



Routledge Studies in South Asian Politics

INDIA AND CENTRAL ASIA IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

**SECURITY, ECONOMIC AND
SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSIONS**

Saroj Kumar Aryal



India and Central Asia in the Post-Cold War Era

This book analyses the evolution of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia after the end of the Cold War.

Focusing on the development of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia between 1991 and 2020, this book investigates the explanatory and intervening variables of the policy towards the region to identify its goals, assumptions, motivations and instruments. The preliminary assumption is that India's foreign policy towards Central Asia has evolved after the Cold War from a passive approach to an active participant in Central Asian security, economic and socio-cultural spheres. This is also seen due to the emergence of the five Central Asian countries as independent states, which have a tremendous strategic significance due to their geographical location, huge hydrocarbon reserve and potential economic opportunities. India expanded its policy to the 'Extended Neighbourhood,' adding East, Central and West Asia to the existing South Asian neighbourhood. Since then, India has been engaging with the region considering the growing geostrategic and geo-economic significance of the region and using the available foreign policy instruments. This book presents a comprehensive assessment of India's foreign policy behaviour evolution with proper analysis of the explanatory (external) and intervening (internal) variables that influence India's behaviours towards the region. It shows that India also aims to be a very influential power in Central Asia.

This book will be an excellent resource for students and researchers of area and global studies, international relations, Asian Politics and South and Central Asia.

Saroj Kumar Aryal is a researcher at the Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland. His book, *Violence, Power and Politics in South Asia: From Kashmir to Kathmandu*, co-authored with Gaurav Bhattarai, is forthcoming with Routledge.

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Security, Economic and Socio-Cultural Dimensions

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEC	Automatic Energy Commission
AEP	Act East Policy
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
APEDA	Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority
APTTA	Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
ASEAN CLMV	ASEAN Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Vietnam
ASF	Afghan Security Force
AYUSH	Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy
BCIMEC	Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor
BHEL	Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Janata Sangh
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CAPXIL	Chemicals and Allied Products Export Promotion Council
CAR	Central Asian Republics
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CAWSEC	Cubic feet per second
CCAP	Connect Central Asia Policy
CCI	Competition Commission of India
CCPA	Central Consumer Protection Authority
CDB	Chinese Development Bank
CGN-URC	China Guangdong Nuclear Uranium Resources Co Ltd
CICA	Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CID	Chief Investigation Department
CIJW	Counterinsurgency and Jungle Warfare
CIPEC	China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor
CMREC	China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor

CNTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
COMPAT	Competition Appeal Tribunal
CPEC	China–Pakistan Economic Corridor
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DPP	Defence Production Policy
DRDO	Defence Research & Development Organization
DSSC	Defense Service Staff College
DTAA	Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EEPC	Engineering Export Promotion Council
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EIDB	Export and Import Data Bank
ETIM	East Turkestan Islamic Movement
EU	European Union
EXIM	Export and Import Bank
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FPE	Foreign Policy Executive
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMR	GM Rao Group of Companies
HAWS	High Altitude Warfare School
HEMTT	Heavy Expanded Mobility Tactical Truck
HICDP	High Impact Community Development Projects
HSK	Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi
ICWA	Indian Council of World Affairs
IDDM	Indian Designed, Developed, and Manufactured
IDSA	Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis
IEA	International Energy Agency
IGC	Inter-governmental Conference
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMU	Inertial Measurement Unit
INC	Indian National Congress
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INR	Indian Rupees
INSTC	International North–South Transport Corridor
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IR	International Relations
IRPT	Islamic Renaissance Party
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	Information Technology
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
JWG	Joint Working Group
KAZIND	Kazakhstan India

KNAU	Kyrgyz National Agrarian University
LAC	Line of Actual Control
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MRTP	Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Activities Act
MRTPC	Monopolies & Restrictive Trade Practices Commission
MSME	Medium and Small Manufacturing Enterprises
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDA	National Democratic Alliances
NDC	National Defense College
NELB	New Eurasia Land Bridge
NHPC	National Hydroelectric Power Corporation
NSC	National Security Council
OBOR	One Belt One Road
OGL	Open General Authorisations
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPV	Offshore Patrol Vessel
ORF	Observer Research Foundation
PAK-FA	Perspektivnyi Aviatsionnyi Kompleks Frontovoi Aviatsyi
PATA	Pacific Asia Travel Association
PJI	Para Jumping Instructors
PMO	Prime Minister Office
PPP	Public–Private Partnership
PRC	People’s Republic of China
QCCM	Quadilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism
QUAD	Quadilateral Security Dialogues
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RITES	Rail India Technical and Economic Services
RSS	Rastriya Swoyam Sevak Sangh
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
SREB	Silk Route Economic Belt
TAPI	Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UN	United Nations
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNODC	United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Social Republics

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VHP	Vishow Hindu Parisad
VIF	Vivekananda International Foundation
VUCA	volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction
WP	Western Pacific Region
WTO	World Trade Organization
XUAR	Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region

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Introduction

I.1 Justification of Research

The research problem of this book refers to India's foreign policy towards Central Asia after the end of the Cold War in broader context of the domestic preferences and international determinants.

There are four main premises behind the selection of the topic:

- a India is a regional power;
- b After the End of the Cold War India started to engage actively beyond the South Asian region;
- c Having a shared socio, cultural and civilizational lineage, India and Central Asia have common interest India and Central Asia have common interests in terms of economic, security and socio-cultural cooperation;
- d Geo-strategic and geo-economic significance of Central Asia in international relations (IR).

Regarding the first justification, accessing the sociopolitical economic indicators India by far leads in all the socioeconomic indicators in South Asia. (*South Asia* includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.) Almost 80% of major indicators are held by India in the region. For instance, India's GDP size of India in 2021 is almost \$3 trillion whereas the cumulative GDP of the rest of the seven South Asian states is \$910 billion.¹ In terms of trade dependency, most of the states in the region are dependent on India. India is the biggest aid provider of states like Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Furthermore, India's defence budget in 2021 is \$76 billion, while that for other states is very minimal. All of these indicators provide evidence that India is a regional power in South Asia.

However, a broad agreement among scholars and practitioners of international security is unusual in almost any field.² Nonetheless, most would agree that India's status in South Asia is that of a regional power. The rationale for such labelling is based on India's relative power in comparison to other regional members; India outperforms the other states in both military and economic capabilities. Indeed, Pakistan's possession of nuclear weapons serves as a reminder that India may

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not achieve regional hegemony. However, due to its newly acquired materialistic capabilities, India has also increased its engagement with regions that are beyond South Asia. And those regions in India's foreign policy have become integral parts.

Secondly, India after the Cold War has attempted to go beyond South Asia. Since the end of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, India has incorporated a concept of the extended neighbourhood into their foreign policy formulations. In doing so, they responded to Indian commentators' concerns in 1997 that "India should break free from the claustrophobic confines of South Asia."³ India's vision of an extended neighbourhood entails power projection, whether through hard power military and economic projection or soft power cultural and ideological strands. The extended neighbourhood has become India's conceptual umbrella; eastward, southward, northward and westwards; amid what some have referred to as an omnidirectional "360-degree vision" of the opportunities available to India outside South Asia.⁴ This was well expressed by Pranab Mukherjee, India's Minister for External Affairs, in 2006: "India's foreign policy today looks at India's environment in expanding circles ... beginning with the immediate neighbourhood ... moving on to ... the extended neighbourhood."⁵ Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon told British audiences in 2007 that "as we move beyond Southern Asia to India's extended neighbourhood ... from a broader perspective, we regard our security as lying in a neighbourhood of widening concentric circles."⁶ The aspirations of the extended neighbourhood during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh were economic and under Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014 are about projecting India's capabilities in a regional platform. Since the accommodation of 'external neighbourhoods' in India's main foreign policy, Central Asia also came into India's area of interest.

In terms of the third premise, although modern state affairs between India and Central Asia started in 1991 onwards, the historical and cultural ties between these two are tremendous. As India re-examined Central Asia in the new context, it discovered that its historical ties to the region dated back more than 2,500 years. Developments in the Eurasian continent had decisively shaped much of India's political history. The challenges from nations beyond the Himalayas or the Hindu-kush were referred to as *Uttara-kuru* in ancient Indian texts.⁷ According to ancient texts, the great trade route known as *Uttarápatha* connected the Indo-Gangetic plains with the southern edge of the Eurasian continent, passing through ancient Takshashila and Gandhara (present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan).⁸ In the 20th century, India felt secure in the USSR's grip on the vast expanse of the Eurasian landmass. The majority of the Indian administration saw Soviet control of Central Asia as a positive historical phenomenon with long-term consequences for India.⁹ During this period India also enjoyed close cultural cooperation with Central Asia.

In terms of fourth premises, due to the geo-strategic significance of Central Asia in IR, India has an economic, security and socio-cultural interest in the region. Great game, a political strategy used by great powers to gain geo-strategic and geo-economic advantages in Central Asia and the Caspian region. Throughout the 19th century, Britain was obsessed with the fear that one of the other European powers would exploit Central Asia's political decay. From the 18th century to the

present, great powers have competed for control of Central Asia.¹⁰ The strategic value of Central Asia to India has a few major contributing factors that make India's engagement with the region very crucial. India's engagement with the region is primarily motivated by two concerns: securing and diversifying India's Energy Supplies to sustain economic growth, and containing the rise of radical Islamist groups that may pose a Threat to India's security. Furthermore, India is eager to capitalize on the Central Asian region's significant commercial potential. Meanwhile, Central Asia's strategic location makes it a focal point for geopolitical manoeuvring that affects India's relations with Pakistan, China, the United States and other regional powers.¹¹

As a result, New Delhi launched a new 'Connect Central Asia' policy in June 2012. This indicated that India would seek to strengthen political ties as well as strategic and security cooperation with Central Asian states. It proposed expanding India's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and establishing a new Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to integrate its markets with those of Central Asia. In practice, it promised a cross-regional energy infrastructure, new flights to Central Asian countries, and the development of IT, banking and pharmaceutical industries to strengthen economic ties.¹²

I.2 Scope of the Book

Time Frame: The book has taken the time frame from 1991 to 2020 for the research period. The time frame is decided based on the following rationales:

- 1 The starting point of the timeframe for the book is 1991 due to:
 - a Only after 1991, there was the emergence of the independent republics in Central Asia.
 - b India remained engaged in the South Asian Neighbourhood during the Cold War due to their strategic orientation of the 'Non-Alignment Movement' and only after the Cold War India started to pursue active foreign policy beyond the South Asia region.¹³

- 2 The book will only analyse India's policy towards Central Asia until 2020. As there are some major events happening between 2019 and 2021 the study has taken 2020 as a grace year to observe continuation or the discontinuation of the policies. There are mainly three rationales behind choosing 2020 as the end date of the book timeframe:
 - a *The US election* – From 2020, the United States will have a new government. The political uneasiness that the world has seen during the Trump era came to an end with Joe Biden assuming the presidency. However, the fundamental changes that the world saw such as increasing US–China strategic competition did not change. So, the year 2020 was used to see if there are going to be fundamental changes in the US approach towards the world.

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- b *COVID-19 pandemic* – Due to the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, the world stopped interacting with each other in terms of trade, security and other sociopolitical aspects. Thus, the study has not considered the date after 2020 as all the indicators will project declining trends between India and Central Asia.
 - c *2021 Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan* – In 2021, Taliban took over Afghanistan which changed the security landscape of South and Central Asia. So the general assumption and the analysis that the book-making in the security sphere needs a rapprochement if post-2020 is included.
- 3 As this book's main aim is to see the behavioural change of India towards Central Asia, the longer time frame allows us to see the linear or non-linear changes in India's Foreign Policy towards the region.

1.2.1 Geographical Definition

Geographically, this book deals with India and Central Asia. The demarcation of those territories is as follows:

- 1 **India:** India, often known as the Republic of India, is a South Asian state. It is the world's most populous democracy and the seventh-largest country in terms of land area as of June 2023. It also ranks first in terms of population.¹⁴ Its land borders with Pakistan to the west, China, Nepal and Bhutan to the north, Bangladesh and Myanmar to the east, the Indian Ocean to the south, the Arabian Sea to the southwest, and the Bay of Bengal to the southeast. India shares a maritime border with Thailand, Myanmar and Indonesia on its Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which are located in the Indian Ocean near Sri Lanka and the Maldives.¹⁵
- 2 **Central Asia:** From the Caspian Sea in the west to the western Chinese border in the east, Central Asia is the core region of Asia. On its northern and southern borders, respectively, are Russia and Iran, Afghanistan and China. The former Soviet countries of *Kazakhstan*, *Uzbekistan*, *Tajikistan*, *Kyrgyzstan* and *Turkmenistan* make up the region.¹⁶ The vast grassy steppes of Kazakhstan in the north and the Aral Sea drainage basin in the south make up Central Asia's landscape. Approximately 60% of the area is made up of desert territory, with the Karakum and Kyzylkum deserts taking up the majority of Turkmenistan and western Uzbekistan, respectively. Except for the riverbanks of the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river systems, which thread their way through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, eastern Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan after rising in mountain ranges to the south and east, the majority of the arid regions are unsuited for agricultural use. All five Central Asian Soviet socialist republics attained independence in 1991, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and are now the sovereign and independent countries of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The book has used the word 'Region,' 'Central Asian Republics (CARs)' or 'Central Asia,' all of which refers to the five republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) of the Central Asia region.¹⁷

1.2.2 Analytical Standpoint

- 1 While finding a common pattern in terms of explanatory variables, intervening variables and goals of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia, the book does not analyse the bilateral relations. However, while discussing the instruments of India's engagement with the region, it has been divided into two broader spectrums of bilateral and multilateral engagement. The book is motivated by finding a common pattern towards the region and thus has not focused on any bilateral aspect of the relations.
- 2 The book analyses the security, economic and socio-cultural dimensions as an instrument that India has been using to shape its foreign policy towards Central Asia.
- 3 Ultimately this book assesses India's foreign policy approach towards Central Asia. Thus, the study only has focused on the events and the milestones between 1991 and 2020 that have contributed to shaping India's policy and have increased the engagement with the region, thus, not necessarily has covered all the interactions that India's had with the region.

1.3 Assessment of Existing Literature

The available literature in the related field can be divided into some broader clusters. The reason behind doing a literature review in clusters is to get a concise perspective on the existing literature rather than keeping it unorganized. To segregate the literature into broader clusters, this section has divided the literature into two sections:

- a India's Policy Interest.
- b Theoretical Approach.

The first cluster accessed the literature from the perspective of India's policy interest towards Central Asia. There are three main themes within India's interest in Central Asia. First, the scholarly community has placed huge stress on India's security concerns towards Central Asia. Within the security concerns of India scholars like Stobdan,¹⁸ Roy¹⁹ and Thite²⁰ have expressed extensive concerns over the instability and the rising religious extremism in Afghanistan and in Central Asia and its spillover impact on India. Stobdan argued that due to multiple polarizations based on historical points of conflict among ethnic and tribal groups that persist in a muted form in the region, an Islamic model for Central Asia remains unfounded. However, in recent years, Central Asia has been projected as a hotbed of Islamic extremism.²¹ Instability in Afghanistan, as well as the emergence of the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan (IMU), have bolstered this notion. Stressing India's position after 9/11 he argued that, despite its support for American actions in the region in the aftermath of 9/11, India has chosen to go it alone in securing interests in both Afghanistan and Central Asia. India's primary concerns in the region remain security rather than strategic.²² Likewise, Roy also has argued that Afghanistan is

India's primary concern and focus of engagement in the region, reflecting both historical ties (much of Afghanistan was once part of the Mughal Empire) and the intertwining of Afghanistan's fate with India's adversary, Pakistan.²³ Additionally, Thite has broadened India's security challenges and has tried to explain them through the interconnectedness between Central Asia–Afghanistan and Pakistan. She argued that religious extremism and terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan pose a threat to Central Asian countries and India. Since the Afghan war, Pakistan's support for a warring militia and, following the independence of Central Asian states, its clear support for fundamentalist organizations such as the Islamic Renaissance Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, IMU and Taliban has demonstrated its agenda of a radicalized Islamic revolution in the region.²⁴ Some other literature also have covered India's security concerns towards the Central Asia region.²⁵ While doing so all of these scholars have overruled some other security factors like drug trafficking, illegal arms sales and illegal immigration. However, some authors like Azizi have published a piece that minutely just focused on drug trafficking and the human security aspect of Central Asia.²⁶

Second, the literature vastly focuses on India's energy security and the possible role that Central Asia can play. Pradhan has argued that no other factor has shaped the past century's history as much as the fight to control and administer energy and its sources. Thus, to meet its burgeoning demand, India has no choice but to look for equity in oil and energy. Through foreign policy initiatives, India has attempted to improve its energy security. In this context, energy insecurity is regarded as one of the most serious threats to India's future development and has thus become a key factor in the country's foreign policy.²⁷ He believes that India's Central Asian policy has been anchored by India's increasing energy demand. Doraiswamy²⁸ and Dadwal²⁹ are also among other scholars who have argued in a similar line as Pradhan. Many also argued that the government has been encouraging people at all levels to look for alternative sources of oil and natural gas. It has diversified its supply sources to meet its energy demand. As a result, supply diversification is critical. Oil and natural gas from Central Asia are important sources of supply.³⁰ Gogna tried to argue from the perspective of strategic advantages that India can have by accelerating relations with Central Asia. He argued that the Central Asian region, along with the Persian Gulf, provides India with significant strategic advantages. The CAR/s, with whom India is actively seeking strategic alliances, are located near India's northern borders. Surface connectivity with the CARs and Afghanistan would not only improve India's security but would also ensure a steady supply of energy inputs from the region.³¹

Third, India's historical and cultural connection with the region also has been discussed extensively in academia. The collected volume of Vohra argues that there were unifying elements in the region's culture that brought together missionaries, traders and pilgrims who travelled along the Silk Road, the "first transcontinental highway." With the imposition of colonial rule in the 19th century, the syncretism of previous years, the unifying bonds of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islamic faiths, waned.³² Roy and Kumara mentioned that, between India and Central Asia, there has been an unbroken flow of men, goods and ideas. According

to Zend Avesta, the ancestors of Iranian India and Turanian people were the three sons of Trattoria, namely Arya, Sairimia and Tura.³³ Abu Qasim Farishta has also included a fascinating account of Indians and Central Asians.³⁴ Guha also made rigorous research on the historical exchange between India–Central Asia culture.³⁵ There are some like Gopal who made a rather recent assessment on the interaction between India and Central Asia under Soviet rule.³⁶ However, those who have done extensive work on India’s historical and cultural interaction with Central Asia have left the part on how India can materialize the existing relations between the two in India’s favour.

