue will be no exception.” Gang further said that Beijing hoped that Moscow and Tbilisi could find “a peaceful solution to the
Georgian-South Ossetia conflict through dialogue.” China was also concerned about the Georgia crisis because it was worried Russia might exert similar pressure on Central Asian states – all of which were former Soviet republics like Georgia and have no match to the Russian military might. A veiled criticism by China and Central Asian states on Russian action is reflected in Dushanbe Declaration which says in its Article 1;

“The interdependence of states tremendously increased and security and development are becoming inseparable in the 21st century. None of the present-day international problems can be resolved by force. The factor of force is decreasing objectively in global and geopolitical issues. Reflections No. 1, 2009 Any attempt for an exclusively forcible resolution will lead nowhere at all and only hinders local conflicts from being settled comprehensively. The comprehensive resolution of existing problems is possible only when all the parties' interests are considered in full and when they are involved in a negotiating process, but not by isolating them. Attempts to strengthen one's own security to the detriment of others' security will not promote the maintenance of global security and stability.’”(SCO Press release, 13th November,2009).

The heads of state reiterated the need to respect each country's and each nation's historical and cultural traditions and efforts aimed at preserving the unity of the state and its territorial integrity, as well as at encouraging good-neighborly relations between nations and their joint development in accordance with international law.”

Russia interpreted the Dushanbe Summit as supporting its position on Georgia and claimed that the action was taken on humanitarian grounds. The Russian Foreign Ministry said on August 28, that China had expressed its understanding of Russia's decision to recognize Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. President Medvedev said recognition was necessary to protect the republics from Georgian acts of aggression, following the August 8 military offensive in South Ossetia. Medvedev urged the leaders at the summit in Dushanbe, to support Russia's role in Georgia, in order to “send a serious signal to those who are trying to justify the aggression that was committed.”
However, in reality, the Russian military action in support of secession of two ethnic groups from a sovereign state grossly contradicts and undermines the very foundation and spirit of SCO framework which is based on fighting three evils namely “separatism, extremism and terrorism.” In the case of Georgia, Russia is seen standing on the side of the separatists.

Russia-Georgia conflict created a serious dilemma for Chinese diplomacy as the Chinese government had, since 2006, considered South Ossetia and Abkhazian issues as internal affairs of Georgia. China had accepted the sovereignty of Georgia over these territories. Chinese political expediency rendered it unable to take a principled position in favor of Georgia. Chinese analysts were unable to voice their concerns over this issue. Chinese media also maintained a low coverage policy on Russia-Georgia conflict. While China seemed to be uncomfortable with the situation, in order to safeguard its long-term strategic interests with Russia, it decided to keep a low diplomatic profile on this issue at all forums, including UNSC. For China, the events in Georgia had set a negative precedence with serious implications for the regions/territories where similar conditions exist. The case of Taiwan in particular has continued to inform Chinese strategic thinking. China is also of the view that it in Russia’s fight with the EU+US, it should refrain from taking a definitive position. The only strategic advantage for China in the aftermath of the Russian invasion is that the Russian-Georgia is likely to restrain and delay NATO’s eastward expansion and consequently provide China with an opportunity to consolidate its strategic interests in the Eurasian region. Russia and China also have common interests in Central Asian region which is extensively dealt in the next chapter.

4.7 Russia-China-India Triangle

The emerging triangle between Russia-India-China is being closely watched in the strategic and academic quarters of the West and the three countries involved. This idea was mooted by the then Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov at a time when India had been internationally isolated after its May 1998 nuclear tests. This was also the time when Russia was facing intense pressure from the West on the issue of human rights violation in Chechnya and on the establishment of true democratic system in Russia. The
third component of the triangle China, was already on the hit list of the US-led West due to its ideological commitment to Marxism. The Tiananmen massacre incident had made China almost untouchable internationally. China has also been facing constant pressure from the West on the Taiwan and Tibet issue.