The second cluster has attempted to access the literature from the theoretical approach of India towards Central Asia. Considering the economic prospectus and India’s association with the SCO, Kothari explains India’s approach from a liberal perspective. He argued that both India and Central Asia share common perceptions of the importance of friendship and mutually beneficial economic relations, particularly in the context of globalization. New Delhi intends to actively participate in Central Asia’s regional cooperation and security arrangements through its “Connect Central Asia Policy.”³⁷ Valen also added that India and Central Asia share the commonality of a liberal mindset. The common thread that connects India and Central Asian states is that both are ‘plural societies’ that require the establishment of a liberal, secular and democratic model.³⁸ While non-literature has mentioned whether India is aiming to balance China with the increased engagement with CARs, Wani has written a piece where he argues that CAR is attempting to strike a balance between China and India. The countries of the Central African Republic seek closer relations with India by strengthening diplomatic channels, increasing mutual visits, signing various agreements and pushing for stronger trade relations.³⁹ However, scholars like Kaushiki and Hannam have tried to explain India’s position in the region through the eye of the ‘New Great Game’ vis a vis Geopolitics. Kaushiki argued that CAR’s geopolitical significance has grown exponentially for India. Several factors, including the region’s vast hydrocarbon and natural oil reserves, China’s expanding economic presence in the region and the US departure from Afghanistan, have made it critical for India to increase its interaction with the CAR and Afghanistan on a strategic, political and economic level.⁴⁰ Scott has argued while defining Great Game:

The term “Great Game” was first used to describe the geopolitical rivalry between the Russian and British Empires in the nineteenth century; a “New Great Game” has been frequently associated with current Central Asia.... However, the term can still be applied to the current Sino-Indian relationship.⁴¹

Hannam also argued that, since their border war in 1962, China has sought to “encircle” India in an attempt to contain India’s interests, while India has sought to “encircle” China geopolitically.⁴²

Nevertheless, various indicators back India’s rising regional profile. India’s upscale engagement in ‘extended neighbourhood’ and the increasing size of its economy and military may reflect its ‘rising power’ attributes.⁴³ Considering the

rising power status and all associated pros and cons, it is necessary to study the interconnectedness between India's contemporary foreign policy attributes and its Central Asian engagement. However, it is crucial to evaluate the importance of Central Asia in India's overall regional ambition. Additionally, not only in Central Asia but overall, in Asia and the Pacific India's ambition has been challenged by China. Existing 21st-century literature presents geopolitical rivalry between China and India in Asia. Harsh V. Pant and Yogesh Joshi explain that the latest power shift in Asia has only stepped up protracted competition between New Delhi and Beijing. Buoyed by its recent economic and military development, China has taken on a more aggressive stance towards India.⁴⁴ While there are multiple interests and a rooted history between India and Central Asia, the foreign policy-making and the conversion of the policy for the benefit of both has been limited.

The literature review gives us two main puzzles. First, the literature on the subject of studies is very scattered. No studies have been conducted that deal with the holistic approach of India's policy towards the region. Second, most of the literature deals with what is happening bilaterally between India and CARs rather than analysing the policy-making process or the evolution of India's approach towards the region. Thus, after a thorough literature review on the subject of study, the study has identified two major literature puzzles.

- a Although some literature has discussed India's interest and engagement with the region, no literature has systematically analysed India's behavioural change towards Central Asia.
- b No literature has also explained the contributing factors which influence India's behaviour towards Central Asia.

To fill the gap in the literature, this book aims to investigate based on the following research questions:

- Q1: What is the rationale behind India's proactive engagement with Central Asia?
- Q2: How has the Foreign Policy of India evolved towards Central Asia since the end of the Cold War?

1.3.1 Hypothesis

India's foreign policy towards Central Asia has evolved after the Cold War from a passive approach to active participation in Central Asian security, economic and socio-cultural spheres. By using available foreign policy instruments India is trying to be a most influential power in Central Asia.

1.4 Research Task

- a Describe the general assumptions of India's Foreign Policy after the Cold War;
- b Analyse the evolution of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia;
- c Identify the motives of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia;

- d Reconstruct the main assumptions and goals of India's security, economic and socio-cultural policy towards Central Asia;
- e Analyse different forms and instruments of engagement that India is using in Central Asia;
- f Find a correlation between India's general foreign policy and Central Asia policy;
- g Access the role of explanatory and intervening variables of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia since the end of the Cold War;

I.5 Theoretical Approach – 'Neoclassical Realism'

Neoclassical realism is a foreign policy analysis approach that seeks to comprehend international politics by considering the nature of the international system – the political environment in which states interact. Taking neorealism as their starting point, neoclassical realists argue that when states conduct their foreign and security policies, they respond in large part to the constraints and opportunities of the international system, but that their responses are shaped by unit-level factors such as state–society relations, the nature of their domestic political regimes, strategic culture and leader perceptions. The neorealist model has several significant limitations, according to neoclassical realists. For example, states do not always perceive systemic stimuli correctly, and the international system does not always present clear signals about threats and opportunities.

The theory of 'neoclassical realism' is discussed in Chapter 1 in detail. However, in general, neoclassical realism examines the relationship between state and foreign policy through three sets of variables:

- Assessment of threats and opportunities in the anarchical international system by states or, more precisely, key decision-makers.
- Strategic adaptation is based on four key factors: who makes the decision and how he or she responds to international threats; how internal actors influence foreign policy; which internal actors are more important; and under what conditions decision-makers negotiate with internal actors.
- Mobilization of internal resources, which can be explained by three factors: how states mobilize internal resources to achieve specific goals; the extent to which internal actors can influence leader decisions; and what is the determinant factor in bargaining social groups.⁴⁵

There are three main reasons behind the selection of 'neoclassical realism' as the main theoretical approach to investigate the research problems. First, delimitations of other theoretical approaches. As our study attempts to analyse India's foreign policy behaviours towards Central Asia holistically, the limitations of other theoretical aspects do not allow us to do so. For instance, liberalism tactfully overruled the military and most of the security dynamics of the bilateral relations. Likewise, constructivism mostly focuses on the ideational factors and the international norms. And within the arena of realist theory of IR, classical realism or neorealism does

not have space to discuss the impact of internal political aspects on the external behaviours of a country. Thus, neoclassical realism has the potential to accommodate most of the relational dynamics between India and Central Asia.

Second, the nature of questions. The book attempts to answer a question to find the internal and external conductors of India's foreign policy towards Central Asia. The intervention of 'neoclassical realism' allows the book to analyse not only the structural dynamics of state behaviours but also the internal determinants of foreign policy-making.

Third, the interdisciplinarity of neoclassical realism. While classical and neorealism is still a very relevant theoretical aspect to analysing state behaviour, it has its own limitations. Classical and neorealism strategically overruled the various internal dynamics that influence the state behaviours. Likewise, it also has no space for the strategic culture of a particular state. Thus, the neoclassical realism has an interdisciplinarity within the realist school which can study internal dynamics and the structural state behaviours within the same theoretical umbrella.

1.6 Methodological Approach

In the broader methodological approach to investigate the subject of study, the research is based on the inductive–deductive strategy. Inductive reasoning begins with an observation or experience and progresses to patterns and hypotheses. A formulation of the tentative hypothesis aids in understanding both the small details and the big picture. As a result, the conclusions present a theory based on the ideas developed during the reasoning process. This method is open-ended and necessitates investigation.⁴⁶

Deductive reasoning is referred to as a top-down method. The reflection begins with a theory and narrows it down to a specific hypothesis (*Using Varied Instructional Techniques: Inductive and Deductive Teaching Approaches 2006*).⁴⁷ The deductive approach in social science provides conclusions based on a specific case derived from a broad theory. In other words, the deductive method necessitates moving from the broad idea, theory or statement to the specific elements. Hypothesis, as an intermediate stage, presents some specific reflection that aids in the discovery of the concrete conclusions required. Furthermore, the hypothesis can lead to the confirmation or denial of a theory.⁴⁸

Thus, in the case of the subject of study, Inductive methods have helped us to identify the pattern based on the observation which led to the formulation of preliminary hypothesis and theory. The major responsibility of this study is to deduct the theory and hypothesis and make an assessment of whether the assumptions based on the inductive strategy can be confirmed or not.

This study has adopted the 'Qualitative Method' of research. Despite having a number of tables that consist of data and the numerical charts, this study is still inclined with qualitative methods as it only uses these data to stronghold the argument without making projections. As a general rule, qualitative research, which includes the use of non-numerical evidence, is frequently contrasted with quantitative research, which is based on numerical evidence. While quantitative methods

account for the majority of research in IR, qualitative methods are frequently used by scholars for a variety of reasons, including (1) a lack of acceptable metrics for quantifying available evidence, (2) an interest in “puzzling” or outlier cases, and (3) a concern with testing existing arguments and hypotheses.⁴⁹ Especially in the study of IR qualitative methods are preferred due to main three reasons.

First, much of the evidence available to IR scholars is inherently “messy,” making it difficult to quantify in a consistent and scientifically “objective” manner. Government censorship, inconsistent data preservation practices, self-reporting bias and other types of world-induced selection bias beyond a researcher’s control make it difficult to use common statistical techniques that require representative and unbiased samples. Second, unlike quantitative research in IR, which seeks “generalizable” findings that can be extended to multiple observations without significant loss of explanatory power, qualitative research in IR is frequently drawn to anomalous and “puzzling” cases that are counter-intuitive or rare to the point of not representing a large enough population for general inference. And, third, some qualitative IR scholars defend their research methodologies by framing it as a critical test for existing arguments and hypotheses. While many academics⁵⁰ argue that a qualitative study based on a handful of cases cannot test an argument convincingly without a larger and more representative sample size, IR scholars who use qualitative methods typically push back by (1) focusing on cases that are “most likely” to confirm established arguments and (2) testing for hypothesized mechanisms within these cases.⁵¹

Within the various qualitative methods of research, this research has used three major methods. First, it has analysed the primary and secondary resources. A primary source is evidence that was obtained directly or firsthand about an event, object, person or work of art. Historical and legal documents, eyewitness accounts, experimental results, statistical data, creative writing, audio and video recordings, speeches and art objects are examples of primary sources.⁵² To investigate India’s foreign policy trends this study has extensively accessed primary sources, including speeches, press releases, meeting proceedings, treaties, agreements, MoUs which are available on the websites of the *Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)*, *Ministry of Defense*, *Ministry of Commerce*, *Prime Minister’s Office*. Likewise, news analysis published by some of the reputed new agencies of India and the monographic books written by scholars and ex-diplomats are accessed as well.

Likewise, secondary sources analyse, discuss, interpret, comment on, summarize and process primary sources. Articles in newspapers or popular magazines, book or movie reviews or articles in scholarly journals that discuss or evaluate someone else’s original research are examples of secondary source materials.⁵³ For the purpose of this study, research published in journals like *India Quarterly* and *Strategic Studies* are used as a secondary source. Additionally, edited volumes published by Indian and foreign scholars, opinion pieces published in think tanks like Observer Research Foundation (ORF), Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), Manohar Parrikar Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA) are also extensively accessed.

Second, it has done a discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is the study of how language works and how meaning is constructed in various social circumstances. It can be used to describe any written or spoken communication as well as nonverbal cues like tone and gestures.⁵⁴ In the context of this book, the discourse analysis will serve as a tool to understand the political language used by the government officials, political communique and the ministerial documents. As the neoclassical realism allows to accommodate the internal political dynamics in the foreign policy-making, discourse analysis will help to understand the internal discussion or the political language as a part of the foreign policy approach to Central Asia.

Third, it has conducted semi-structured interviews. To regain control of the interview process, it is necessary to preserve the potential confidentiality of other interviews, limit the length of responses and follow up with a question. As a result, the semi-structured interview method is frequently preferred because it allows for flexible use of the questionnaire based on the person's remarks, while taking care to prioritize the issues so that the most important ones are not left until the end of the appointment, risking not having enough time to ask them.⁵⁵ Similarly, respondents feel more comfortable in semi-structured interviews due to not having a formal set-up and the obligations. The author of this book has gone on a study visit to India from 15 April 2022 to 15 July 2022 and has conducted semi-structured interviews with 21 scholars from India (Delhi and Calcutta), including professors, research scholars and analysts of think tank organizations. The response of the interview has been used in the main body text as suited. However, the author has travelled to Kazakhstan from 15 September 2022 to 15 October 2022 and has brought some Central Asian perspective on India's approach towards the region. As this book primarily focuses on India's approach to Central Asia, the response taken from Central Asian scholars has been utilized only in the conclusion section to give some perspectives.

The book has done a triangulation⁵⁶ between three methods. By offering several viewpoints on the study subject, this method is frequently utilized to increase the validity and dependability of findings.

1.7 Chapter Division

The book consists of six chapters. The first five chapters are presented in uniform order. The main reason behind this attempt is to confine the study in one thread and to maintain the coherency.

The first chapter is titled 'Reconstruction of the Model of Analysis.' The primary aim of this chapter is to discuss the various interventions that Neoclassical allows to study the foreign policy. To do so the chapter is divided into three parts. First, it generally discusses the evolution of neoclassical realism as a theoretical discourse in IR. Second, the chapter presents the explanatory variable and the intervening variables of neoclassical realism. The third section of the chapter reviewed the interconnectedness between neoclassical realism and the goals, assumptions and instruments of the foreign policy analysis.

The second chapter is titled 'Evolution of India's Foreign Policy after the Cold War.' The main aim of this section is to make an assessment of India's overall foreign policy in Asia and the Pacific region. While doing so the first section discusses India's great power aspiration, power politics in the Indo-Pacific, the US policy towards the Indo-Pacific, and the rise of China and the South Asian neighbourhood as the explanatory variables. Likewise, the second section discusses the intervening variables of India's foreign policy-making towards Asia and the Pacific region. India's strategic culture, modernization of the defence sector, economic progress and the evolution of the political system are discussed as the internal conductor of India's foreign policy-making. The third section has categorically presented the goal and assumptions of India's foreign policy after the Cold War and the fourth section presented the instrument that India has used to achieve its goals and assumptions in the region.

The third chapter is titled 'Security Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asian Countries.' This chapter is divided into four parts. The first section identifies and presents the explanatory variables of India's security policy towards Central Asia. The explanatory variables include great power competition, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China factors and the non-traditional security threats. The second section identifies the intervening variables that shape India's security policy towards Central Asia. Those variables include extremism and terrorism in Kashmir, increasing polarity and fragile sea lanes of communication and its energy security dynamics. The third section makes an assessment of the goals and assumptions of India's security policy towards Central Asia. And the final section presents the instruments that India have used in the sphere of security in the region.

The fourth chapter is titled 'Economic Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asian Countries.' The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part identifies and discusses the explanatory variables of India's economic policy towards Central Asia. The external determinants include the economic significance of Central Asia and economic initiatives under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Whereas the second part accesses the intervening variables that work as the conductor of the economic policy towards the region. Those variables include India's economic liberalization of 1991 and the economic dynamics of energy. The third section makes an assessment of India's economic policy goals and assumptions towards the region. And the final section presents India's economic instrument towards the region.

The fifth chapter is titled 'Socio-Cultural Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asian Countries.' While accessing the socio-cultural dynamics of India's foreign policy towards Central Asian countries, the chapter has been divided into four parts. Yet again the first section identifies the explanatory variables of India's socio-cultural policy towards the region. Those variables include soft power policy of great powers towards the region, increasing soft power of China in the region and India's concerns regarding religious extremism. However, the second section identifies the historical legacies, Muslim population and the approach of the right-wing government as the intervening variables of India's socio-cultural policy towards the region. The third section made an assessment of

India's goals and assumptions. And the final section presents the instruments of India's socio-cultural engagement with the region.

The sixth chapter is titled 'Dimensions of India's Behaviours towards Central Asia after the Cold War.' The aim of this chapter is to make an assessment of the evolution of India's behaviour towards the region. This chapter functions as an overall assessment of the discussion that is done in Chapters 2–5. The chapter is broadly divided into four sections where the first three sections have systematically analysed the achievement and the challenges in India's behaviour towards Central Asia in the security, economic and socio-cultural sphere. And the fourth section has discussed the perception of India in Central Asia.

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1 Reconstruction of the Model of Analysis

1.1 Neoclassical Realism: General Assumption

Due to the limitations held by the existing realist theory such as neorealism and classical realism, neoclassical realism (NCR) emerges as a new stream of realism. It aims to incorporate the domestic variables as the dependent conductor of foreign policy-making as well as the external political environment. Without dismissing systemic explanations, a large number of scholars (Wohlforth, 1993; Zakaria, 1998; Schweller, 2004)¹ have emphasized the importance of combining systematic and unit-level variables. “A good account of a nation’s foreign policy should include systemic, domestic, and other influences, specifying what aspects of the policy can be explained by what factors,” writes Fareed Zakaria (1992, p. 198).² Gideon Rose referred to the works of these scholars as “neoclassical realism” in his 1998 review article *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*³ to demonstrate their intellectual connection with classical realism.

NCR is an outcome of the limitations of ‘neorealism’. Kenneth Waltz⁴ argued that in order to understand international politics, one must first understand the nature of the international system – the political environment in which states interact.⁵ States are thus compelled to obey systemic imperatives on a regular basis in an anarchic, self-help system where security and survival are always at stake. While Waltz acknowledges that states do not always behave in accordance with the international system, he maintains that because those who defy systemic imperatives are frequently defeated and eliminated, the international system socializes states over time to balance against rising great powers and to emulate the successful security behaviour of their peers. As a result, neorealists expect states to balance against rising challengers in a predictable and unproblematic manner, arguing that domestic political differences between the United Kingdom and the United States had little impact on their foreign policy behaviour).

Neoclassical realists agree with structural realists that states build their foreign security policies primarily in response to threats and opportunities in the international system. As Jennifer Sterling-Folker⁶ explains, neoclassical realists share an environment-based ontology that prioritizes the political environment in which states interact. Nonetheless, they reject the implication that states must respond to changing international circumstances as fluidly as structural

realist balance-of-power theories suggest. Overall, there are four limitations of neo-realism that classical neorealists have pointed out:

- 1 States do not always correctly perceive systemic stimuli. Based on the relative distribution of capabilities and differential growth rates, the international system may present states with relatively clear requirements. Yet, as William Wohlforth (1993, p. 2)⁷ points out;

If power influences the course of international politics, it must do so largely through the perceptions of the people who make decisions on behalf of the states.

As noted by Robert Jervis (1976)⁸ and others (Blainey, 1973, pp. 35–56; Lebow, 1981, pp. 101–119; Stoessinger, 2010)⁹ leaders, who are only human after all, frequently err in their calculations of relative power, identification of available options and assessments of the likely consequences of their actions.

- 2 Leaders do not always respond to systemic stimuli rationally. Even if they correctly perceive the international system's threats and incentives, they may engage in suboptimal or irrational decision-making processes that result in policy responses that contradict systemic requirements. As with perception, these issues may be related to cognitive limits on humans' ability to process information, particularly during a crisis when Time is Limited and the Stakes are High (Holsti, 1979).¹⁰ As a result, leaders may fail to identify all of the policy alternatives available to them, or they may choose between them in an inefficient manner, rather than selecting the option most likely to maximize the expected payoff at the lowest possible cost.
- 3 The international system does not always send out clear signals about potential threats and opportunities. When faced with a clear and present danger, such as a rapid and imminent power transition, states can easily discern the threat and determine how to counter it given the time frame and resources at their disposal.
- 4 States cannot always mobilize the domestic resources required to respond as the international system requires due to domestic political/economic circumstances. The neorealist model of foreign security policy-making necessitates a perfectly flexible state capable of correctly identifying systemic imperatives and responding quickly as international circumstances demand. If balancing is required, the state must be able to raise revenues, mobilize resources and recruit military personnel in a timely manner in order to prevent a revisionist state from achieving hegemony. When faced with a certain power transition, the state must be prepared to wage preventive war (Levy, 1987; Copeland, 2000; Lemke, 2003) (Table 1.1).¹¹

Zakaria wrote a review essay of 'Myths of Empires', by Jack Snyder, for *International Security* in 1992. He argued that most international political theorists, on the other hand, have focused on the nature of the international system and ignored what happens behind state doors, dismissing it as the domain of comparative politics, a separate sub-field of political science. Having said that Zakaria believes

Table 1.1 Classical Realism, Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism

<i>Theoretical Approach</i>	<i>Epistemology and Methodology</i>	<i>View of the International System</i>	<i>View of the Units</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Underlying Causal Logic</i>
Classical realism	Inductive theories; philosophical reflection on nature of politics or detailed historical analysis (generally drawn from W. European history)	Somewhat Important	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Power distributions or Distribution of interests (revisionist vs. status quo)->foreign policy
Neorealism	Deductive theories; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative and sometimes quantitative methods	Very important; inherently competitive and uncertain	Undifferentiated	International political outcomes	Relative power distributions (independent variable) -> international outcomes (dependent variable)
Neoclassical realism	Deductive theorizing; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative methods	Important; implications of anarchy are variable and sometimes opaque to decision-makers	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Relative power distributions (independent variable) -> domestic constraints and elite perceptions (intervening variables) -> foreign policy (dependent variable)

Source: Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy" in Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Inside "Neoclassical Realism, State, and Foreign Policy,"* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009

that, Snyder aimed to bridge the gap between domestic and international affairs by developing a domestic politics model that he claims adheres to the realist tradition.¹² The “primacy of foreign policy,” which is more relevant here, states conduct foreign policy for “strategic” reasons, as a result of international pulls and pushes, rather than to further domestic goals. Realists have long considered interstate relations to be separate from domestic politics.¹³ Indeed, realism as a school of thought evolved in tandem with the rise of strong states that were distinct from the societies they ruled and interacted with one another. Realists have argued that systemic pressures determine states’ foreign policy behaviour since the 16th-century Italians, who spoke of an external force of nature controlling state behaviour, to Kenneth Waltz’s balance-of-power theory.¹⁴ While analysing Snyder’s imagination of the empire through five expansionist powers: Germany (1866–1945), Japan (1868–1945), Britain (1830–1890), the Soviet Union (1945–1989) and the United States (1945–1989), Zakari identified three steps of argument that Snyder made in his book:

- a Why Over Expansion? A state expands because it always benefits a few people very much while costing many people very little. Parochial interest groups like the military, foreign offices and big business may or may not want imperialism, but they benefit from imperial, militaristic or autarkic policies. These organizations use government organs for their own ends.¹⁵
- b How? Pro-expansionists create strategic rationalizations for their policies and deceive the public with these “myths of empire,” which include a belief in the riches to be gained through conquest, falling dominoes, the advantage of offensive strategies and the efficacy of threat.¹⁶
- c Why Acute Over Expansion? Expansion is frequently so extreme, beyond what any one group desires, due to a process of logrolling between various factions, each of which is willing to back the others’ imperial projects in exchange for support for its own ambitions. This synergy usually results in “multiple expansion,” but if the bargaining process also includes key anti-imperial interests, it may result in an awkward mix of aggressive behaviour in some areas and conciliation in others, which Snyder refers to as “offensive detente.” As a result, overexpansion will be most severe in countries with many concentrated interest groups, a phenomenon Snyder refers to as “cartelization.”¹⁷

Zakaria concluded that Snyder’s *Myths of Empire* is an ambitious attempt to broaden international relations discourse by studying domestic politics.

Later, Zakaria’s (1998) study of the rise of the United States contends that, despite systemic incentives and opportunities, the United States failed to expand its influence in the Central American-Caribbean region in the latter half of the 19th century. According to Zakaria, this period in American history of “imperial under stretch” can be explained by a lack of state capacity, particularly the government’s inability to mobilize material and human resources from society. This frame of analysis also fits the theory of under-balancing by Schweller (2004).¹⁸ His central claim is that a lack of social and elite cohesion, combined with a high level of regime vulnerability,

prevents a country from pursuing coherent balancing strategies against external threats. In other words, state–society relations constrain a government’s ability to respond appropriately to external pressures and opportunities.¹⁹

Although the work of Zakaria brought the domestic political factor as a conductor of state behaviour within a realist framework, it is worth mentioning that Snyder has failed to provide a domestic politics model that is compatible with system-level influences, owing to theoretical ambitions that undermine his analysis.

Additionally, according to Christensen,²⁰ the early Cold War hostility between China and the United States was an unintended consequence of strategies used by Mao Zedong and the Truman administration to mobilize societal resources for national security. Changes in the international distribution of power ultimately drove Chinese and US foreign policies, but Domestic politics in both countries led to the pursuit of overly competitive policies in secondary regions in order to secure broad support for necessary policies in primary regions. According to Wohlforth,²¹ Soviet grand strategy during the Cold War arose from disagreements between the Kremlin and Washington over the actual post-World War II distribution of power in Europe, as well as the influence of Communist ideology on Soviet net assessments. Schweller²² contends that the late 1930s and early 1940s tripolar international system, as well as the distribution of revisionist and status quo interests among the three poles – Germany, the Soviet Union and the United States – actually aided Adolf Hitler’s expansionist grand strategy.

Based on the work done by prominent scholars such as Snyder, Zakaria and Wohlforth and Schweller, Gideon Rose attempted to present ‘NCR’ as a separate theoretical branch within the realist school. If one attempts to synthesize Rose’s argument in one statement that would be:

Based on neoclassical realism, the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy are determined first and foremost by the country’s relative material power. It contends, however, that the impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening unit-level variables like decision-makers perceptions and state structure.²³

More specifically, he seeks to explain why, how and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states – the extractive and mobilization capacity of politico-military institutions, the influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups, the degree of state autonomy from society, and the level of elite or societal cohesion – intervene between leaders’ assessments of international threats and opportunities and the actual diplomatic, military and foreign economic policies (Figure 1.1).²⁴ Rose contends that these books form a coherent school of foreign policy theories because they share a single independent or explanatory variable (relative power), a common set of intervening variables (state structure and leaders’ perceptions and calculations of relative power), explicit scope conditions, and a distinct methodological perspective characterized by detailed historical analysis and attention to causal mechanisms (Figure 1.2).

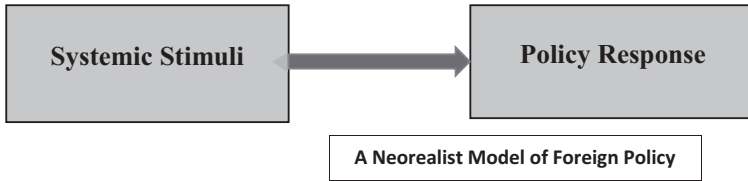


Figure 1.1 Functioning of Neorealism.

Source: Designed by the author based on Baldwin, David A. "Neoliberalism, Neorealism, and World Politics." In *The Realism Reader* by Routledge pp. 313–319. London: Routledge, 2014.

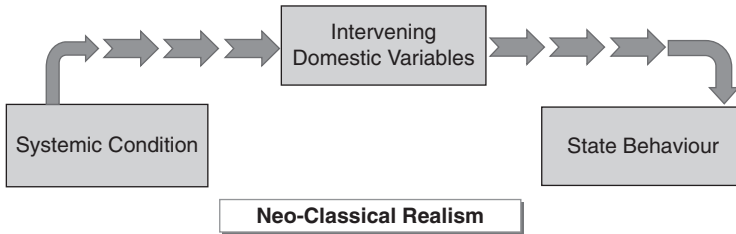


Figure 1.2 Neoclassical Realism and International System.

Source: Designed by the author based on the Firoozabadi, Jalal Dehghani, and Mojtaba Zare Ashkezari. "Neo-Classical Realism in International Relations." *Asian Social Science* 12, no. 6 (2016): 95–99.

Overall, the goal of neoclassical realists is not to develop a general theory of international politics. Rather, they are interested in explaining a specific state's foreign policy behaviour. According to Baylis et al. (2020, p. 99),²⁵ the central tenets of NCR are that foreign policy is the result of international structure, domestic influences and complex interactions between the two. Realists have ignored foreign policy theories, according to Rose (1998).²⁶ Thus, neoclassical realists provide a framework for obtaining a precise picture of any country's foreign policy. The rigour and theoretical insights of Neorealism of Waltz, Gilpin and others are drawn upon, without sacrificing the practical insights about foreign policy and the complexity of statecraft found in Morgenthau, Kissinger, Wolfers and others (Taliaferro et al., 2000, p. 4).²⁷

Based on the assessment above, the book makes six broader assumptions of 'NCR' that leads us to the next section to discuss the more concentrated analysis of the theory for the purpose of foreign policy analysis

- a The scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy are determined first and foremost by its position in the international system, specifically its relative material power capabilities.
- b Because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level, the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex.

- c Foreign policy decisions are made by actual political leaders and elites, so it is their perceptions of relative power that are important, not simply the quantities of physical resources or forces in existence.
- d These leaders and elites are not always free to extract and direct national resources as they see fit. As a result, power analysis must consider the strength and structure of states in relation to their societies, as these factors influence the proportion of national resources that can be allocated to foreign policy.
- e As a result, countries with comparable gross capabilities but different starting structures will most likely behave differently.
- f Systemic pressures and incentives may shape the broad contours and general direction of foreign policy, but they are insufficiently strong or precise to determine the specifics of state behaviour. This means that the impact of systemic factors is often more visible from a distance than up close. For example, limiting the menu of foreign policy options considered by a state's leaders at a given time, rather than forcing the selection of one item on that menu over another.

Because of significant limitations, neoclassical realists have supplemented structural realist theory with unit-level variables in order to explain two key categories of events that a purely structural theory could not account for. In the first case, states sometimes respond inconsistently to systemic imperatives. Even when systemic imperatives are clear, as when the rise of German power threatened an impending power transition in Europe in the 1930s, there have been notable instances of what Randall Schweller (2014)²⁸ refers to as “under-balancing.”²⁹ Significantly, Schweller cites the French failure to prepare for a war against rising imperial Germany prior to World War I, as well as British and French appeasement in the 1930s, as examples of failure to balance appropriately.³⁰

In terms of domestic politics, Schweller, Snyder, Taliaferro and other neoclassical realists explain these surprising deviations from structural realist expectations. According to Schweller,³¹ under-balancing occurs as a result of four domestic political variables: elite consensus and cohesion, which affect the state's willingness to balance; government/regime vulnerability and social cohesion, which explain the state's ability to extract resources from society to implement a balancing strategy; and government/regime vulnerability and social cohesion, which explain the state's ability to extract resources from society to implement a balancing strategy. In other words, when the state is fragmented or weak in relation to society, it is unable to respond to external threats in the manner required by the system. Sten Rynning uses similar terminology.³²

When the international environment does not present a clear and imminent threat, states frequently have a range of policy options from which to choose, rather than a clearly optimal policy dictated by international circumstances.³³ The actual choices made by states under these conditions may have far more to do with leaders' worldviews, the strategic cultures of the states they lead, the nature of the domestic coalitions they represent, and domestic political constraints on their ability to enact and implement various policy alternatives. In the late 19th century, for

example, when French, Russian, German, American and Japanese contenders rose to power as potential challengers to British hegemony, it was unclear how British grand strategy should respond. Instead, domestic political coalitions competed to determine the degree of threat each challenger posed and whether that threat should be met with cooperative or competitive policy responses, according to Steven Lobell (2003, pp. 43–85).³⁴

The range of options is very limited, with the broad contours determined primarily by external factors, leaving domestic political considerations to influence only the style or timing of the policy response. Dueck contends that, while US military interventions in Korea and Vietnam were necessary due to Cold War exigencies, their timing and style were influenced by concerns about domestic political opposition.³⁵ In other cases, the range of options is quite broad, giving the state and key societal actors more room to bargain over policy; as a result, the policy is more likely to be tailored to domestic political circumstances.

1.2 Variables of NCR

NCR as a theoretical framework provides the grid to systematically analyse the foreign policy of a state. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro realized the first attempt to identify NCR as a deductive theoretical structure that resembled the propositions of Waltz, Moravcsik or Alexander Wendt in their 2009 work *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. They defined NCR in paradigmatic terms but referred to it as a research programme rather than a theory. Its fundamental assumptions are based on two guidelines. To begin, the authors resigned from identifying states' motives and emphasized that every work using the NCR should define its baseline from a variety of realist options, including offensive realism, defensive realism, threat balance theory, hegemonic theory, and so on.

After rigorous assessment above on theoretical discussion and discourse, the involved variables of NCR can be divided into two parts:

- a Explanatory Variables (1.2.1);
- b Intervening Variables (1.2.2).

1.2.1 Explanatory Variables

The explanatory variable is the relative distribution of capabilities at the system level. NCR accepts neorealism's understanding that a given structure exists that is binding and external to the state. Scholars define the international system as "a set of interacting units," and the distribution of capabilities is determined by how states are ranked (based on population size, territory, economic power, military assets and political stability) (Waltz, 1979, p. 40, 99, 131). When the distribution of capabilities among those states shifts or when the organizing principle of anarchy shifts, the structure of the international system of states changes (the absence of a world government).

Similarly, taking complexities of international order, where the state is guided by whether to increase the state capacity or to sustain its international position, there are other crucial external factors that NCR allows to take into account like the international environment and the great power politics. Among those external factors, the policy of external players is also one of the factors to be considered. It is possible to conceptualize and analyse it as the ability of “Other Nations” to infiltrate and influence the “Foreign Policy Actor.” Given this capability, an external actor could indirectly influence foreign policies by interfering with the process of formulating foreign policy.³⁶

Based on the academic discourse and the rigour assessment, four Explanatory Variables were identified;

- a State Materialistic Capabilities;
- b Power Distribution in the World System and the Polarity;
- c Strategic Environment and Great Power Politics;
- d The Regional Balance of Power.

1.2.1.1 State’s Materialistic Capabilities

The state’s materialistic capabilities determine its international relations as well as its capacity to control events and outcomes.³⁷ The method most frequently employed and acknowledged for studying national power is the control over resources approach. In empirical research, military spending, the number of armed forces, the GDP, and population are commonly employed as indices of national power.³⁸ The control over resources may or may not translate into the control over even and the outcomes of world politics. But if the leader is rational enough to channel the national resources from the strategic perspective, then it might produce the results accordingly. For instance, the result of international conflicts can be reasonably explained or predicted if intangible resources like military force composition, leadership ability and the willingness to employ force when necessary are taken into consideration. In other words, there is a conversion process that converts the ability to control resources into the ability to control actors or events.³⁹ It is assumed that a set of resources, both material and immaterial, can be located so that a general indicator of national power, derived from the nation’s command over various resources, can accurately forecast the nation’s capacity to impose its will on others.

1.2.1.2 Power Distribution in the World System and the Polarity

The allocation of power is based on comparisons between the international system and market structures. Concentration aligns better with the microeconomic underpinnings of these investigations than polarity does. Furthermore, in order to measure the distribution of power using polarity, analysts must make the following assumptions – often implicit ones: (1) major power inequality is a minor aspect of the global power structure, and (2) nonpolar major powers ought to be disregarded

in structural analyses of international relations. In the realm of international relations, studies of power dynamics hold a prominent role. Studies in this area have long been based on discussions on the significance and type of its influence. A large number of these differences are the result of arguments about the definition and measurement of power distribution. While there is a debate about measuring the distribution of power, it is certain that the distribution of power creates the international political environment and based on the international political environment a country formulates its foreign policy.

The methodical and meticulous reformulation of political realism has been one of the most significant contemporary breakthroughs in the field of international relations. The following assumptions define this reformulation, sometimes referred to as “neorealism,” which has produced many theoretical advances: (1) States are the primary actors in the international system; (2) the international system lacks any supranational authority with a monopoly on the legitimate use of force (and is therefore anarchic); and (3) in the absence of any supranational authority, each state must ensure its own security, which depends on its power vis-à-vis other states.

Neoclassical realists, according to Gideon Rose’s review article from 1998 in *World Politics*, “argue that the scope and ambition of a country’s foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities.” In theoretical literature, the word “international system” has many different definitions. According to NCR, territorial nations are the world order’s foundation. Even though neoclassical realists do not discount the significance of a variety of actors operating in the international sphere today – including, but not limited to, individual businesses, economic sectors, epistemological communities, multinational corporations, international organizations and institutions, terrorist networks, transnational criminal organizations and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) – our conception of the international sphere does not take into account the size and composition of these actors.

Neorealist ideas operate at the level of the international system and contend that the patterns of various global outcomes are best explained by the power relations among the major states. According to Kenneth Waltz, “[a] system is composed of a structure and of interacting units. The problem ... is to contrive a definition of the structure free of the attributes and interactions of units.”⁴⁰ Studies of this nature typically characterize the structure of the international system in terms of the organizing principle (hierarchy of anarchy), the functional differentiation among states (homogeneous or heterogeneous) and the allocation of power among nations.⁴¹

Three different political power distribution systems – unipolar, bipolar and multipolar – have existed historically. The distinctions between these systems can be made on a variety of grounds, but they typically revolve around military and economic might. The number of powerful states fighting for dominance and their hierarchical relationship is essentially reflected in these various systems.⁴² Additionally, each pole is thought to be of equivalent strength in these systems. The two nations in a bipolar relationship are about equal in strength (for example, the

United Nations and the Soviet Union during the Cold War), or the two states in a multipolar relationship are roughly equal in strength (for example, the major powers of Europe before World War I).⁴³ So, states that are not an active part of polar politics behave differently considering the power distribution and the polarity of the international system.

1.2.1.3 Strategic Environment and Great Power Politics

The changing strategic environment and the great power politics also contribute to the formulation of a foreign policy for certain countries. The early 1990s saw the beginning of the post-Cold War era of international relations, which is generally characterized as having featured lower levels of overt political, ideological and military competition among major states. By 2014, however, this period had given way to a situation in which the United States was competing more intensely with both China and Russia, as well as challenges from both countries to parts of the post-World War II international order that the United States led.⁴⁴ The strategic environment operates as a sophisticated self-organizing system. It tries to keep its existing relative equilibrium or find a new acceptable balance. Some things are known (expected) in this environment, some are probable, some are reasonable, some are feasible and some are just unknown. It is a dynamic environment that responds to input, but not always in a direct cause-and-effect fashion. Strategy may be focused on a certain interest or policy, but the environment's holistic character results in both intended and unexpected consequences.⁴⁵ The strategist's ultimate goal is to preserve and advance the state's interests within the strategic environment by creating multi-ordered effects. A strategy model is straightforward in concept – ends, ways and means – but the nature of the strategic environment makes it challenging to apply. To be successful, the strategist must understand the nature of the strategic environment and build a strategy that is compatible with it, without rejecting its character or succumbing to other players or chance.⁴⁶ This setting is defined by the acronym VUCA, coined by the United States Army War College:

A world order where the threats are both diffuse and uncertain, where conflict is inherent yet unpredictable, and where our capability to defend and promote our national interests may be restricted by material and personnel resource constraints. In short, an environment marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

(VUCA)⁴⁷

The strategic environment, as defined by the four earmarks volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), is always in a state of dynamic instability or “chaos.” The strategist's mission is to exert control over volatility, manage uncertainty, simplify complexity and resolve ambiguity in terms advantageous to the state's interests and in accordance with policy guidelines.⁴⁸

1.2.1.4 The Regional Balance of Power

One of the most prominent theories in international relations is the balance of power. According to international relations theory, states can ensure their survival by preventing any one state from attaining enough military force to rule all others.⁴⁹ If one state gets significantly stronger, the theory predicts that it will exploit its weaker neighbours, forcing them to band together in a defensive coalition. Some realists argue that a balance-of-power society is more stable than one with a dominating state because aggression is unproductive when opposing coalitions have equal power.⁵⁰ Within the dogma of balance of power, throughout the development of the international system, there are many new strategies that have been developed such as balancing, bandwagoning, buck-passing and chain-ganging. Scholars used balance of power logic in the early 1990s to suggest that the end of Cold War bipolarity would result in a new multipolar distribution of power.⁵¹ However, with no evidence to support the resurgence of conventional balancing against the United States, even a number of realists are questioning the major components of the balance of power theory.⁵² Meanwhile, sophisticated agent-based models point to serious weaknesses in the theory's logic. As a result, the regional balance of power started to prevail due to the changed distribution of power from 'unipolarity' to 'multipolarity'.⁵³ When and if there are more than two regional powers emerging in the same period of time, the regional balance of power becomes more relevant. Regional powers start to pursue neighbouring states to forge a partnership which ensures regional balance of power.