Aware of the circumstances in which all three countries found themselves and the power aspirations which all these shared; Primakov gave a call to unite in the face of unnecessary intervention of the West in their internal matters. However, no triangular relation can take off and be sustained if each had a problem with the other.

To analyze the possibility of this triangle actually materializing it is, therefore, important to study the kind of relation these states share with each other. In the first section on swings in Sino-Soviet relations is briefly discussed. The disintegration of the Soviet Union created fresh opportunities for qualitatively different nations to develop between China and the successor Soviet states, especially Russia. The triangle can only be understood in this context. Thereafter the chapter focuses on the kind of relation developing between Russia and India and China and India. An analysis of the bilateral relations would indicate the possibilities of this triangle actually materializing. The last section of the chapter briefly highlights the implication this triangle will have on India.

a) The Soviet Times

Soviet Union and China were bound to each other as comrades resolutely devoted to working class and peasant revolutions. Soviet Union's assistance under the Stalin regime to Mao's revolution endeared the two, who after the success of the 1949 Chinese revolution, presented themselves as the impenetrable and expanding socialist world of the early 1950s. The comradeship however began to drift apart on several accounts and there were many reasons that soured Soviet-China relations. Both wanted to establish their credentials as true Marxists. Gradually the two drifted away from each other though these two countries belonged to the same idea bloc there were strong differences between them. Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaigns were amongst the first signs of discord. Chairman Mao opposed CPSU's new ideological formulations like peaceful co-existence
and non-antagonistic contradictions between imperialism and socialism. Concepts used by Soviets for the third world like non-capitalist path of development and policy of support to the 'national bourgeois' were similarly opposed. The real issue behind the ideological discord was however, leadership and hegemony over the international communist movement and relations with the newly emerging countries of Asia and Africa. (Chenoy, April 2005: 11)

The Chinese and Russians had disagreements on internal matters as well. Chinese wanted assistance from the Soviets on their nuclear programme which was denied by the Soviets. The Chinese and Soviets became competitors in the space technology; Chinese needed more economic assistance for their modernization programmes that the overextended Soviet Union failed to provide. Soviets were critical of several Chinese policies including the Cultural Revolution; Chinese called the Soviets revisionists', an insult to those who believed themselves to be Marxists (Gorbachev, 1987: 10-12).

As, the Sino-Soviet dispute broke out in 1959 and became bitter after 1961, the Chinese and the Soviets saw themselves on opposite sides of major international disputes. During the Sino-Indian border clash in 1962 contrary to Chinese expectations, Soviets remained neutral and provided military equipments to India soon after that. That is incidence further caused damage between the two countries whose relations reached an all time low. The Soviets were critical of the Sino-US rapprochement and opening of trade relations between the two. China's border clashes with Vietnam in the 1980s, their support to Pol Pot's oppressive regime in Cambodia, were basis of Soviet critique of Chinese opportunism.

However, the tense relationship of two communist giants eased with the rise of Gorbachev as the Secretary General of CPSU in 1985. He made epoch making changes in the Soviet history by introducing 'Perestroika' and 'Glasnost'. Some have described him in Soviet history as 'reformer in hurry'. In the realm of international relations he introduced 'New Thinking' which stressed on a deidoelogised foreign policy.

In the words of Gorbachev, 'New Thinking' stood for
“We need normal international conditions for our internal progress. But we want a world free of war, without arms races, nuclear weapons and violence, not only because this is an optimal condition for our internal development. It is an objective global requirement that stems from the realities of the present day. The world is living in an atmosphere not only of nuclear threat, but also of us resolved major social problems of new stresses created by the scientific and technological advancement and by the exacerbation of global problems. Mankind today faces unprecedented problems and the future will hang in the balance, if joint solutions are not found. All countries are now more interdependent than ever before and the stockpiling of weapons especially nuclear missiles, makes the outbreak of a world war, increasingly more probable due to technical failure or human fallibility. Yet all living things on each would suffer”. (Gorbachev, 1987: 10-12).

Under the slogan of 'New Thinking' Gorbachev's foreign policy was based on shared moral and ethical principles to solve global problems rather than on Marxist-Leninist concept of irreconcilable conflict between capitalism and communism. The historic meeting between Deng and Gorbachev lead to resolution of many outstanding problems between the two. The border dispute was resolved by demarcating the Usuri River; trade was opened up and threat perceptions to a large extent eliminated.

While relations were improving between the two countries, the Soviet Union itself collapsed in December 1991. It was a historical event of global significance. Relations between the two neighbours, Russia and China could not therefore, escape the global effects of this historical event (Imam, 1999: 379-402).

The new government of Russia appeared to ignore the need for further development of relations with China from the point where Gorbachev had left during his tenure. The reasons were obvious. President Yeltsin and his government were preoccupied with a series of domestic problems arising out the disintegration of Russia's domestic factors placed a very important role in the formulation of Russian foreign policy during the
initial period. The economic crisis of the early 1990s produced national humiliation. Unemployment increased and a large number of people were pushed below poverty line. Between the 'Atlantists' and "Eurasians' model of foreign policy Russia went ahead with former in the hope that the west will provide huge aid to restructure the socialist model of economy into it capitalist one. But once the threat perception of Russia was eliminated the US emerged victorious in the Cold War. Neither West not the US paid much attention to admit Russia into Western world and help it economically. Instead, they started treating Russia as competitor in various field.

The bubble of 'Common European Home and one World From Vancouver to Vladivostok" etc. burst very soon and a disillusioned Russia turned her face towards the Third World and Asia which had been a natural ally of the erstwhile Soviet Union. So in the changed circumstances and policies countries like China, India, Iran got the top priority in Russian foreign policy list.

Soon, Kozyrev was replaced by ill academician Yevgeny Primakov as Russia's new foreign minister who tried to balance between the East and the West. In December 1998 he made an official visit to India. Primakov visited India at the time when India was internationally isolated for conducting nuclear tests a few months back. He proposed to formulate a triangle between three major Eurasian countries Russia-China-India to counter US hegemony and unilateralism in the world politics. According to him 'Russia favours the creation of a Moscow-Beijing-Delhi triangle and also it would be a good idea (SWB/SU/3416 B/5, December 22, 1998).

Before going into detail about the emerging triangle between the three, let us see how their individual relations are developing with each other.

b) Russia-India Relations

The legacy of strong mutually beneficial relations between Soviet Union and India weighed heavily on Indian expectations in developing relations with new Russia. Global events brought India and Soviet Union together in the fifties when the Cold War dominated international relations. India had identified itself with the Soviet Union World
view just as Pakistan had with that of the USA. The general understanding was Indo-Soviet friendship being time tested. Indo-Russian equation would rot dramatically alter. End of Soviet Union, however, altered the international scenario completely. It heralded the end of the confrontational bloc politics (If the Cold War era and the weakening of ideologies. Free from ideological compulsion new Russia had new options (Shams-uddin, 2001:1)

After prolong dilly dallying and rescheduling his visit since 1992, Yeltsin finally arrived in New Delhi only in January 1993. President Yeltsin's belated visit to India in January 1993 was aimed to reassure New Delhi that Russia was not cold-shouldering India. But Russian leaders first visited South Korea in November 1992 and China in December 1992. Russian foreign policy it appeared was now being based on the maxim 'we do not have any permanent friends or foes, but we do have permanent interests'. Since 1993 Indo-Russian relations have been growing smoothly. Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narsimha Rao visited Moscow in 1994; during high visit President Yeltsin remarked that "there was no difference at all between the two countries on international and bilateral issues". The document signed during his visit promised for joint action by both countries against terrorism. The document supported all forms of cooperation, investment, joint enterprise, creation of conditions for economic initiative development of scientific technical cooperation, peaceful atom, cosmos, and laser technology (Chenoy, 2005: 183-184).