1.2.2 Intervening Variables

Within the NCR model of foreign policy analysis, four intervening variable categories were established: cognition, strategic culture, state–society relations and domestic institutions (Lobell et al., 2009, pp. 67–68).⁵⁴ The authors identify and describe circumstances in which certain variables are more important than others. The most significant aspect of their assumptions is that they did not exclude any variables or formulate any constraints on the possibilities of applying them. The essence of the NCR is that state effectiveness in responding to international system incentives is influenced by unit-level (domestic) variables. The systemic pressures are not immediately transformed into state actions, as Waltz claimed, but the translation process is very complex and indirect. Furthermore, the domestic variables are the heart of this translation chain. As a result, the international system is perceived as not the only, but still very important, source of foreign policy constraints for countries. The book has identified four intervening variables:

- a Individual Decisions of Foreign Policy Executives;
- b Influence of Strategic Culture in Systemic Stimuli;
- c Interaction between State and Societal-Economic Institution;
- d State Structure and Domestic Political Institution.

1.2.2.1 Individual Decisions of Foreign Policy Executives

One major group of intervening variables is the beliefs or images of particular state decision-makers. These persons are known as the foreign policy executive (FPE); they include the president, prime minister or dictator, as well as important cabinet members, ministers and advisors in charge of foreign and defence policies. Because the FPE frequently has private knowledge and has a monopoly on intelligence on foreign countries, it is the most crucial factor to focus on when attempting to understand foreign policy and grand strategic adjustment.⁵⁵

1.2.2.2 Influence of Strategic Culture on Systemic Stimuli

The second group of key intervening variables is a country's strategic culture, which influences how the state perceives and adjusts to systemic stimuli and structural variations in material capability. Strategic culture scholars distinguish between organizational culture, such as that of the military as a bureaucratic entity, and a larger concept of strategic culture, which includes ingrained beliefs, worldviews and shared expectations of a community as a whole.⁵⁶ Strategic culture ideational models incorporate a set of interconnected beliefs, conventions and assumptions. Strategic culture or collective expectations impact political leaders', society elites', and even the general public's strategic understanding. These collective assumptions and expectations become deeply entrenched through socialization and institutionalization (in rules and norms) and constrain a state's behaviour and freedom of action by defining what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices, even in an anarchic self-help environment.⁵⁷

1.2.2.3 Interaction between State and Societal-Economic Institution

The third cluster of intervening factors includes state–society relations, which can be defined as the nature of interactions between the state's primary institutions and diverse economic and sociocultural groupings. The degree of harmony between the state and society, the degree to which society defers to state leaders on foreign policy issues in the event of disagreements, distributional competition among societal coalitions to capture the state and its associated spoils, the level of political and social cohesion within the state, and public support for general foreign policy and national security objectives are all important questions. These elements can influence whether state leaders have the ability to extract, mobilize and utilize the power of the nation.⁵⁸

1.2.2.4 State Structure and Domestic Political Institution

The final set of intervening factors for NCR theory consists of state structure and domestic political institutions, which frequently solidify state–society relations. Formal institutions, organizational routines and processes and bureaucratic oversight, which are frequently established by constitutional provisions with well-defined rules and regulations, set the broad limits within which domestic

policy competition occurs.⁵⁹ As a result, they decide who can participate in policy development, at what point of the policy process, and who can serve as veto players, blocking policy proposals to modify governmental policies.⁶⁰ In this aspect, state institutional structures can have a significant impact on their ability to adapt to systemic forces.⁶¹

1.3 Correlation between Variables, Goals and Instruments in Shaping Foreign Policy

Instead of presenting itself as a wholly distinct theoretical paradigm, NCR sees itself as an essential advancement of the prevalent structural realism theory. Structural realists draw attention to the anarchy that characterizes the international system, which indicates that there is no worldwide authority that can control interstate relations and supply enough data to guarantee a balance of interests and sustained collaboration.⁶² States' ongoing suspicion of one another makes cooperation difficult and military competition inevitable. This is a systemic problem.

The distribution of power within the international system may constrain grand strategy, but its implementation, according to the NCR, cannot be inferred from the system level of analysis. The strategy is implemented through decisions made by FPEs based on threat assessment, risk, mobilization of domestic resources, including public support, and so on. The unit-level variables may limit or facilitate states' ability to respond to systemic imperatives (Lobell et al., 2009, p. 4).⁶³ The international system's anarchy (viewed as one of neorealism's main characteristics) is thus only a permissive condition rather than a single independent causal force (Walt, 2002, p. 211).⁶⁴ As a result, one might assume that the NCR is attempting to correct the imbalance between the general and the particular, or, in other words, to combine different levels of analysis. Its primary task is to combine elements from various levels of analysis and give them explanatory power. Aside from attempting to combine systemic and unit-level ontology, the NCR also attempts to combine material and Ideational Ontology. The dependent variable is chosen directly from the research question or (empirical) puzzle identified by the investigator (Figure 1.3).⁶⁵

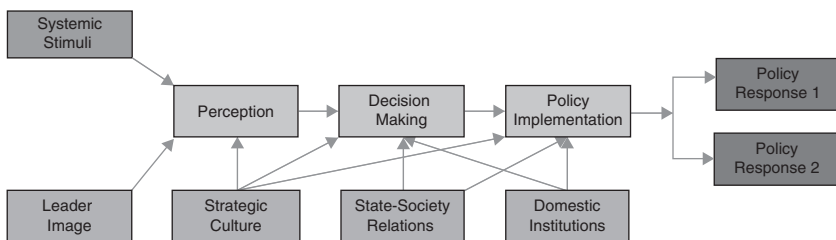


Figure 1.3 Neoclassical Realism Model of Foreign Policy.

Source: Ripsman, Norrin M. "Neoclassical Realism." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* eds. by Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2011).

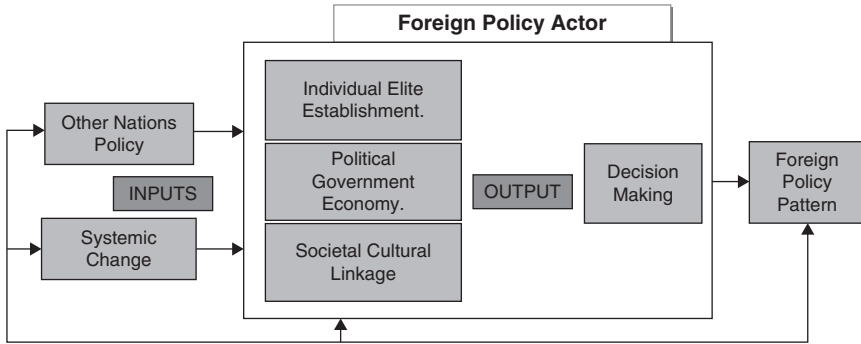


Figure 1.4 A Framework for Analysing Foreign Policy in a Neoclassical Realism Model.

Source: Andriole, Stephen J., Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Gerald W. Hopple. "A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy Behavior." *International Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1975): 160–198. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600267>.

Based on the framework provided by NCR, this book will assess India's policy-making towards Central Asia. The chapters assess the independent and dependent variables of India's policy-making towards the region. While doing so, the section of the chapter is designed uniformly. The author attempts to categorically analyse external determinants of India's policy towards the region by presenting internal determinants as an intervening variable (Figure 1.4).

Neoclassical realists emphasize that, because state leaders and elites shape the state's perception of its relative capabilities within the system, there is no direct causal relationship between the material attributes of the international system and a state's behaviour, engagements and overall foreign policy choices. Neoclassical realists accept that the objective reality of relative power in the international system prevails over domestic variables, but they deny the notion that actions by states can be directly influenced by such systemic facts.⁶⁶ This is where the theory's contribution is evident because it includes sub-systemic elements to provide states' foreign policy decisions with a more comprehensive picture. Therefore, NCR views the views and ideologies of state leaders and elites as the intervening factors and the actual distribution of power among states in the international system as the independent variable. These mediating factors act as a link between the outcomes of the global system and the particular foreign policy choices made by states.⁶⁷

The foreign policy-making process in NCR can be divided into four parts.

- a First, States evaluate the environment for international security, identifying both possibilities and challenges. They achieve this by taking into account variables including the distribution of alliances, the relative strength of other powers and the existence of regional wars.⁶⁸
- b Second, the next step is for states to create foreign policy objectives that will further their national interests and improve national security. These objectives

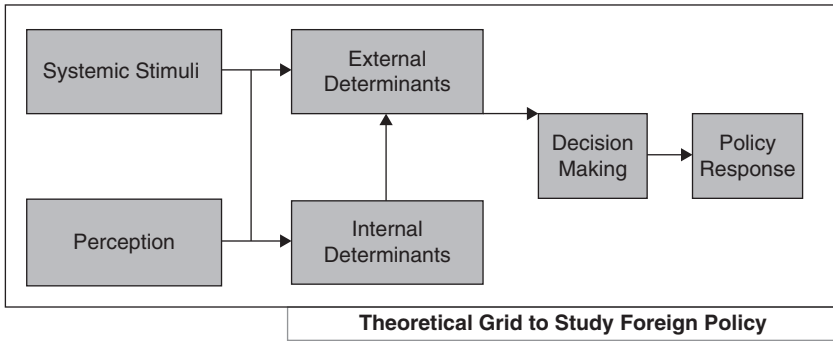


Figure 1.5 Theoretical Grid to Study Foreign Policy in Neoclassical Realism.

Source: Designed by the author based on the Ripsman, Norrin M. "Neoclassical Realism." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* eds. by Oxford (Oxford University Press, 2011).

- could be things like preventing violence, preserving the status quo of power or gaining more clout.⁶⁹
- c Third, states decide the tools of foreign policy they think will help them accomplish their objectives. These tools can take many different forms, including international aid, economic sanctions, military action and diplomacy.⁷⁰
 - d Fourth, States carry out their decisions about foreign policy and then assess the outcomes. Depending on how the global climate develops or how well their initial policies work, they might need to make adjustments to their policies over time.⁷¹

In foreign policy, the relationship between objectives and tools is intricate and multidimensional. States will, however, often select the tools that have the best chance of achieving their objectives.⁷² A state may decide to establish alliances with other governments or station military forces close to its border in an effort to thwart an adversary's aggression. In order to encourage economic growth, a state may decide to engage in international aid or trade agreements with other states. The state's resources, values and the global environment are only a few of the many variables that will affect the choice of instruments (Figure 1.5).⁷³

Notes

- 1 Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of under Balancing," in *Realism Reader* (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 265–271; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role*. Vol. 82 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 2 Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay." *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 177–198.
- 3 Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy." *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–172.

- 4 Kenneth N. Waltz (born 1924 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States – died 12 May 2013 in New York, New York) was an American political scientist and educator best known as the founder of the neorealist (or structural realist) theory of international relations. More; <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kenneth-N-Waltz> (accessed 2 December 2021).
- 5 Explanations of patterns of international behaviour, such as the recurrence of war, based on human nature or the nature of states (his first and second images of international politics) were, at best, incomplete, because human nature theories could not explain why war does not always occur, and theories of national difference could not explain why states with different political systems behave similarly in similar circumstances. The first and second image theories were insufficient because the prescriptions that followed required changes in state relations, implying that the problems stemmed from the nature of the international system, his third image. Third image theories, on the other hand, focusing on anarchy in the international system and its consequences for states, were the most efficient explanations of war and other macro-political outcomes between states, and they were sufficient because they did not require any reference to the types of states involved, human nature, or the specific leaders of particular states. As a result, Waltz developed a third image theory of international politics in which states respond to the most important variable in the international system, the distribution of capabilities, under anarchy. For more; Arend Lijphart, “The Structure of the Theoretical Revolution in International Relations.” *International Studies Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (1974): 41–74; Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).
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2 Evolution of India's Foreign Policy after the Cold War

2.1 Explanatory Variables

Following the demise of the Soviet Union and a domestic economic crisis, the new worldview of India began to take shape. India's economy gradually opened up through careful economic liberalization. By the late 1990s, India was willing to prioritize its own national interests – both economic and security – over broader ideas of global justice and equity. In this setup of changing perception within India policy making diaspora post-Cold War Indian foreign policy has been determined by a few broader external factors. The strategic discourse analysis of primary and secondary sources done regarding evolution of India's foreign policy after the Cold War leads to four major explanatory variables:

- a India's Position in International Relations: Global and Regional Dimension;
- b Rise of China and Sino–US Competition: Global and Regional Perspective;
- c Central Asia in International Relations: Resurgence of New Great Game;
- d Great Power Politics in Neighbourhood of India.

2.1.1 *India's Position in International Relations: Global and Regional Dimension*

India's influence in global politics has steadily grown since the end of the Cold war, and the Indian government is eager to take on a major global role. Since the end of the Cold War, the political narrative of India's rise and the changing role in International Relations can be found in many primary and secondary documents.¹

The path for India's global aspiration was paved due to a shift in global political interest and economic power towards Asia following the end of the East–West antagonism and the decline of the United States' previous dominance. However, it is also a result of the Indian government's rising political ambitions. Indian politicians, strategists and political scholars advocate for a more active global, if not a great power role: “India no longer wants to be mired in regional politics; rather, it wants to play a larger global role” concludes one researcher,² while others have since long requested that “India should break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia.”³ According to a prominent foreign policy commentator and opinion leader in Delhi, “India has tried to take its place as one of the great powers, a key

player in international peace and security”⁴ and others imply that India is on its way to becoming a superpower⁵ that should design strategies “to attain rule-making powers.”⁶

India is a rising power with a growing global footprint. Our economy is one of the fastest growing in the world, and our military is becoming increasingly modern. We are also playing an increasingly active role in regional and global affairs.⁷

As most of the last decade of the 20th-century India was engaged in internal and regional affairs the global aspiration started to vanish India’s international to become a global power started to surface in the Indian documentation from the first half of the 21st century. In 2004, Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani told the audience in a public speech that, “If the 20th Century belonged to the West, the 21st Century will belong to India.” “Our short-term objective is to become a developed nation, like Singapore or Taiwan,” he added. “Our long-term goal is to be on a par with America.”⁸

Given India’s status and long-term track record as a stable, secular society and multicultural democracy, the Indian political elite envisions India’s place in the top tier of global affairs. As a result, India’s desire to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council is seen as not only legitimate but also long overdue.⁹ Its insistence on being a nuclear weapons power, as well as its annual high growth in conventional weapons investments, serves to highlight India’s global ambitions while also signalling to its neighbours its claim to regional leadership if not dominance.

India’s current prowess and diplomatic resolve demonstrate an extraordinary level of buoyancy and persistence. To improve its global role and international recognition, the government is pursuing a two-pronged strategy. It actively participates in groups such as the G20 and is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, with over 8,000 police and troops out of a total UN force of nearly 100,000 at the start of 2012.¹⁰ At the same time, the Indian government, in keeping with its non-alignment tradition, is not afraid to express its dissatisfaction with the work and composition of many political and economic global forums.¹¹ The thought process of India’s global aspiration has to do with the pattern of global order. India’s policymaking has been influenced by the unipolar global order established right after the end of the Cold War and the contemporary scenario of changing global order.

2.1.1.1 Economic Progress and Defence Modernization

India suffered greatly during the 1997–1999 Asian financial crisis, but it emerged as being far more resilient than other Asian countries. After that, there were two droughts (in 2000 and 2002), a dot-com bubble burst, a global economic downturn in 2001 and a period of extreme global unrest leading up to the 2003 Iraq invasion. During those challenging years, the Indian economy stumbled, and from

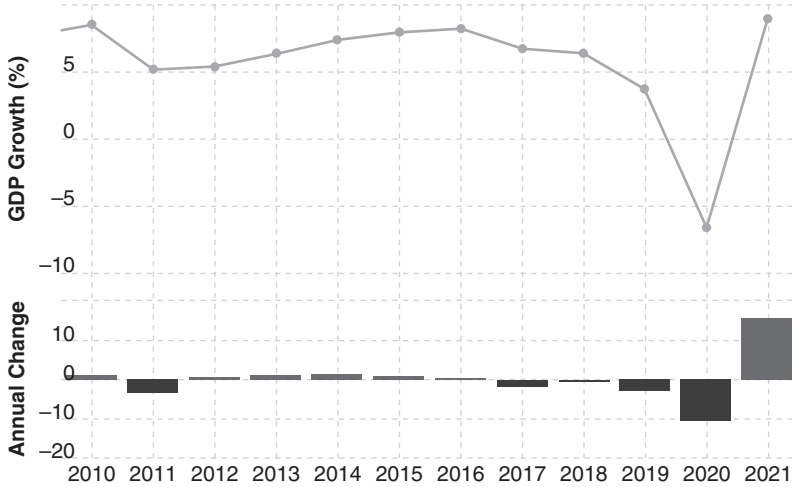


Figure 2.1 India's Gross Domestic Products (1987–2028).

Source: O'Neill, A. (2023, August 29). *GDP of India 1987–2028*. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263771/gross-domestic-product-gdp-in-india/>. (Accessed 02 March 2021)

1997 to 2003, the average GDP (gross domestic product) growth rate decreased to 5.7%. But after that came the global boom of 2003–2008, which was led by China and raised all boats. India's GDP growth skyrocketed and peaked in the three years between 2005 and 2008 at over 9% annually.¹² This is a testament to the new power structure that a non-European, non-Western power will lead the world economy in the coming decades. China's economic growth will inevitably translate into greater diplomatic influence. The same will be true for other emerging South Asian regional powers as they expand their global reach, albeit in nonlinear ways. A resurgent Russia will still wield considerable military power.¹³ With Germany, France and Italy at its core, a highly developed Europe may find a renewed sense of cohesion. Japan will face new strategic quandaries, depending on whether the US–China relationship becomes more cooperative or adversarial (Figure 2.1).

Similarly, the exponential rise in India's defence sector is vital from a strategic perspective while investigating India's role in international relations. The entire approved budget for the Indian military for the fiscal year 2019 was \$60.9 billion, while the budget for the fiscal years 2020 and 2021 is US\$65.86 billion, an increase of little under 7%.¹⁴ Since it imports over 70% (by value) of its high-tech defence equipment, such as airplanes, ships, submarines, missiles, etc., primarily from Russia, Japan, Israel and the United States, India has been pushing for greater domestic production of military gear.¹⁵ From the year 2000 to 2020, India's defence budget allocation increased from INR 58,587 million to INR 471,378 million.¹⁶ By 2015, India was recognized as the seventh-largest military-spending nation, but in 2016, it moved up to the fourth-largest military-spending nation in the world (Figure 2.2).¹⁷

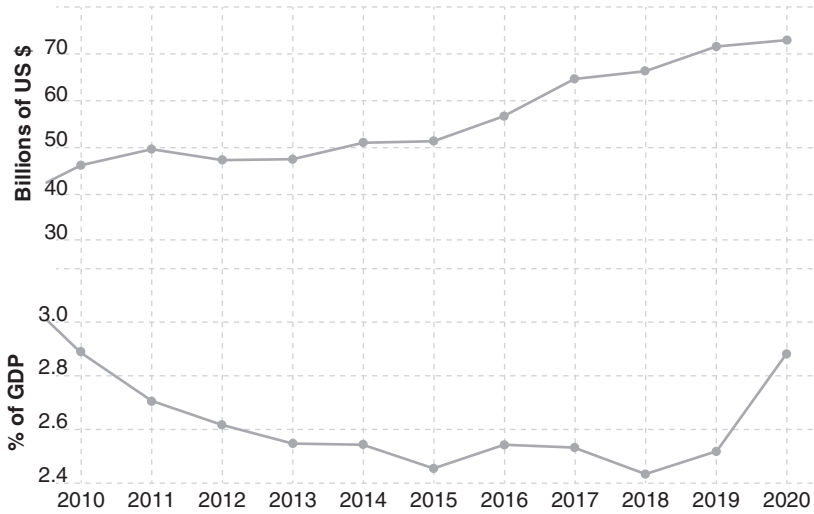


Figure 2.2 Trends in India's Defence Spending.