Of the weapons Indian armed for the possesses around 70% of weapons is that of Soviet/Russian origin. Russia supplies cheap and reliable arms to India, unlike West and USA which always puts certain conditions before delivery of arms with higher price tag. India gave more importance to Russia than the USA because Russia had been an all-weather friend and both countries maintained close political, economic, nuclear and military relations.

Between 1992-96 India imported from Russia defense equipments worth $3.5 billion. Indian military and defence orders now sustain many defence industries in Russia, especially in St. Petersburg and Irkutsk which would otherwise have faced closure at the
time of transition in the Russian economy. India is the only country with which Russia has a long term programme of military-technical cooperation, which was signed in 1994. The Soviet era Treaty of Friendship, Peace and Cooperation was renewed for another 10 years, during the then Defence Minister Mulyam Singh Yadav's visit to Moscow in December 2000. (Chenoy, 2001: 183-184) Russian spokesman stated that Russian Indian military cooperation would touch $4.5 billion in 2000 and $6.5 billion in the end of 2005.

The crucial and the most time testing moment in Indo-Russian relations came in May 1998 when India tested five nuclear bombs in Pokhran, Rajasthan and most of the influential countries imposed economic and many other kinds of sanctions on India. Although Russia disagreed with the West and USA that India should sign on CTBT and NPT and ratify it as soon as possible, but Russia opposed any kind of economic sanction against India, and refused to impose sanctions itself. Tremendous pressure was exerted by the USA led West on Russia to scrap all its agreements in nuclear cooperation with India and also stop technical support to India's two nuclear reactors under construction with Russian assistance at Kudnakulam, Tamilnadu. But Russia stood up to the Indian expectations and refused to company with US dictates. (Boquerat and Frederic: 2004:132-140).

Russia has constantly supported India’s point of view on the issue of Kashmir in various international forums. It has also promised India to using veto power in UNSC if India would be pressurized on the Kashmir issue. As the reciprocal gesture India also always supported Russian stand on the Chechnya issue and criticized the West for interfering in Russia's internal matters on the pretext of addressing human rights violations.

India and Russia set up a joint working group on Afghanistan. As on many other issues their stance on this issue was similar. Together they made it possible for the Northern Alliance to keep afloat and thereby a counterforce against the Taliban was available when the American attack on Afghanistan took place. Their joint proposal of resistance also mooted by General Musharraf and virtually endorsed by the USA prevented the sneaking in of Taliban elements in the interim government formed subsequently in Afghanistan under the leadership of Hamid Karzai (Dutt, 2003: 18-19).
Russia is one of the states which promised to support for India for a permanent seat in the Security Council, and thus has demonstrated to the Indian foreign policy establishment its loyalty to Indian position and its understanding of India's strategic aspirations globally.

Another important landmark in the development of Indo-Russian ties was Prime Minister Primakov's visit at the end of 1998. The visit sparked off a debate following his references to an Indo-China-Russia strategic triangle. He remarked that "Russo-Indian relations are perhaps unique in diplomatic history of the past fifty years. Their strength has been tested by many turns and twists in the two countries political life and during the profound transformation of international system". He also rightly noted that cooperation between the two countries rests on a long established bread public consensus in both countries regarding the priority of Russian-Indian cooperation as a factor promoting national interests (Shams-ud-Din, p.8).

On March 22, 1999 India and Russia signed an agreement to train Indian defence personnel in key Russian defence establishment for maintaining advanced defence equipments. The 44,500 tonnes Kiev class Admiral Gorshkov aircraft carrier has been gifted to India by Russia. The Mig-29K Fulcrum aircrafts stand a better chance to be operated from this aircraft carrier. Upgrading of MiG-29 Bis Fished Fighters, construction of 3 Kirvak class frigates of the Indian Navy modernization foT -72 MBT, procurement of T -90s MBTs, for the Indian army and 8-300 antiballistic missiles systems were discussed. (Shams-ud-Din, p.8).

### 4.8 Russia-India-China Emerging Triangle: Myth or Reality

During his visit in December 19S8, the former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, proposed a Russia-India-China strategic triangle, which envisaged closer strategic cooperation. He said that

If we succeed in establishing a strategic triangle, it will be very good ... a lot depend in the region on the policies perused by India, China and Russia. Further, this proposal was
made in the framework of partnership between the three countries that could bring about greater stability not just in the region but the world.

The immediate response from Beijing on the proposed triangle was positive. The spokesperson of Chinese foreign ministry dubbed it as 'very positive thought' and 'would help in containing growing unilateralism in international politics'. India's response was cautious and rather lukewarm because she did not want to send wrong signals to the West by joining in bloc politics. In his speech then Prime Minister Vajpayee said 'Russia is a longstanding partner of India with which we have traditionally enjoyed friendly relations. At the same time, India is working on normalizing its relations with China'. Due to this cold response from India, speaking to the media Primakov explained that his earlier words on the possibility of forming a triangle between Russia-China-India were not official proposal. He said "I wanted to say that such partnership could reliably stabilize the situation in the region and in the world". (SWB/SU/3417 B/4, December 23, 1998.)

In 1990s and after 9/11 USA loomed over the world as sole superpower ready to undertake unilateral action anywhere ranging from NATO led attack on Yugoslavia to bombing in Afghanistan to oust Talibans from power. The next states which form 'Axis of Evil' i.e. Iran, Iraq and North Korea are now on USA's hit list. Presence of US troops in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Taiwan close to the borders of Russia and China is posing grave threat to their security. Repercussions of these international developments are bound to affect the two countries.

The multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies of Russia, India, and China have faced increasing pressure from the forces that seek to destroy their pluralistic societies. In India infiltration in Kargil was the culmination of years of infiltrations and terrorist activities. The terrorists have also attacked the highest symbol of Indian democracy, the parliament. Russia's long bleeding problem of Chechnya has been further aggravated with the Western and US media and human right groups' intervention on the name of human rights violations. China is facing potential threat of secession in its Xinjiang province by Islamic extremists who are engaged with continuous low level warfare with Chinese authorities. There is growing feeling among the three countries that US alone should not
set the agenda of global war against terror. The experience of Iraq also shows that the US polices can leave a bigger mess in the region, the effect of which has to be borne by neighbouring countries. (Joshi, 2003: 187-188).

Meanwhile as Twenty First Century progresses, Asia is likely to occupy a centre stage in the international system. While on the one hand Asia has seen economic prosperity it also has sources of danger. It stretches from Persian Gulf to Philippines contains sources of tell1sions such as global terrorism. In American perception the 'Axis of Evil' i.e., Iraq, Iran and North Korea are located in Asia. President Vladimir Putin has proposed that the arc of instability be converted into an arc of stability. To achieve this objective India, Russia and China can play vital role.

At broader level India, Russia and China agree that the world should be a multipolar one. China felt the pressures from the West after the Thiamin square massacre, the US relentless support to Taiwan and threat perception of China despite of years of normalization of US- Chinese relations, US sale of F -16s to Taiwan and promised Theater Missile Defense (TMD), forced Chinese to reconsider relations with the USA. With the development of National Missile Defence (NMD), US will get cutting edge on strategic position vis-a-vis Russia and China. Russia, with its huge nuclear arsenal, could live with the US NMD. From Chinese perspective, however, the same system could immediately render China's minimalist nuclear relations form obsolete. (Yu Bin, 2000:121-130).