Source: Macro Trends; <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/IND/india/military-spending-defense-budget>; Behera, L. K. (2020). India's defence budget 2020–2021. India's Defence Budget 2020–2021 | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses. <https://idsa.in/issuebrief/india-def-budget-2020-21-lkbehera-040220>. (Accessed 23 May 2024)

In the 1980s, India began a renewed effort to galvanize its domestic defence industry by investing largely in DRDO and the development of indigenous missile systems such as 'Prithvi', 'Akash' and 'Nag'.¹⁸ India also began the development of its flagship aeronautical project, the Light Combat Aircraft during this period. In 1998, India entered into an agreement with the Soviet Union to develop a supersonic cruise missile system, the 'Brahmos', through a joint venture.¹⁹

Major A&D firms including Airbus and Mahindra Defence Systems, Boeing and Tata Advanced Systems, Lockheed Martin and Safran have already established a presence in the Indian market since 2015 in order to produce military helicopters, the Apache helicopter's body and other investments.²⁰ the beginning of programmes that are moving quickly, such as the undocking of six Scorpene diesel-electric attack submarines and the introduction of the first squadron of the locally made LCA Tejas India has signed MoUs and agreements for defence cooperation with over 20 nations,²¹ including the United States (as a "major defense partner"). These agreements allow India license-free access to a variety of dual-use technologies. Under the PAK-FA programme, India and Russia are also working together to create a fifth-generation stealth combat aircraft.²²

First indigenously designed and manufactured multi-role offshore patrol vessel, dubbed Barracuda, sold to Mauritius; lightweight torpedoes sold to Myanmar for US\$37.9 million.²³ Ordnance Factory Board received its largest export order from the UAE, paying INR 3,220 million for the supply of 40,000 155 mm artillery

shells and another 50,000 artillery shells.²⁴ In order to manufacture products with a long shelf life, high nutritional value and ready-to-eat on-the-go food products to be consumed in challenging terrain and terrible weather, DRDO negotiated technology transfer contracts with 16 Indian companies, including start-ups.²⁵ The government approved 39 capital procurement bids, of which 32 were classified as Buy and Make Indian, totalling INR 889 (US\$12 billion).

India opened up the defence industry to the private sector as well in 2018. Due to aggressive initiatives implemented by the government since 2014, India's defence exports, which were INR 4,682 crore (US\$0.66 billion) in 2017–2018 and INR 10,500 crore (US\$1.47 billion) in 2018–2019, are anticipated to expand tremendously in the next few years. With a US\$5 billion yearly export objective by 2025, the Defence Production Policy of 2018 (DPP-2018) seeks to rank among the top five global manufacturers of aerospace and defence manufacturing.²⁶

Collaboration with business, the private sector, research organizations and educational institutions is encouraged in order to become a leader in technological research and production, decrease reliance on imports and improve self-sufficiency. Defence exports increased significantly because of the Make in India in Defense programme, rising from \$213 million in FY 2016–2017 to \$1.5 billion in FY 2018–2019, a 700% increase in just two years. This inspired the government to establish a goal of \$4.87 billion (about Rs. 35,000 crore) in defence exports by 2021. An effort is being made to increase foreign direct investment (FDI) in the defence industry by first raising the cap from 26% to 49% through the automatic method and 100% with the MoD's approval, allowing the investing foreign corporation to own up to 100% of the defence manufacturing.²⁷

Various types of defence projects, including Buy Indian-IDDMM (Indian Designed, Developed, and Manufactured), have been introduced in an effort to support both Public Sectors Undertakings (PSUs) and the private sector. Industrial licenses are granted according to a liberalized and open policy funding for design and development initiatives in the private sector, with a particular emphasis on the medium and small manufacturing enterprises (MSME) Sector. Defence exports have significantly increased as a result of streamlining. The agreements and memorandums on defence cooperation with more than 20 nations are signed until 2019. Likewise, the strengthening of strategic alliances with the United States, Russia and the EU to promote technology transfer in the defence sector are in force.

Above mentioned brief assessment of India's post-Cold War defence modernization not only signals that India is being self-sufficient but also provides a foundational understanding of India's potentiality to be a major defence exporter of the world system. India's increasing self-sufficiency in the defence sector not only reduces the dependency on defence power houses such as the United States and Russia but also provides India with an opportunity to lead and project its increasing profile in the international order.

2.1.1.2 Global Aspiration

Based on sources analysis regarding India's global power aspiration and its role in international relations, it can be categorized as rising into three broader periods.

After the end of the Cold War until 1998 can be categorized as the first phase of India's approach towards the global order. The rationale behind selecting this time frame for the first phase is the content analysis of the official document of India, which are substantiated by the secondary resources.

The terminology such as India's position, vision for the 21st century, economic development and place for India in international order stated to appear frequently in India documents, speech and official communication.²⁸ With the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the bipolar international system that dominated the Cold War period gave way to a largely unipolar system led by the United States. While the Soviet–American rivalry did not entirely dictate American policy, Americans mostly agreed on key issues: American security needs were at the heart of its national interest; the Soviet Union was the greatest threat; and the United States had no choice but to be actively engaged in the world to protect itself. This is no longer the case; the realm of compulsion has shrunk while the realm of freedom of choice has grown. Some threats to American security remain, including nuclear weapons in the hands of Russia and other countries, a lack of economic resources, and non-traditional threats such as migration and pollution. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union has disintegrated, Russia will still have a nuclear arsenal capable of destroying the United States.

The annual report of 1991 mentioned that

The world scene witnessed momentous changes during the year under review with far-reaching implications for India's foreign policy. These changes have reaffirmed the need, given the state of ferment and metamorphosis in which the world is in today, to utilise foreign policy as an instrument to further our national interest in a dynamic manner. The upsurge of democratic sentiment, together with a renewed and focussed desire for peace, not only globally but at the sub-regional and regional levels, the demand for greater economic justice and the desire to uphold human dignity, provide both the background and setting for such changes. These aspirations have naturally led to the replacement of outmoded state structures and policies with new approaches for frameworks of political and economic development.²⁹

India also started to question the unipolarity of the world established after the end of the Cold War which automatically increased the possibility of them being a part of the multi-polarity. By giving the example of their potentiality and the rise of China in the economic sphere, the annual report of 1992/1993 stressed that

India responded to the external environment's fast change with dynamism and pragmatism. Although the world was seen as unipolar after the Cold War, with the United States emerging as the most significant politico-military power, India recognized that the global situation cannot be explained in terms of a single dimension. There were and still are additional rising centres of power that will affect international relations in the long run.³⁰

In 1994, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao made a famous speech in the joint session of the US Congress and outlined India's vision where he put stress on "by strongly holding the democracy and implementing the market liberal policy, India wants to establish good relations with the United States to prepare for the 21st century." The annual reports, speeches and the so-called vision of India all reciprocate with each other that India has used most of the first decade after the end of the Cold war to prepare itself for the 21st century to contest itself as a global power. India's strategic foundation of 'non-alignment' also contributed to positioning India within the international order as a distinct power. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) report of 1997 explains that

Both India and the US recognize the significance of the building and broadening the foundation for mutually beneficial relations as two developed and friendly democracies. The US and other countries were regularly consulted on bilateral, regional, and global matters. While India and the US do not agree on all topics, both countries are interested in preventing disagreements over some problems from getting in the way of cooperation in the many areas where our views overlap and are advantageous to both parties.³¹

This statement itself is a testament to India's intention regarding the international order and its position. However, some scholars also have argued that due to their unpreparedness, India has struggled to find a rhythm in the changed international environment after the end of the Cold War.³²

After the successful nuclear test of 1998, India's second phase of global aspiration started. The famous speech of then Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Indian parliament in Twelfth Lok Sabha, Session: 2, 27-05-1998, projected India's more assertive approach to international order. He said,

India is now a nuclear weapon state. This is a reality that cannot be denied. It is not a conferment that we seek; nor is it a status for others to grant. It is an endowment to the nation by our scientists and engineers. It is India's due, the right of one-sixth of humankind. Our strengthened capability adds to our sense of responsibility. We do not intend to use these weapons for aggression or for mounting threats against any country, these are weapons of self-defence, to ensure that India is not subjected to nuclear threats or coercion. We do not intend to engage in an arms race.³³

The statement is not only the declaration of India becoming a nuclear state but also a declaration of India's perception towards the world order. While India acknowledged to be a responsible nuclear power and only kept it for the defensive purpose, it also projected that we do not need to be told what to do. Prime Minister Vajpayee added more during the same speech in the parliament that

The present decision and future actions will continue to reflect a commitment to sensibilities and obligations of an ancient civilisation, a sense of

responsibility and restraint, but a restraint born of the assurance of action, not of doubts or apprehension. Avoiding triumphalism, let us work together towards our shared objective in ensuring that as we move towards a new millennium, India will take its rightful place in the international community.³⁴

In 2003 during the Independence Day, speech Prime Minister Vajpayee stressed that

India's international standing has improved as a result of our proactive foreign policy. The way the rest of the world sees us has significantly changed. India is presently recognized by all nations:

- As the biggest democracy in the world
- As an emerging economic power
- As a confluence of a modern nation and an ancient civilization
- As a powerful country dedicated to the ideal of peace.³⁵

During this phase, India also became the forefront of many multilateral organizations that represent the rising power of the world. One of those is BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Multi-polarity has become a common term in the lexicon of diplomats and world leaders. The first BRICS Summit, for example, in June 2009, expressed support for “a more democratic and just multipolar world order.” Successive BRICS communiqués, as well as Non-Aligned Movement declarations, have continued to strike this chord. During an official visit to New Zealand in 2010, former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated, “we see a shifting of power to a more multipolar world as opposed to the Cold War model of a bipolar world.”³⁶ Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in 2013 at Stanford University that we are “moving increasingly and irreversibly toward a multipolar world.”³⁷

The nuclear test and the increasing India's approach to international order did not only draw a positive response but also drew much negativity. The tests turned out to have a significant impact on India's regional and international ties, albeit in two very different ways. It situated India in relation to regional dangers, most notably Pakistan, and announced India's entry into the nuclear arena. India's tests were not seen as the country's strategic maturation but rather as a violation that would raise concerns about proliferation. Most obviously, the international sanctions imposed in response to the tests – led in this regard by the United States – came as a blow to India's relations with other countries, especially with the United States.³⁸ The US-led sanctions regime against India for the 1998 nuclear tests instantly slowed the momentum that was building in India–United States ties as a result of the former Soviet Union's collapse in the last decade of the 20th century. Sanctions against India were imposed by the United States and a number of other nations on the political, economic and scientific fronts.³⁹ The tension that was created by the nuclear test of 1998 was resolved in 2005 when India and the United States signed a comprehensive nuclear deal⁴⁰. After the deal, the relationship saw the course from lifting the sanctions to President Obama backing India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council.⁴¹

Due to the re-establishment of a positive relationship with the United States and consistent economic development, India maintained good ties with other countries as a dynamic process that takes into account both our fundamental goals and the numerous dimensions and elements that serve the national interest. The foreign policy was designed to proactively engage with the rest of the world, built on a thorough, realistic, and analysis of the local, regional, national and international geopolitical and economic environments.⁴²

The third phase of India's great power aspiration started when Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014. Prime Minister Modi became the torch bearer of 'multi-polarity'. In contrast to his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, Modi demonstrated a great enthusiasm for travel, making as many trips abroad during his first term as Singh did in a decade, participating in a number of important summits, and attempting to build relationships with his counterparts in South Asia, China, Japan and the United States.⁴³ Indian diplomacy during this phase can be categorized as 'active diplomacy' as most of the policies assumed after the Cold War started to get implemented due to Modi's enthusiasm towards the foreign policy. India's increasing position and the intention can be traced through the annual reports of the ministry after 2014.

The annual report of 2015/2016 mentioned that

India increasingly came to occupy a new role in the world, as a confident, articulate, rising power, willing to claim its place on the global high table and able to discharge its responsibilities. No longer content to merely react to international developments, we frequently acted to shape and even initiate them. On its part, the world visibly acknowledged India's potential to act as a leading power, under a determined and decisive leadership with a regional and global vision. Consequently, India's voice played a prominent role in shaping the global debates on issues ranging from global governance reform, climate change, multilateral trade negotiations, internet governance & cyber-security, and trans-national terrorism.⁴⁴

The official documents of the government of India after 2014 have shown India's strong intention to improve its global order and get into a decision-making seat. India after 2014 took some of the foreign policy decisions like 'Look East' policy was converted to 'Act East', neighbourhood policy was reintroduced as the 'neighbourhood first policy' and India became an active participant in 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' and 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)'.

Some claim that the Modi administration has revolutionized and re-energized foreign policy, increased national pride and the nation's "soft power" abroad, bolstered ties with important allies, and restored India's standing and investor confidence. According to one analysis, the Modi administration's foreign policy "has been transformative," and Modi "has established himself" as both a "world leader" and a "policy entrepreneur."⁴⁵ His 'open embrace' of a strategic alliance with the United States has been commended as being both foresighted and pragmatic, and his savvy management of a China that is becoming more aggressive has been cast

as well.⁴⁶ Parallel to this, his government's responses to terrorist strikes across the Line of Control in Kashmir, such as a retaliatory raid by Indian special forces and an airstrike into Pakistan territory, have been commended for their vigour and purported ability to dissuade Islamabad.⁴⁷ On the contrary, numerous commentators contend that Modi and his ministers have not changed as much as it might initially seem. According to them, India's foreign policy's fundamental approach and broad "trajectory" have essentially remained unaltered.⁴⁸ Some argue that the Modi government's claims to have departed from conventional approaches to formulating or carrying out foreign policy are unpersuasive.⁴⁹

Despite the mixed response to India's foreign policy conduct and its great power aspiration, Prime Minister Modi has reiterated about the rightful place of India in the global order. PM Modi in his speech during the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018⁵⁰ or at the United Nations General Assembly 2019,⁵¹ has put forward the idea of the role that India is playing or ready to play in the international arena. Similarly, the Jawaharlal Nehru-dominated postcolonial era's terms and concepts have been abandoned, and the Modi government has worked hard to replace them with new ones largely derived from the Hindu nationalist school of thought that dates back to Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo Ghose.⁵² Some claim that this rethinking or reinvention of India's foreign policy gives the nation more freedom to influence the world and creates new prospects for global leadership.

Besides that, India after the Cold War was going through a strategic dilemma of 'Non-Alignment' and 'Multi-Alignment'. For a large section of post-independence Indian foreign policy was anchored by its decision not to be part of any bloc politics. But PM Modi re-imagined India's foreign policy posture as a 'strategic autonomy' which helped them to establish good relations with the United States, continue their defence and energy relations with Russia and cooperation-competition approach towards China at the same time.

In general, the multipolar world offers numerous opportunities for India. India's ability to shape world order was hampered by both the bipolar Cold War and the unipolar moment of the American world order. The decline of Western dominance creates opportunities for emerging powers such as India to play an active role in global affairs. A multipolar world defined by geopolitics increasingly provides India with more options for pursuing its national interests and leadership ambitions through global interdependence, proactive shared leadership of global governance, and the creation of a positive regional environment in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific.⁵³

2.1.2 Rise of China and Sino-US Competition: Global and Regional Perspective

The rise of China has been a strategic challenge to India. India and China fought a war in 1962 and the memory of the war still guides the majority of aspects of India-China relations.⁵⁴ Especially after the announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) India and China have confronted each other in South, East and Central Asia. India's MEA and their communique prove that India has a strategic confrontation with China.⁵⁵

Likewise, the rise of China in International politics has changed the global and regional political environment. The strategic threat that the United States is facing due to the rise of China has a contributing dynamic in India's foreign policy. Due to the rise in a similar period of time, India also has a strategic challenge associated with the rise of China. India is reluctant siding with China or the United States, as stated in its doctrine of strategic autonomy.⁵⁶ India aspires to uphold its independent foreign policy while advancing its own interests locally and globally. India has a lot of difficulties in striking a balance between its interests and those of the United States and China.⁵⁷ The nation must exercise caution so as not to agitate China, but it must also be ready to defend its interests in the face of China's increasing might. India must also handle its relationship with the United States, an ally that can be demanding at times. So, the rise of China and the increasing Sino-US competition have put Indian foreign policy in check.

Among the most important events of the last few decades has been the growth of China. China's economy has grown at an extraordinary rate since implementing economic reforms in the late 1970s, bringing hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and making it the second largest in the world. Wide-ranging effects have resulted from this change, both nationally and globally. Rise of China became significant due to two facts. First the domestic transformation. The lives of China's residents have changed significantly as a result of the country's economic growth. Living standards have increased significantly, and there is now much greater access to healthcare, education and other necessities. Millions of people have moved from rural to urban areas around the nation in pursuit of better opportunities, contributing to the country's fast urbanization.⁵⁸ There have been difficulties associated with this economic expansion. China has to deal with problems like corruption, environmental deterioration and income disparity. But generally, there has been incredible growth that has elevated China to a new degree of international significance.⁵⁹

Second, internationalization of China.⁶⁰ The global scene has been significantly impacted by China's rise as well. Due to its strong economy, it is one of the world's most important trading partners, and as its influence grows, so does its participation in international organizations and initiatives.⁶¹ China's expanding global ambitions are best illustrated by the vast infrastructure investment programme known as the BRI. By building a network of ports, railroads and highways between China and other nations, the BRI seeks to promote trade and solidify China's place in the world economy.⁶²

The theatre for the rise of China and increasing Sino-US competition is the Indo-Pacific region. And India is an active participant and the promoter of 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' conceptualization. Since 2010, the concept of 'Indo-Pacific' has grown in popularity in geopolitical and strategic discourse and is now widely used by policymakers, analysts and academics in Asia and beyond. It has been exactly a decade since the author proposed the concept in 2007. Although Australians had previously used the term "Indo-Pacific," this was the first time in recent decades that the concept was formally introduced and explained in an academic paper. The paper, titled 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation,' was published in the January 2007 issue of the Institute for Defence

Studies and Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi's *Strategic Analyses journal*.⁶³ The term 'Indo-Pacific' refers to the confluence of the Indian Ocean Region and the Western Pacific Region, which includes the seas off East Asia and Southeast Asia.