The issue of NMD and its deployment in Asia (Japan and Taiwan) is bound to affect strategic balance in the region. India on the whole, has been supportive to President Bush's decision to go ahead with missile defense, although New Delhi has opposed unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty of 1971. China is worried about a US defensive shield that could make Taiwan more independent minded. Russia has objected to unilateral abrogation of ABM treaty and fears that, even Russian nuclear forces are in decay and decline, the US could be poised to take a great leap forward militarily.
Russia-India-China has ample possibility to play together a constructive role to build stability in Central Asian energy resources. Of the three, only Russia is more or less self-sufficient in oil and natural gas. About 70% of India's oil is imported, mostly from the Gulf. Central Asian alternative supplies are being actively considered. Beijing has already indicated its interest in an ambitious venture linking up Central Asia with its industrial heartland in the eastern provinces. China and Russia have made deals for supply of oil and natural gas through pipeline which could feed oil hungry China in the decades to come.

There are other interested players in the region, foremost and most influential being the USA. Due to presence of petroleum and hydrocarbons, the 'great game' in Central Asia has been revived. Russia, China, USA are the major players in this game and competing for lion's share in the Central Asian natural resources. India, though a marginal player in this game is trying to reduce her dependence on Gulf oil, and looking forward for supply of oil from Central Asia.

Russia, India and China can also combine to discuss and if necessary deal with terrorism. Islamic extremism in Kashmir, Xinjiang and in Chechnya has grown over the years. Although US war on terrorism will help in reducing the problem, Washington clearly cannot do everything.

There has been a consensus between the three countries on the growing menace of terrorism. In April 1996, the 'Shanghai Five', a multilateral forum composed of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, was created with the aim of fighting ethnic separatism as well as Islamic fundamentalism. In March 2000, a meeting was held in Astana, Kazakhstan, to determine a common position on these two issues. This was later confirmed in a joint declaration in July 2000 in Dushanbe followed by a decision to create an anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. (Djalili, 2001: 64-65). Likewise, in October 2000, during President Putin's visit to Delhi, India and Russia reaffirmed their convergence of view on fighting terrorism, expressing their deep concern over the situation in Central Asia and Afghanistan for which they agreed to set up a working group. (Basu, vol. 24: 1764).
Although the period of study of this research work is 1991-2001, but it would be worth taking note of some of the recent developments vis-a-vis the triangle. Since the time of proposal of the triangle in December 1998 to 2001, by and large no concrete steps seem to have been taken was by the three concerned steps to realize it. But the more US unilateralism became blatant the more attractive the option seemed. As a result for the first time the three foreign ministers of Russia, China and India met on the sidelines of UN General Assembly meet at New York in 2002 to explore the 'triangle' possibility.

The approach continued to be an extremely cautious one. The three foreign ministers gave no media briefing for the press except that informally they let the press know that they had met and that these meetings will continue. By comparison at the second 2003 New York meeting the difference in both their body language and press briefing could be clearly noticed. At the conclusion of their second meeting, three foreign ministers were ready to convey to the press that three states had adopted a common approach on Iraq favoring return to political process to ensure quick return of sovereignty to Iraqi people. (Singh, 2005: 14-16). This clearly had strong connotations for the USA, especially as all three of them had also refused to send troops to Iraq.

The 2004 meeting on the eve of the UN General Assembly session in New York could not occur due to change of government in New Delhi leading to some scheduling problems with the Indian establishment. Nevertheless, this was soon rectified and the three foreign ministers had their third 'trialogue' on strategic triangle on the sidelines of the Almaty meet of the 16 nation Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in October 2004. In the press briefing all three countries agreed to strengthen a "collective approach" in world affairs. (Singh, 2005: 14-16)