For more than a decade, the "Indo-Pacific" or "Indo-Pacific region" has grown in popularity as a geographical and strategic construct in foreign and security policy discourse in Japan, the United States, Australia, India, France and some South-east Asian countries. Many see "Indo-Pacific" as a new geographical and strategic frame of reference that has come to replace the previously dominant "Asia-Pacific" construct, at least partially.⁶⁴ The term has crept into official documents such as national security strategies and defence white papers, as well as elite rhetoric.⁶⁵ It is also increasingly being debated in think tanks and universities. As a result, it has evolved into a type of "geopolitical nomenclature."⁶⁶

In a broader term while defining the Indo-Pacific's strategic value to India, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar in his lecture at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand mentioned,

Every vision has its concepts and its assessments and this is the case with Indo-Pacific to where India is concerned. Three decades ago, we made a strategic correction to the East that was responsible for the rapid flowering of our cooperation with ASEAN. Originally, it was contemplated as an economic measure, with trade and investment at its core. Over the years, India's interaction expanded well beyond the ASEAN to cover Japan, Korea, and China, and in due course, Australia as also other areas of Pacific Islands for example. The facets of cooperation also increased, they now cover connectivity in various forms, people-to-people ties, and more recently, defence and security. This maturing of what we were doing to the East of India in our own terminology, we call it as moving up from Look East Policy to Act East Policy. What is relevant for our purposes today is to recognize that a very substantial portion of India's interests now lie to the East of India, beyond the Indian ocean and into the Pacific Ocean.⁶⁷

The statement of the foreign minister not only explains the concept of Indo-Pacific for India but also explains the strategic overlapping between their Look East, Act East, Pacific and the strategies towards Japan, Korea and Australia. Thus, India especially after 2017 has put much stress on Indo-Pacific strategy as it covers India's major strategic orientation towards East Asia, Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean Region and the Pacific Region.⁶⁸

While accessing the regional dynamics of what Indo-Pacific is and why it is gaining the strategic attention in world politics, the security complexities of the region can be divided into three broader frameworks. First, traditional security. The strategic competition between the United States and China is a paradigm that will continue to shape the world order of the future. It has an impact on every aspect of state power, including hard and soft power, geo-economics competition and coercion, space, cyber, technology and innovation. Recently, the Sino-US rivalry has taken a more aggressive ideological turn, contributing to the growing

polarization. The Chinese massive investment in defence is driving the rising trend in Indo-Pacific military expenditure. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),⁶⁹ The Chinese defence budget increased by 76% between 2011 and 2020, reaching an estimated US\$252 billion. This exponential rise in defence capabilities, combined with obfuscated strategic objectives, is fueling distrust throughout the region. The lack of trust creates a security quandary, encouraging regional countries to modernize their own capabilities. As a result, India increased its defence spending by 34% between 2011 and 2020, South Korea by 41%, Australia by 33% and Indonesia by 83%. Asia and Oceania's defence spending increased by 47% over the last decade, compared to 8.5% for Western Europe, and Asia will account for 27% of global defence spending by 2020. This trend will continue as long as China remains the region's dominant military power. Military capability asymmetry will continue to be a key feature of the regional security environment. North Korea has achieved de facto nuclear status.⁷⁰ The resurgence of interstate tensions has exacerbated nationalism and rivalries, resulting in a highly tense, but also fluid security dynamic characterized by constant and, at times, rapid adjustments in states' postures. There is an Indo-Sino border conflict,⁷¹ rising tensions in the South China Sea,⁷² strings of pearls in the Indian Ocean Region,⁷³ and hostility in the Taiwan Strait.⁷⁴

And second, emerging hybrid tactics and grey zones. Irregular warfare tactics have gradually come to supplement traditional security tools. Non-military actors are increasingly being used to gain political and strategic clout. Disinformation, influence warfare, the use of legal mechanisms and institutions (also known as "lawfare") and economic pressure are gradually supplementing traditional tactics, blurring the lines between peace and war.⁷⁵ In the South and East China Seas, gray zone situations have become common. While China develops the submarine component of its nuclear capability, it has used civilian agencies – whether coast guards or maritime fishing militias – to enforce its sovereignty in the South and East China Seas.⁷⁶ In the South and East China Seas, gray zone situations have become common. While China develops the submarine component of its nuclear capability, it has used civilian agencies – whether coast guards or maritime fishing militias – to enforce its sovereignty in the South and East China Seas.⁷⁷

2.1.3 *Central Asia in International Relations: Resurgence of the New Great Game*

The Central Asia region has been subjected to great power competition after the Cold War. The great power politics in the region also shapes the foreign policy of India towards the region. India has been cooperating with Russia in the connectivity projects and has been the part of Washington's promoted Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) project.⁷⁸ On top of that, the increasing tension with China and China's presence in Central Asia complicated the position of India in the region.⁷⁹

The complexities of the great power politics in Central Asia can be accessed in two parts. First by investigating the Central Asia region in great power's strategies.

While doing so, it starts with general assumptions and goals of great powers towards the region and it analyses the security sphere in their strategies. Second, by decoding the emergence of the so-called 'New Great Game' and the scenario under the changing geopolitics of Central Asia. As the Great Game was contested between the Russian Empire and Britisher, the New Great Game had much more complexities in terms of contestation.

Central in contemporary international relations have various features that make the region relevant. First is the geographical location. Halford John Mackinder, a British geographer, developed a hypothesis of the Heartland that has impacted our subsequent knowledge of Central Asia over the last century.⁸⁰ Although Mackinder's theory helped build the groundwork for geopolitics as a discipline, its geographic concentration on Eurasia illuminates the spatial boundaries and parameters of any economic flows and political actions inside and around the large region. In his original formulation, Mackinder (1904) saw the large landmass of Eurasia, or the Heartland, encompassing the river basins of the Volga, Yenisey, Amu Darya, Syr Darya and the Caspian Sea, as the Pivot of influence on historical processes and geopolitical realities due to the planet's central location.⁸¹ So, Central Asia still has that geographical salient which draws the great powers in the region.

Second, the hydrocarbon stockpile. Because of its geographical location and availability of hydrocarbon deposits, Central Asia has grown in importance for various states since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. These hydrocarbon deposits are primarily found in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Each of them has adopted a distinct approach to foreign policy and the regulation of foreign investment and engagement in its energy sector.⁸² They have adopted a 'multi-vector' policy through the development, production and export of their oil and gas reserves, solidifying their links with other countries in many ways. Russia, China, the United States, European countries, Iran, India and Turkey are the primary countries active in the oil and gas sector of Central Asian countries, at various levels and for various reasons.⁸³ Among these players, Russia views Central Asia to be part of its historical sphere of influence, notwithstanding Beijing's expanding involvement.

Third, the emerging region as a market size. Central Asian republics have steadily transitioned from a state-controlled to a market economy since achieving independence in the early 1990s. To boost competitiveness, all five countries are implementing structural reforms. Kazakhstan is the only Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) country to be featured in the Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness rankings for 2020 and 2019. To lower agriculture's percentage of GDP, they have been modernizing the industrial sector and encouraging the development of service sectors through business-friendly fiscal policies and other measures. Agriculture's proportion fell in all countries except Tajikistan, where it climbed while industry fell. Turkmenistan experienced the fastest growth in industry, while the other four countries experienced the greatest progress in the services sector. Between 2007 and 2019, Central Asian countries attracted \$378.2 billion in FDI. Kazakhstan received 77.7% of all FDI channelled to the region. Kazakhstan is also the most populous country in Central Asia, accounting for more than 60% of the region's GDP.⁸⁴

As a result of the relevancy of Central Asia, there is a re-emergence of new great games in the region. The following decade-long fight and battle among large countries for control and dominance of energy resources, transportation routes, and influence became known as the ‘‘New Great Game.’’⁸⁵ The United States and Russia were the game’s first rivals, but additional participants like China, the European Union, Pakistan, India and Turkey joined later.⁸⁶ The geopolitical competition between Russia, China, India and the United States highlights the region’s significance. The strategic importance of Central Asia to Russia, China and the United States differs depending on how its economic, political, security and strategic interests are seen. And on the India side, it became essential to increase its interaction with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan at a strategic, political and economic level due to a number of factors, including the region’s vast hydrocarbon and natural oil reserves, China’s outsized strategic and economic presence in the region, and the US announcement of its plans to withdraw from Afghanistan.⁸⁷

When the United States launched its War on Terrorism, the rivalry between major nations in Central Asia entered a new chapter.⁸⁸ The primary participants in the New Game’s second and main phase differ from those in the old Great Game.⁸⁹ The primary participants in the New Game’s second and main phase differ from those in the old Great Game. New participants attempt to pursue their interests and aims in the region in this New Great Game.

- 1 Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Turkey are regional players in the New Great Game. These nations are using their historical, cultural and geopolitical ties to gain control of Central Asia’s energy riches and capitalize on the region’s strategic location.
- 2 In this New Great Game, the United States is the trans-regional player.
- 3 Apart from regional and trans-regional entities, Central Asian states play an important role in the New Great Game. Their drive to enhance their economy and play a role in international events by exploiting the big-power competition marks a turning point in the New Great Game.⁹⁰

The nature of India’s relations with the area has evolved as a result of its recent economic success. India’s capacity for involvement in the area has risen in appeal. Due to China’s conflicting interests, the absence of land access routes and US animosity towards Iran, India’s engagement with the region has encountered challenges. Iran has grown to be of utmost importance since it gives India access to the area via the Chabahar Port. In order to reach Central Asia and beyond, India will figuratively travel around Pakistan.

The situation in Central Asia offers a unique chance to assess and analyse foreign policy of great powers, as they develop in new governments that have formed a discrete sub-region from a greater total. Considering its geo-strategic location and hydrocarbon richness, the region attracts all the great power. The world’s big powers are striving for the chance to incorporate Central Asia into their spheres of influence and/or get access to the region’s potential hydrocarbon wealth. Nonetheless, each is adopting a different method to achieve its Central Asian objectives.

2.1.4 Great Power Politics in the Neighbourhood of India

India's political and economic success is heavily reliant on its neighbours' stable, safe and peaceful environments.⁹¹ 'No nation can become a true world power unless it has long-term primacy in its own neighborhood.'⁹² The ability of India to manage its own neighbourhood will determine if it accomplishes its aim of becoming a big force in Asia. For India, South Asia is its primary foothold. Many literatures have presented South Asia as a sphere of influence for India.⁹³ From the centre of the continent, South Asia spreads south to the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean, the Himalayas and Afghanistan make up South Asia's main borders. India and Pakistan are separated from Bangladesh by the Bay of Bengal to the east and the Arabian Sea to the west. The western border is the arid area where Pakistan and Iran share a border. South Asia consists of eight modern states namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Due to various geo-strategic reasons, South Asia is a vital region not only for India but for world politics. First, South Asia is a very populous and diversified continent. One-fourth of all people on earth live there, or 1.5 billion people. With more than 500 million people living in extreme poverty, South Asia has the biggest concentration of poor people in the entire world.⁹⁴ While the population with a high number of working forces presents many opportunities and the possibilities to contribute to the economic development of the region, it also has some complex components such as increasing gap between rich and poor and other non-traditional security threats such as climate migration. On the other hand, there is a volatile security environment in South Asia due to some of the classic security challenges in the region. The Kashmir conflict⁹⁵ is one of those which many have assumed to have the potential to trigger a nuclear war. Likewise, there are serious issues of natural disasters,⁹⁶ climate change,⁹⁷ internal minority struggle,⁹⁸ and increasing small state-big state hostility.⁹⁹ Due to that, it becomes more vital for India to keep anchoring its overall foreign policy through the South Asian Neighbourhood Policy to maintain its sphere of influence.

South Asia, which includes Afghanistan, served as a focal point for great power manoeuvring in the global war on terror, which dominated world politics until the strategic rivalry between the United States and China took its place.¹⁰⁰ In the meantime, the region has known about the impending competition between the United States and China since quite early on. In order to use India as a counter-balance to China in Asia in the event that Beijing's ascent might eventually have unfavourable effects on Washington and its Asian allies, the United States started cultivating relations with the South Asian regional power in the early 2000s. South Asia is not China's or the United States' top geopolitical priority.¹⁰¹ Few problems in the area really raise the possibility of a direct conflict between the United States and China. In light of this, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan have received disproportionately large amounts of US attention in relation to South Asia.¹⁰² During the late Cold War, the primary goal of US policy in the area was to use the proxy war, working with China and Pakistan, to force the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. Washington turned its attention in the 1990s to preventing nuclear conflict in

the subcontinent and limiting nuclear development by Pakistan and India. Later, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the main concerns facing the United States and the international community were the terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak), the instability of those two nations, and the possibility of Weapons of Mass Destructions (WMDs) being transferred to terrorist organizations. However, US policy goals in the larger Indian Ocean or Indo-Pacific (formerly Asia-Pacific) region have had a significant impact on US strategy towards South Asia. In this regard, Washington started fostering ties with Delhi at the turn of the century in anticipation that India would grow and be able to counterbalance China in the event that China came to dominate Asia.¹⁰³

And for China, South Asia is important primarily because of three reasons. First, China and India are parties to a territorial dispute. Since there is no formal international border separating the two nations, China and India have overlapping claims to sovereignty over a large portion of the Himalayan region, including the Indian-controlled state of Arunachal Pradesh and the Chinese-controlled Aksai Chin border region.¹⁰⁴ Second, China and Pakistan, which disagree with India on territorial matters, have a long-standing, tight security alliance. Although they are not similar to its relations with Pakistan, Beijing has historically expanded its contacts with other minor regional nations as well.¹⁰⁵ Third, the stability of China's domestic system is directly linked to South Asia. India has granted shelter to Tibet's spiritual leader, the 14th Dalai Lama. Additionally, China has been extremely cautious of Uyghur Islamist militants operating in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which has allied itself with other jihadist groups based in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the two neighbouring countries with majorities of Muslims.¹⁰⁶

There are several indications that India's demands for a sphere of influence in the region are justified. There is no question about the subcontinent's shared heritage of culture. However, Pakistan disputes this legacy and aspires to forge its own identity distinct from that of India.¹⁰⁷ The immense strength of the British Raj, which ruled over the whole subcontinent, dominated its neighbouring states and influenced the regional order across the Indian Ocean, can be linked to the contemporary view of India's regional primacy.¹⁰⁸ Economic liberals support this assertion by emphasizing the enormous potential for integrating regional markets in the era of globalization around the dominance of India in trade. Pakistan must, however, disassociate itself from any such initiatives due to political ideology.

India's aspirations to become a great power would only be boosted by a prosperous and stable South Asia. Regional stability is necessary for India to project power and assume the kind of larger global role that is expected of a great power, which is why India's emergence as a great power is dependent on it. Additionally, India's local hegemonic behaviour may be a sign of the kind of great power India would develop into and the potential nature of its managerial position in the world. Even if India contributes to peacekeeping operations, takes part in multilateral organizations and makes friends across long-standing international political lines, its behaviour towards its South Asian neighbours frequently meets with hostility, resistance and a hasty search for departure strategies.

Over time, India's neighbourhood-focused foreign policy has changed. India moved to the Gujral doctrine, which detested reciprocity in bilateral relations, from the construction of the neighbourhood as its security periphery after independence, where India would not brook any external presence that might impinge on its security. In 1977, prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee conceptualized "beneficial bilateralism" to mend frayed ties. Manmohan Singh, the country's then-prime minister, described India's neighbourhood policy as an "asymmetric responsibility" in 2004, and it later changed to become Narendra Modi's "neighborhood first policy," with a focus on "sab ke saath, sabka vikas, and sabka vishwas" (With all, for the development of all and earning the trust of all).¹⁰⁹

Especially after the rise of China in South Asia, India's neighbourhood policy has become more relevant. When China announced its flagship BRI in 2013, the presence of China in the region increased massively. China's participation in South Asia after the BRI began in Pakistan. Excellent bilateral ties exist between China and Pakistan thanks to their shared hatred of India. The idiom "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" has never had more meaning than it does now.¹¹⁰ On a number of contentious matters, the two nations support one another. Pakistan accepts the One China Policy of China. Pakistan is urged by China to maintain its security, independence and geographical sovereignty. China reaffirmed support for Pakistan and expressed alarm about India's intention to remove Jammu & Kashmir's special status.¹¹¹ In addition, Pakistan seldom ever criticizes China for how it treats the Uighurs in Xinjiang. Pakistan must cooperate with China to carry out its BRI agenda. Particularly now that the Taliban have taken control of the country, Beijing appears to think that Pakistan will be useful in carrying out its agenda there. China's ties with Bangladesh and Nepal have improved on the other side of South Asia. As part of their BRI strategy, China has made major investments in Bangladesh. China and Bangladesh have committed to strengthening their defence cooperation in addition to their economic ties. China is also Bangladesh's main source of armaments, having imported over 71.8% of all weapons from 2008 to 2018. As a result, Bangladesh can never replace China.¹¹² Relations between China and Nepal have lately improved. The Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network and connectivity projects involving ports, highways, railways, aviation and communications are just a few of the BRI initiatives currently underway in Nepal. Recently, it was revealed that a feasibility study for the cross-border railway between China and Nepal had begun.¹¹³ Westerners frequently believe that Sri Lanka is a victim of a Chinese debt trap when analysing relations between Sri Lanka and China. The Chinese-led Sri Lanka handed up the Hambantota port on a 99-year lease in December 2017 rather than paying down Colombo's BRI debt. The strategic location of Hambantota on the Indian Ocean may help Beijing's String of Pearls.¹¹⁴

2.2 Intervening Variables

While there are various explanatory variables that implicate India's foreign policy making, there are also intervening variables that determine India's foreign policy.

Based on the India's political and diplomatic documentation and the strategic discourse four intervening variables are identified;

- a Re-orientation of India's strategic culture: from Non-Alignment to Strategic Autonomy;
- b Institutional framework of foreign policy decision-making;
- c Economic reform of India since 1991;
- d Evolution of political system in India.

2.2.1 Re-Orientation of India's Strategic Culture: From Non-Alignment to Strategic Autonomy

India was cautious about becoming involved in the superpower conflict throughout the Cold War. It made sense for India to adopt a non-aligned foreign policy stance during that time since it would, at least in theory, protect India's independence in international affairs. Behind all the platitudes about "Third World unity," there was a cool-headed calculation intended to safeguard India's critical interests.¹¹⁵ Given India's comparatively weak economic and military capabilities, the extent of these interests was constrained. Pakistan was India's main security concern due to its proximity and hostile history. However, there was little clarity outside of Pakistan, a flaw that was starkly shown by India's shocking loss at the hands of the Chinese in 1962.¹¹⁶ There is also little evidence that India has ever had a cogent strategy with regard to Pakistan.

However, India's changed strategic discourse after the Cold War can be traced through three cases. The first case is nuclear weapons development and the minimal nuclear deterrent strategy. At the crucial moment of the unconditional and indefinite extension of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), India conducted a number of nuclear tests in 1998, intensifying its nuclear rivalry with Pakistan.¹¹⁷ This not only made the situation in terms of regional security worse but also presented difficulties for the system of international non-proliferation treaties.

However, if New Delhi's early nuclear policy showed a hint of morality and idealism, then its programme of developing nuclear weapons in the name of "peaceful explosion" marks an instance of shrewd, realistic manoeuvring.¹¹⁸ In 1954, India proposed the signing of an international agreement to prohibit nuclear tests. Analysing India's nuclear weapon development from the standpoint of strategic culture paints a very different image. Many Indians believe that their country should be a natural world power. As a result of this strongly ingrained confidence in Indian civilization, many people think that India ought to be a great country by default.¹¹⁹ As a result, other nations must accept its big-power position as an objective reality and make necessary adjustments.

The consistency of this assessment gives India the additional benefit of allowing it to reconcile its new acceptance of nuclear weapons as essential to its security with its long-standing opposition to nuclear weaponry, which was expressed in its vociferous Cold War campaign for nuclear disarmament. Since they are ultimately defensive tools and are therefore justifiable in a situation where New Delhi

is left with no other options, their possession becomes more easily tolerable if these instruments are more valuable to protect security than to finance ambitious political goals, which is an especially inevitable consequence when both India and its rivals possess nuclear weapons.¹²⁰

The Indian leadership believes that utilizing nuclear weapons as solely political rather than military tools is realistic, which enables them to tackle other internal problems that arise from having them. For instance, it justifies maintaining a relatively modest – and, consequently, less expensive – arsenal if India opts for a strategy of inflicting intolerable levels of punishment by holding at risk a small number of crucial targets at a time when its economic development and conventional military requirements are still far from being satisfied due to limited resources.¹²¹ Additionally, it enables New Delhi to maintain the “assertive” control system that is currently in place, which is typified by total civilian dominance over the military.¹²²

Following the nuclear tests in 1998, the declaratory doctrine was developed in two stages: first, by the National Security Advisory Board in draft form in 1999, and then, in response to disagreements over the document, by the Cabinet Committee on Security in more authoritative but laconic form in 2003.¹²³ Although the declaratory and operational components of India's publicly stated doctrine are not legally separated, the two can be analytically broken down into three aspects each. India pledged to develop and maintain a “credible minimum deterrence,” to adhere to the principle of “No First Use,” and to signal that it would respond to any nuclear attacks on its military forces or on it with “massive” retaliation “designed to inflict unacceptable damage” on an aggressor. These commitments were all included in the declaratory component.¹²⁴

The second case is seeking a unique strategic edge in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.¹²⁵ The relationships India has with both regional and non-regional parties provide the greatest context for understanding its strategic actions in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. Both the Mandala¹²⁶ geo-strategic philosophy and British–Indian strategic thinking, as well as the offensive–defensive orientation of its strategic culture, can be explicitly seen in India's actions from these two perspectives.¹²⁷ India remained within the bubble of South Asian power politics for the larger part of the Cold War. And after the Cold War India has expanded its area of interest to a broader geography which is also self-confrontation to Indian strategic beliefs. So, the first policy orientation that India had was Look East Policy. In a nutshell, this policy involved strengthening ties between India and Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Asia-Pacific area and creating bridges to these regions, particularly through India's eastern states, both in the north and the south. These states had historically fulfilled precisely that role, although it waned throughout the colonial era and later due to the severity of the cold war.¹²⁸ Likewise, to varied degrees, Buddhist, Chinese, Islamic and Indic influences have moulded Southeast Asia's culture. Religion, language, traditions, mythology, folklore, arts and architecture are all shared by India and the area. A few of these historic cultural ties were intended to be strengthened by the contemporary Look East strategy.¹²⁹

Later India turned the same Look East policy to ‘Act East Policy’. At the 12th ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)/East Asia Summit in Naypyidaw,

Myanmar, in 2012, Modi presented the Act East strategy.¹³⁰ The new strategy aims to interact more consciously and aggressively with not only ASEAN nations but also those in the larger Asia-Pacific area, such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. India's geo-strategic profile in Asia is meant to be increased by increased involvement with the Asia-Pacific region. The goal of the Modi administration to increase India's worldwide influence is reflected in the policy. Highlights of this policy include respecting ASEAN's importance in India's expanded relationship with Asia, prioritizing engagement with the ASEAN CLMV nations (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam), and enhancing bilateral ties with some countries in the Asia-Pacific region.¹³¹ Due to the energetic posture through Act East policy, India opened the possibility of becoming the active participant of Indo-Pacific Strategy and QUAD.

And the third case is the choice between strategic autonomy and non-alignment. Similar to non-violence, non-alignment appears to have evolved into a fundamental component of India's identity. But in truth, this is just a generalization about how India behaves abroad. India views non-alignment as a means of realizing both its big-power status and its aspirations for big-power status. India's non-alignment policy is a result of how it views and evaluates the UN's voting process, which was a blatant example of the Cold War rivalry between blocs.¹³² India asserted to retain autonomous positions in the face of these conflicts in order to avoid choosing between the Eastern and Western camps. But Post-Cold War India's international behaviour has been coined as 'non-alignment 2.0', 'multi-alignment' or 'strategic autonomy' where India has made a decision to engage with multiple actors based on its interest and strategic orientation.¹³³

2.2.2 Institutional Framework of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

For India, the MEA plays a central role in overseeing India's foreign policy, other key organizations like the Prime Minister's Office, Cabinet, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, National Security Council, and Parliament also make substantial contributions to the development and planning of India's foreign policy.¹³⁴ Among other things, a democratic state's parliament is thought to be crucial to the formulation of public policy. Furthermore, the Indian constitution granted Parliament unmatched authority to enact laws pertaining to matters on the union list, including foreign policy. Utilizing a variety of constitutional provisions, the parliament, as the nation's highest democratic institution and the voice of the people, can also affect how foreign policy decisions are made.¹³⁵

One of the most influential organizations in India's foreign policy decision-making process is the Prime Minister's Office.¹³⁶ One of the key institutions for determining foreign policy in parliamentary systems like India is the Prime Minister Office (PMO). The Prime Minister's choice still counts as the last say in any policy formation, even if the Ministry of External relations are responsible for managing foreign relations. Prior to implementation, the Prime Minister must approve all significant foreign policy and national security topics.¹³⁷

Since India's independence, the PMO has played a more important role than the MEA because the country has never had an autonomous, charismatic foreign minister with the political clout to make significant changes to foreign policy.¹³⁸

In India, the president is recommended to sign foreign treaties and agreements by the prime minister, who also suggests names for Indian heads of mission. At this point, the PMO takes centre stage in diplomatic relations. The position of the PMO has expanded significantly since the establishment of the National Security Council and the appointment of the National Security Advisor, who was previously the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary.¹³⁹ However, the PMO's function and level of influence are largely dependent on his character, capacity for effective leadership, and the stability of his standing in the political hierarchy. When the prime minister demonstrates a personal interest in foreign matters and the PMO's decision-making limitations, he assumes a central role in foreign policy.

Overall, India's foreign policy decision-making is complex as it involves the citizens through parliament, and at the same time, the Prime Minister of India has a great amount of independence to formulate and execute the foreign policy.

2.2.3 Economic Reform of India since 1991

India had the greatest economic crisis in 1991 and was at the edge of a sovereign default. In the Gulf war of 1990–1991, oil costs rose sharply and Indian employees who worked in foreign countries deteriorated. This has resulted in a dramatic drop of less than 6 billion Dollars in India's currency reserves, which was barely enough to fulfil the country's imports for around two weeks.¹⁴⁰ The government was not helped either by the deteriorating fiscal deficit position and the growing external debt levels. The Government has also been added to its troubles by the fiscal deficit of 8% of the GDP and the current account deficit of 2.5% of GDP. The burden of a common man has also been increased by double-digit inflation rates.¹⁴¹

India was greatly affected by the break-up of the Soviet Union. It opened in many ways the way for a country's reinvention: from an abusive socialist economy to a more dynamic, capitalist one; from a foreign policy defined by America's suspicions to that defined by common interests and mutual affection; and from public attitudes which frowned upon individualism, consummation and ambition to a nation that exalts those same qualities today.¹⁴² India was never a communist country, a founding partner of the global non-aligned movement. However, the Soviet Union was far closer than the United States for the whole of the Cold War, with concessional arms purchasing, trade-offs with the Eastern Bloc, and financial and technical assistance for industrial and infrastructural projects.¹⁴³

As a result of the Soviet disintegration and payment crisis of 1991, India took a revolutionary decision to reform the structure of India's economy, famously known as 'Market Liberalization of 1991'. There were many technical changes on the nature of economic structure, but mainly three major changes were made which boosted India's economic growth after the cold war;

- a Liberalized movement of capital to and from India;
- b Permitted domestic corporations to enter into equity-sharing arrangements with international corporations;
- c Change the focus from state-controlled production quotas to free market competition;

2.2.3.1 *Liberalized Movement of Capital to and from India*

In India, policy emphasis was given to the liberalization of capital-account operations following the 1991 crisis. As part of the external sector's border restructuring package, it aimed at lowering debt dependency, notably at generating flows of short-term foreign investment, in particular FDI.¹⁴⁴ Whereas the main goal was the attraction of appropriate private capital to the desired composition, the policy measures also focused on controlling inflows during surges of capital flows. The rupee has been converted to foreign investors for all purposes through the progressive liberalization of international investment, including FDI and portfolio investment. Capital outflow restrictions for residents persist, though. These regulations did actually meet the demands of the external industry and of the economy as a whole, and many of them can be eliminated on a durable basis based on success in fixing the prerequisites.¹⁴⁵

Trade liberalization was preceded by the Indian experience of liberalizing capital accounts, like many other developing nations. India's free trade includes virtual abolition and a gradual transfer of banned import products to open general authorizations.¹⁴⁶ Simultaneously, in the early 1990s, tariff reductions began. Between the early and late 1990s, the average tariff rate was more than half. The long-term goal of India's decrease in tariffs is to put these prices in line with those of its members. Also following the lowering of tariffs, non-tariff obstacles were removed. Between 1999 and 2001, all quantitative import limitations previously imposed for balance of payments concern were removed in India.

As a result, India saw some sharp rise in FDI inflows, rise of GDP and Foreign Exchange Reserve (Figure 2.3).

By the end of 2021, the foreign exchange reserve of India became \$633.6 billion.¹⁴⁷

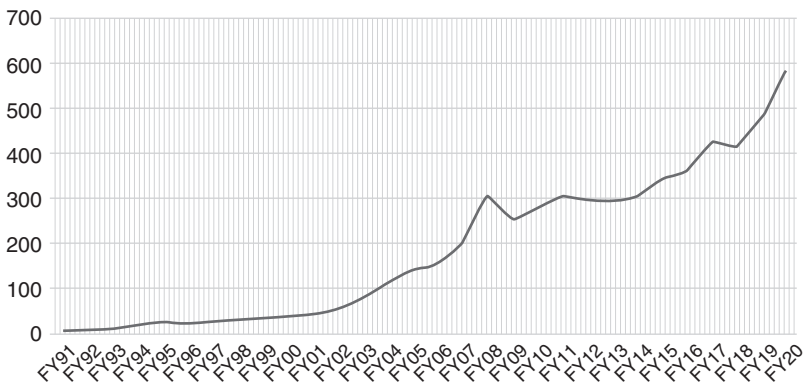


Figure 2.3 India's Foreign Exchange Reserve.

Source: Reserve Bank of India (RBI).¹⁴⁸

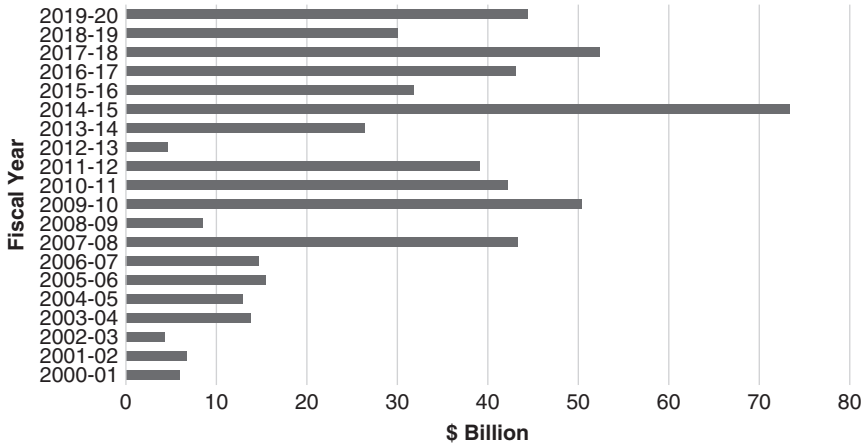


Figure 2.4 FDI Inflows in India (2000–2020).

Source: Reserve Bank of India (RBI).¹⁴⁹

In the fiscal year 2021–2022, India received the highest annual FDI inflow of US\$83.57 billion. In 2014–2015, India received US\$45.15 billion in FDI, compared to the largest ever annual FDI inflow of US\$83.57 billion reported during the fiscal year 2021–2022, surpassing previous year’s FDI by US\$1.60 billion despite the military intervention in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since FY03-04, when inflows were barely US\$4.3 billion, India’s FDI inflows have surged 20-fold (Figure 2.4).¹⁵⁰

2.2.3.2 *Permitted Domestic Corporations to Enter into Equity Sharing Arrangements with International Corporations*

Due to economic reform, the major impact was seen in equity-sharing arrangements between domestic and international corporations. The Act imposed in 1947 was rigid in terms of foreign companies to be directly involved with domestic corporations due to the state-centric nature they have.¹⁵¹ However, there was an instant increment on foreign corporate engagement in India after the reform. Investors in mutual funds increased from 2 million to 40 million between 1980 and 1993, second only to the United States (51 million). With regard to listed businesses, the Indian stock market is currently the world’s largest (7,985 in 1995), with the United Kingdom and Germany (678) well behind (even bigger than the United States (7,671 firms)).¹⁵²

Day-to-day trading of shares on the Bombay Bursary increased by over 30 times from Rupees 0.13 billion in 1980–1981 to Rupees 3.7 billion in 1993–1994. In the early 1990s, the average daily volume of trade in Bombay was equivalent to that in London – around 45,000 businesses daily. This rate has doubled at its peak.¹⁵³

While Indian stock market development was spectacular in the 1980s and 1990s, it also occurred in many other rising economies. In Taiwan, the share of GDP in market capitalization grew from 11% in 1981 to 74% in 1991.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, the Chilean proportion increased from 13.2% to 78% between 1983 and 1993, while the Thai proportion rose from 3.8% to 55.8%. In order to frame the data historically, Mullins (1993) observes that a substantially similar growth in the capitalization ratio from 7% to 72% presumably took the US stock market 85 years (1810–1895).

Liberalization has taken place at the same time as additional regulation in India's stock market reforms.¹⁵⁵ Liberalization includes the abolition of Capital Issues Control Act 1947, which regulated and defined the pricing of the new stocks by the government. International liberalization enabled foreign institutional investors to buy Indian business shares directly. Similarly, the collection of cash abroad has been allowed for Indian firms.

2.2.3.3 *Changed the Focus from State-Controlled Production Quotas to Free Market Competition*

India's economic reforms, initiated in 1991, have therefore introduced competition into the Indian markets and the advantages, both in terms of quicker economic growth and consumer welfare are plainly evident. For the first time since independence, the average Indian consumer has become sovereign and companies have to compete for his patronage, notably in key areas like communications, aviation, consumer electronics, vehicles, etc.

With this context in mind, under the last National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government the Competition Act 2002 (hence the 'Loi') aimed at avoiding anti-competitive acts, fostering and maintaining competition, safeguarding the consumer interest and ensuring free trade. The Competition Act 2002 was adopted. The overall aim of the Act is to monitor anti-competitive agreements and to prevent abuse of dominant position by major companies, to regulate combinations and to defend competition.¹⁵⁶

The Indian Competition Commission ("CCI") is the legal entity that has been formed to implement the Law. While it was enacted in 2002, the Act was gradually enacted. In May 2009, Articles 3 and 4 of the Act (concerning anti-competitive agreements and abuse of domination) and the CCI's enforcement powers came into law. Sections 5 and 6, which established the Indian merger control regime and required the CCI to pre-clear the fusion, procurement and amalgamation meetings, were implemented in June 2011 at the latest and required worldwide and/or Indian turnover/asset-based thresholds (the 'combinations' referred to by the Law).¹⁵⁷ This legislation replaced the 1969 Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Activities Act (MRTP), which was enforced on 1 September 2009 when the MRTP Act was abrogated. The MRTP Act intended the regulation of monopolistic, restrictive and unfair trading practices.¹⁵⁸ The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC), competent in MRTP Act matters, was subsequently disbanded on 14 October 2009 and outstanding investigations and cases of MRTPC, the CCI and Competition Appeal Tribunal (COMPAT, respectively), were transferred.

As a much-needed shock, the end of the Cold War forced Indian authorities to adjust to the changing political and economic realities around the world. Given the altered situation, many of the fundamental tenets of Indian foreign policy have to be re-evaluated. The world's structure changed, suggesting that India may need a new foreign and national security strategy.

Everyone agrees that a state's capacity for economic expansion and vitality are traditional indicators of its authority. Economic factors play a major role in determining the total power of states, according to realist scholars of international relations, including Hans Morgenthau and John Mearsheimer.¹⁵⁹ This is because a strong and viable economy can provide more capital to the defence sector and translate a healthy GDP into increased military might. India's foreign policy is supported by its economic expansion:

Over the past decade and more, the debate in this country on the nature of our interaction with the world, with our wider Asian neighbourhood and with Major Powers, has also been shaped by the sweeping changes in our economic policy. The initiatives we took in the early 1990s towards economic liberalization have not only altered the nature of our interaction with the world, but have also shaped global perceptions of India.... It is also interesting to note that the response of other countries to our national security concerns is being shaped by perceptions of business and economic opportunities. Countries that imposed sanctions on India when we declared ourselves a nuclear weapons power are building bridges with us, to utilize opportunities for mutual economic benefit.... Our foreign policy is of course shaped by our civilizational values ... it is shaped by our yearning to recover our lost space in the global economy and our economic status in the comity of Nations.¹⁶⁰

The economy reacted by seeing an acceleration in growth, which doubled preceding time periods and averaged 6.3% yearly in the 1990s and early 2000s. After the Cold War shortages of electricity and energy vanished. Five million landlines had been established nationwide by the public telecom monopoly on the eve of the changes, and there was a seven-year waiting list to receive a new connection. Five million new users were added by commercial cellular providers each month in 2004. With 1189.28 million subscribers, India is currently the second-largest telecoms market in the world (of which mobile telephone connections are 1168.32 million and landline telephone connections are 20.96 million). The nation as a whole has a tele-density of 90.23%. At the end of July 2019, the urban tele-density was 160.87% compared to the rural tele-density, which is currently 57.01%.¹⁶¹ Between 1993 and 2009, the percentage of the population that lived below the poverty level fell from 50% to 34%. The percentage of population living below the poverty line in 2020 is about 17%.¹⁶² Depending on the poverty level utilized, the exact estimates vary, but even alternate estimates show that poverty has been declining more quickly since 1991 than at any other point since independence. The country's share of global trade expanded from 0.4% before the reforms to 1.5% in 2006. India until 2021 shares 3.5% of the global economy maintaining the position of fifth largest economy.¹⁶³

Coming to 2010, policymakers' perennial problem of foreign exchange shortages is solved by reserves of up to US\$350 billion, sparking discussions over what to do with the "excess reserves." Coming in 2021 India jumped into the fifth position with highest foreign reserve.¹⁶⁴

India's attitudes towards international trade discussions saw a significant shift from being a reluctant player to playing a proactive role as a result of the increased importance of trade for the Indian economy. India had only signed one minor preferential trade agreement before the year 2000 (with the Maldives). Between 2000 and 2021, through trade agreements, India enjoys privileged market access and economic cooperation with more than 50 nations.¹⁶⁵ In contrast to its earlier protectionist position in the pre-reform era, Indian business became a significant champion for deeper global integration from approximately a decade following the beginning of economic reforms, showing India's growing self-confidence.

As a result of all this economic progress, India's materialistic capabilities provided them strategic upper hand to engage with multiple partners from various regions. It at the same time increased India's profile internationally and also provided a foundational basis to project India as a rising power in international power.

2.2.4 Evolution of Political System in India

It is critical to consider how a nation's domestic political situation and its foreign policy are related. Especially in India the approach to international affairs has varied dramatically depending on the ruling party. If one tends to do more micro analysis then it varies on an individual level.

In accordance with Article 246 of the Indian Constitution, Parliament has the sole authority to enact laws relating to, among other things: (1) India's defence; (15) War and peace; (6) Atomic energy; (10), Foreign Affairs; (11) Diplomatic and consular representation; (12), United Nations Organization; (16), Foreign jurisdiction; (37) Foreign loans; and (41) Trade and Commerce with Foreign Countries.¹⁶⁶ Through questions, resolutions, motions and discussions on the house floor as well as through Consultative Committees, the Legislature also has a deliberative say in how the Executive formulates and executes its foreign policy. In the worst-case scenario, if displeased with the MEA's management of international relations, Parliament may even decide to withhold appropriation of grants to the agency.¹⁶⁷

The first person to rigorously examine how domestic political structure affects Indian foreign policy was Arjun Appadorai. Despite the numerous constitutional prohibitions to the contrary, he came to the conclusion that during the first 25 years of India's independence, "the effect of Parliament (and parties) on foreign policy was relatively minor."¹⁶⁸ The fact that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) went to the polls in 1998 emphasizing its pledge to "re-evaluate the country's nuclear policy and exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons" and painting its opponents as unpatriotic and timorous for "bending under pressure" to neighbours and major powers is indicative of the politicization of foreign policy.¹⁶⁹ Foreign policy may still be a concern of the elite, but since the heyday of Indira Gandhi, it has unquestionably entered the electoral and public sphere and appealed to susceptible groups

like never before. While dispelling the myth of a BJP alternative to the Nehruvian framework is the goal of this analysis, it does so in the context of rising foreign policy references in domestic political discourse and the growing influence of the latter on the former.