On June 2, 2005 the three foreign ministers of Russia, China and India namely Sergei Lavrov, Li Zhaoxing and Natwar Singh had their first ever stand alone meeting at the port city of Vladivostok in Russia's Far East. The presence of large number of Western journalists at this meeting indicated that the meet generated curiosity beyond these states. Most experts believe that a meeting solely for this purpose reflects the beginning of the new era in the evolution of the Russia-India-China triangle.
For various reasons, all three countries feel that they are under Western pressure. Russia because of NATO's eastward expansion, Chechnya issue, and more generally, because of perceived CS design on former Soviet republics, including Central Asia and Caspian Sea region. China is experiencing Western pressure on human rights issue and feels threatened by US arms sales to Taiwan and more generally, an East Asian security policy which moves towards greater use of Japan in balancing China. India is experiencing in concealed Western propensity to try to get involved on Kashmir issue and helping Pakistan to internationalising Kashmir issue; as well as the Western -mainly US attempt to limit country's nuclear and missile programme. (Heisbroug, 1999-2000: 5-19) India also accused US for pursuing 'double standard' on fighting with terrorism. India blames that terrorist outfits functioning in Pakistan with covert support of Pakistani establishment are posting grave threat to India's security, but US in eliminating only those terrorists who pose threat for her own interests and not that of India.

4.9 Implications for India

India on its side is also willing to engage in great power politics and is looking for international recognition it has been deprived since independence. Nehru wrote movingly of India's desire and its destiny to play a major role in the world politics. He hoped that it would not be military role, but one based on sound moral values. Today although there exists no "white paper" enunciating the objectives of the country's foreign policy, India still strives towards this goal. The most spectacular example of this new assertiveness, largely founded on the self-confidence generated by the relative success of the nuclear tests, is the claim for a permanent seat at the UNSC.

On the issue of triangle, it is only India that seems to be least under pressure to pursue this triangle. India has to carefully weigh its policy options and maintain a delicate balance between promoting strategic triangle and strengthening its engagement with the USA. Individually both Russia and China have maintained good relationship with the US and their trade volume are increasing rapidly with the US.
Fear persists at the bilateral level as well. To some Chinese analysts Russia still represents a potential threat and vice-versa is also true. Both Russia and India presume that in the short and medium term, China may pursue the policy of peace, but in the long term equations may change. China's overt and covert support to Pakistani nuclear and missile development programme pose a great security danger for India.

India-Russia-China can do some sensible things together in the military and geopolitical realm. There is very little prospect that they are going to be allies or even thoroughgoing strategic performers. Moreover there are number of areas where protocol, discussions and agreements might be reached which would enhance their security and contribute to the security of Asia. If the idea of triangle between them mean anything, it is probably means a relatively modest set of understanding on which their view coverage.

The Eurasian security in future will depend a lot on how these three largest countries harmonise their relationships. They represent world's most populous segment, rich with natural resources and are on a fast track to emerge as leading global economic power. The June 2, 2005 concluded meeting at Vladivostok recently solely for this purpose indicate that future of triangle is very promising and the picture will be clearer in the time to come. At the same time the future of triangle rests with how India and China solve their own long standing problem of border disputes.

To conclude, therefore, if Asia has to make any positive contribution towards the evolution of new global order and if world has to evolve an adequately representative framework for international security then, increasingly mutual cooperation of these three Asian powers amongst themselves and also their cooperation with other major players remains the most critical pre-requisite to all initiative; in building the future world order.

Russia, China and India have great historical experience of dealing with such Western influences and preserving their Asian identity despite all challenges. The fundamentals of strategic triangle seem robust and clear and effort must be made to make it effective As of today Russia-India-China stand together in their support for evolving 'just and rational' new international order with democratization of international politics and
multipolarization. Also all three have been suffering from transnational and cross-border terrorism and have not been comfortable with unipolar world led by the US. The trilateral cooperation among themselves holds the key of 'triangle' and how these three Asian giants resolve their internal disputes would be the deciding factor in the emergence of 'Eurasian triangle'.

To conclude, Russian and Chinese interests in Central Asia seems smooth but with growing Chinese influence in the region is the cause of concern for Russia. China has already surpassed Germany to become third largest economy in the world. China’s fast growing economy needs continuous energy supply for which Central Asia is its natural choice. Russia treats Central Asia as its backyard and interests of both countries seems to be at odds here.