The BJP's role in bringing India into the nuclear club in May 1998 will go down in history as its greatest accomplishment. With this alleged departure from Nehruvian non-proliferation principles, the BJP boasted that it was putting into practice an "alternative paradigm that can upend the foundations of the Congress party's foreign policy." When the Bharatiya Janata Sangh, the BJP's previous incarnation, served as the ruling coalition partner in India's first non-Congress Janata government, there were accusations that it had a foreign policy that was fundamentally different from the Congress' and rumours of "major shifts in international perceptions" (1977–1979).

The nature of India's international relations can be traced as the guided belief in Gandhi–Nehruvian ideology or the ideology carried by the BJP. Indian nationalism was born in opposition to British colonial control. Nehru and Gandhi's formulation of Indian nationalism was a civic nationalism that asserted itself in the name of every Indian regardless of their religious beliefs.¹⁷⁰ The BJP bases its philosophy on cultural nationalism, often known as Hindutva, and shapes its worldview using this tradition's tools.¹⁷¹ Hindutva, put simply, is an effort to rediscover India's Hindu brilliance and bring back the country to its greater pre-Hindu grandeur.¹⁷² When assertive Hindu consciousness, cultural pride, and order replace the "softness" of anglicized creations like Nehru's "pseudo-secularism," the Indian country will only be able to live up to its Vedic golden period.¹⁷³ The Gandhi–Nehru effeminate and non-violent essentialisms must be replaced with representations of Hindu masculinity and martial endowments if the BJP is to realize its vision of bringing India global recognition and a legitimate place among the world's top powers. Since "every Hindu god is armed," M.S. Golwalkar, the founding guru of Rastriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the parent organization of the BJP, mocked India's claim to be a place of ahimsa (non-violence).¹⁷⁴ The "ersatz pacifism" of Buddhist, Jain, Vaishnav-Bhakti and Gandhian viewpoints, according to foreign minister Jaswant Singh, is to blame for "twisting India's strategic culture into all kinds of absurdities" and weakening a once-violent nation.¹⁷⁵

As the Indian government for the first half of the 1990s was led by the believers of Gandhi and Nehru, they focused more on adapting to the new post-Cold War scenario by implementing economic liberalization. But when Atal Bihari Vajpayee became a Prime Minister in 1996 the Indian foreign policy took a nationalistic and the realist turn as he took India into a Nuclear power. When Dr. Manmohan Singh became a Prime Minister in 2004 by representing the Indian Congress, he re-oriented India's policy towards economic progress. By profession, he was an economist and he was serving as the finance minister in 1991 when India adopted an economic liberation policy. Thus, economics was his area of expertise and he was Gandhian by nature. So, from 2004 to 2014 the Indian government focused on establishing as much as economic relations with partners internationally. If one analyses the core period of India's economic progress it would be between 2000 and 2015.

On the contrary, Modi came into power in 2014 with different intentions regarding foreign policy. Modi's foreign policy agenda has been pursued along the broad – if hazy – lines outlined in the BJP's election manifesto, which outlined three priority areas for action: strengthening India's security with regard to both Pakistan and China; utilizing India's "soft power" in the West and the developing world to increase New Delhi's global stand.

In his 2015 book *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence*¹⁷⁶ renowned Indian foreign policy analyst C. Raja Mohan stated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has brought in a "third republic" in terms of how India conducts its foreign policy. His central claim was that Modi had fundamentally revitalized India's foreign policy and had finally done away with many of the shibboleths that had previously limited the country's ability to make foreign policy decisions. Of course, the venerable pledge of non-alignment and its reincarnation as "strategic autonomy" were among them. Additionally, he argued that India was currently in the process of shedding its long-standing visceral, reflexive anti-American attitude.¹⁷⁷ Where the assessment made by Raja Mohan stands correct in terms of all the attention that India is drawing internationally, the grassroots reform of India's foreign policy is a tough task as argued by Sumit Ganguly.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the famous historian of India Ramachandra Guha called it a personality cult rather than an organized approach to the internal and external approach of the government of India. Guha argued that the BJP asserts that it is the biggest political organization in the world and that it has more members than the Chinese Communist Party. India also claims to be the greatest democracy in the world. The BJP and the government have both been subject to the demands – and occasionally the whims – of a single person since May 2014: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The construction of an exceptional personality cult around Modi is evident in both official and party propaganda, eulogies in the press, and adoring invocations of his ostensibly revolutionary leadership by India's top business people, celebrities and athletes.¹⁷⁹

The assessment above signals how the role of certain political parties, political beliefs and the individual massively impact the thought processing and the implementation of India's foreign policy.

2.3 Post-Cold War General Assumptions and Goals of India's Foreign Policy

Based on the conducting factors of India's foreign policy after the Cold War, the application of the foreign policy orientation can be divided into three parts. From adjusting to the changed international political environment in the post-Cold War scenario to becoming the energetic engagement towards international politics, India's foreign policy has evolved exponentially. The evolution can be traced in India's approach towards international relations. The same phases were confirmed by the Indian external affairs minister Subramaniam Jaishankar during his speech in the India Today conclave in 2021.¹⁸⁰

2.3.1 India's Adjustment in Post-Cold War World Order – Phase I (1991–1998)

India was in a precarious condition as the 1990s approached. The fall of the Soviet Union, for example, meant that India had lost a major pillar of its foreign policy. India has no choice but to fumble around with different new policies.¹⁸¹ Because

India has typically regarded itself as a world power in the making, and handled its regional and international affairs on this basis, this created severe problems for India. The outcome has been insignificance in the eyes of the outside world, mistrust in the area, and domestic turmoil.¹⁸²

Furthermore, the Soviet Union was not only India's primary economic partner, but also its largest trading partner. India feared defaulting on its loans as a result of the Gulf War in 1990–1991, rising oil prices, and a significant drop in home remittances from Indians working in the Middle East. It had no choice but to seek International Monetary Fund funds for help. In exchange for the aid, India was asked to liberalize its economic structure and open up its economy, which it had kept closed throughout the Cold War. In June 1991, Narasimha Rao was elected Prime Minister, and the following month, he and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh (later prime minister) initiated economic reform. India's foreign policy has been forced to undergo a complete redesign as a result of the transformation of the Indian economy and the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as changes in the international system. The government began a market-oriented reform process that included depreciation of the currency, relaxation of trade and foreign investment rules, and banking sector liberalization, among other things.¹⁸³ In the 1990s, a slew of foreign policy initiatives were undertaken. Rao visited the United States in 1992. During the Cold War, the United States was 'on sometimes cordial, sometimes hostile, but, more frequently, merely alienated' from India.¹⁸⁴

In 1993, Rao paid a visit to China and signed an Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility over the real control lines between India and China. The core of the deal may be summed up as a return to normalcy in their relationship by resolving the thorny problem of their shared boundary. Since 1993, the Look East Policy has been in effect.¹⁸⁵ As a result of this new approach, India was designated as the ASEAN Dialogue Partner in 1994 and became an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) member the following year. This shift in status was due to a shift in ASEAN's viewpoint, which allowed it to "digest the consequences of China's development, not merely as an economic power but also as a military force."¹⁸⁶ During this time India has adopted 'strategic partnership' as one of the major tools to have a foreign engagement. As of 2019, India has signed strategic partnerships with 29 countries.

India's foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar divided this phase as a period called 'quest for a strategic autonomy'. Adding that the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in the creation of a unipolar world dominated by the United States. "These events contributed to the commencement of the fourth

phase of Indian foreign policy,” Dr. Jaishankar said, “It invites a fundamental reconsideration in India on a wide range of subjects,” the Minister said, adding that the focus has moved to maintaining strategic autonomy.¹⁸⁷ According to the minister, this was also a time when India increased its outreach to the United States.

Likewise, one of the major milestones that shaped India’s foreign engagement was the nuclear test of 1998. Explaining the core interest of nuclear test of 1998, minister Jaishankar mentioned that

Given its adverse security environment in the early 1990s, India’s pursuit of nuclear weapons as a deterrent against Chinese and Pakistani adventurism would have appeared not only wise but necessary, particularly when considered in conjunction with the relatively low costs of a nuclear program, a multilateral order that threatened to recognize China’s nuclear status in perpetuity while denying India entry, and an enabling domestic political environment.

However, in reality, this statement is open for debate. This is ambiguous, he is most likely alluding to the fall of the Soviet Union, India’s Cold War partner, as this is frequently used by Indian officials and experts to justify the 1998 nuclear tests.

Similarly, one of the major attributes of India’s foreign policy during this phase was the re-orientation of its ‘Neighbourhood Policy’. While asked about the aim and the goal of the ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy, Minister of State in the MEA of India, Shri V. Muraleedharan, answered that

Under its ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy, the Government is committed to developing friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all its neighbors. India is an active development partner and is involved in several projects in these countries. India’s policy of ‘Neighbourhood First’ focuses on creating mutually beneficial, people-oriented, regional frameworks for stability and prosperity. Our engagement with these countries is based on a consultative, non-reciprocal and outcome-oriented approach, which focuses on delivering benefits like greater connectivity, improved infrastructure, stronger development cooperation in various sectors, security and broader people-to-people contacts.¹⁸⁸

With the emergence of Inder Kumar Gujral as a diplomat, particularly as the External Affairs Minister, India started a peace drive under the ‘Gujral Doctrine’. After Deve Gowda, I.K. Gujral became India’s Prime Minister, continuing Deve Gowda’s ideology of seeing the necessity for a liberal approach to neighbouring nations’ problems and stressing that India should take initiative in addressing long-standing problems without expecting reciprocity. Gujral doctrine basically revolves around five principles. First, India does not demand reciprocity from its neighbours, such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka, but instead offers and accommodates what it can in good faith and confidence. Second, no South Asian country should allow its territory to be utilized against the interests of another

country in the area, according to us. Third, no one should meddle with another's internal problems. Fourth, all nations in South Asia must respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of one another. Finally, all of their differences should be resolved via peaceful bilateral discussions.¹⁸⁹

On the other hand, the definition of India's neighbourhood was re-defined as an 'Extended Neighborhood'. While giving a lecture at Sikkim University, Ambassador Yogendra Kumar defined extended neighbourhood by stating:

Extended Neighborhood has been variously defined in geographical terms. It includes countries sharing land and maritime borders whose list goes beyond the geographical description of South Asia; apart from Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, countries sharing land and maritime borders with India are China, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Maldives. In addition, several countries, in proximity, outside of this list are tied to India through close economic and diasporic links and the developments wherein are perceived by Indian policymakers as having strategic implications; one could include in this category countries in the Indian Ocean Region, on the East African seaboard, in the Gulf Region, Afghanistan, in the Central Asian Region as well as countries in south-east Asia.¹⁹⁰

During the late 1990s, the Indian government introduced the idea of the "Extended Neighborhood." During what some have termed an omnidirectional 360-degree perspective of the possibilities outside South Asia that are accessible to India, the enlarged neighbourhood has become India's conceptual umbrella – eastward, southward, northward and westward.¹⁹¹ India's projection of power, whether hard power military and economic projection or soft power cultural and ideational threads, is fundamental to this notion of an expanded neighbourhood.

India's extended neighbourhood idea is distinct from Jawaharlal Nehru's earlier cosmopolitan rhetoric and Indira Gandhi's later South Asian focus. During Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP administration from 1998 to 2004, the notion was pushed with zeal, with the announcement that "our interests and contacts transcend much beyond South Asia." Other neighbours and nations bordering this region—our 'extended neighbourhood'—are among them.¹⁹² The phrase "extended neighbourhood" did not exist in the MEA's Annual Report for 1999–2000, but it did emerge in the Annual Report for 2000–2001 as a way to identify India's "immediate neighborhood."¹⁹³ By 2004, the Indian government had endorsed "the notion" of an "extended neighborhood for India" that spanned from the Suez Canal to the South China Sea and included West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia, the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean Region.¹⁹⁴

2.3.2 *India's Rise as a Balancing Power in World Order – Phase II (1998–2014)*

From 1998 to 2014 has been divided into a period called 'balance of power'. According to External Affairs Minister (EAM), after 1998, India entered another

phase of foreign policy and gained balancing power characteristics. "It's evident in the nuclear deal between India and the United States, as well as improved understanding with the West as a whole," he added.

The post-Cold War relationship between India and the United States has reached a level of maturity and strength that was unthinkable during the Cold War. Since 2000, all American presidents have paid official trips to India, and the Civil Nuclear Agreement has been signed, to name a few examples of this mature relationship throughout the post-Cold War period.¹⁹⁵ Despite a shared heritage of democratic principles, India–United States ties fell into a condition of "estrangement" over the first fifty years of independence. India, according to a non-alignment policy, chose not to join the West in its battle against Communism, which severely angered the United States.¹⁹⁶ The United States leaned towards Pakistan in the 1960s and 1970s, while the erstwhile Soviet Union provided India with political, military and economic support. In the early 1990s, the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the start of an economic reform programme in India ushered in a new era in the estranged relationship. Although there was more engagement at the political, economic and military levels, conflicts over non-proliferation issues counterbalanced this collaboration.¹⁹⁷ The conduct of nuclear tests and India's disclosure of a weaponization programme in May 1998 brought the relationship to a new low point. However, between 2001 and 2003, the US–India agenda for bilateral cooperation expanded to include diplomatic collaboration, military-to-military contacts, counterterrorism cooperation and public diplomacy.¹⁹⁸ In 2004 India and the United States signed a strategic partnership taking the inspiration from Atal Bihari Vajpayee's ideas. Since then India–US relations have been blistering. Currently, India and the United States share the same values in the Indo-Pacific Region and both actively endorse collective initiatives like 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' and 'QUAD'.

Likewise, during the Soviet era, India and Russia had decades of strong ties at the highest levels. However, as the newly created Russian Federation tried to reconstruct its foreign policy, the turbulence of the initial post-Soviet years resonated across the Indo–Russian relationship as well. Later, both India and Russia have attempted to rekindle their ties. They signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1993, followed by a Military-Technical Cooperation pact a year later. Following a brief period of significant decline in arms shipments from 1990 to 1993, India will eventually become a big importer of Russian weaponry.¹⁹⁹ Finally, the yearly summits between India and Russia were started at the start of Vladimir Putin's administration in 2000, as part of a renewed attempt to improve the bilateral relationship. Also in 2010, the joint statement announcing the tenth anniversary of the 'Declarations on Strategic Partnership' between the two nations stated that the relationship had progressed to "the level of a special and privileged strategic partnership."²⁰⁰ Currently, India and Russia both utilize their bilateral relations to minimize the increasing influence of China in the region. With the takeover of operations at Chabahar port²⁰¹ Earlier this year, India now has a direct path to Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan, and then on to Iran and Central Asia. Given Russia's concerns about growing Chinese influence in Central Asia, both nations

should explore strengthening their links to India via Chabahar and the International North–South Transportation Corridor (INSTC).²⁰²

Similarly, after 1962 border war relations between India and China stayed in vacuum for more than two decades. But India had already begun discreetly exploring the possibilities of mending relations with Beijing in the early 1980s.²⁰³ The visit of Rajiv Gandhi to China in December 1988 marked the start of a new era in India–China ties. It resulted in significant policy changes. First, India and China agreed that their relationship would be totally normalized, and that it would no longer be reliant on the resolution of the border dispute. Second, all parties agreed to preserve the peace and calm along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) awaiting a fair, reasonable and mutually agreeable ultimate conclusion. Third, both parties recognised the other's rightful contributions to world peace and prosperity. In Indian circles, this became known as the Rajiv Gandhi–Deng Xiaoping *modus vivendi*.²⁰⁴ However, India and China have had border face-off constantly for a few decades now. So India mostly has adopted a competitive and cooperative stance towards China. To pursue its cooperation and competition objectives India has adopted various measures. Reduced rhetoric, resumption of summit-level and other political exchanges, reopening of trade and commercial exchanges, relaxation of restrictions on people-to-people contacts, confidence-building measures in border areas, normalization of military-to-military relations and increased cooperation in multilateral areas were among the elements of India's engagement with China.²⁰⁵ But experts are suggesting the killing of twenty Indian soldiers and an unknown number of Chinese soldiers in a violent clash at the LAC on 15 June 2020, marks a turning point in India and China's seventy-year partnership.²⁰⁶ It has been called the “tipping point” in India-China relations by Brahma Chellaney,²⁰⁷ and the “lowest moment since the 1962 border conflict” by Hu Shisheng.²⁰⁸

2.3.3 India's Foreign Policy towards an Energetic Engagement – Phase III (Under Modi Government)

After Narendra Modi became prime minister of India in 2014, the foreign policy of India got re-oriented. The Modi government's proactive foreign policy is motivated by two factors. First, due to China's rapid ascent, the balance of power in Asia is gradually leaning in its favour. Furthermore, China's border violations have become a cause of concern for India. As a result, the Modi government saw the necessity to expand on previous administrations' approach of forging alliances with countries that share similar interests and values. Second, Modi's ascension to the prime ministership was accompanied by an overabundance of optimism that the economy would expand faster. Increased foreign investment became vital as faster economic growth necessitated significant infrastructure and manufacturing investments.

The primary agenda of Modi's foreign policy roams around safeguarding 'national interest'. The term “national interests” has a broad definition. For example, securing borders to protect territorial integrity, combating cross-border terrorism, energy security, food security, cyber security, building world-class infrastructure, non-discriminatory global trade practices, equitable global responsibility

for environmental protection, reforming global governance institutions to reflect contemporary realities, disarmament, regional stability and international peace are all examples. Under Modi's leadership, India's foreign policy has become more diverse, with four main objectives: (a) to protect India from traditional and non-traditional threats; (b) to create an external environment that is conducive to India's inclusive development, ensuring that the benefits of growth reach the poorest of the poor in the country; (c) to ensure that India's voice is heard on global forums and that India is able to influence world opinion on issues of global dimensions such as terrorism, climate change, disarmament and reforms of global governance institutions; and (d) to engage and protect Indian diaspora.

To achieve these objectives the Modi government has adopted a few principles which reflect the pro-activeness in India's foreign policy engagement. First, India opposed the export of ideology although it grounded itself into the modern democracy. Second, India opposes the imposition of sanctions or military action against a single country or a group of countries unless these sanctions or military activities have been approved by the United Nations as a result of international agreement. Third, India does not believe in interfering in other countries' domestic issues. However, if any country's action, whether innocent or not, has the potential to harm India's national interests, India does not hesitate to intervene quickly and effectively. Third, India does not believe in interfering in other countries' domestic issues. However, if any country's action, whether innocent or not, has the potential to harm India's national interests, India does not hesitate to intervene quickly and effectively. Fourth, on global concerns such as the world trade regime, climate change, terrorism, intellectual property rights and global governance, India supports for a global debate and agreement. This statement also can be perceived in Modi's speech where he put stress on 'be on the seats on the decision-making table', that signals India's desperation to be in permanent membership in 'UN Security Council (UNSC)' and 'Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)'.²⁰⁹ Fifth, another important element of India's foreign policy is its decision-making independence and strategic autonomy. As a result, India prefers partnerships to alliances, particularly military alliances. India's dependent military hardware relations with Russia and a security cooperation with the United States and cooperation and competition feature of India–China relations are some of the facts which justifies what does it mean by being multi-aligned based on strategic autonomy. Besides that, India's foreign policy initiatives over the last five years have been marked by unparalleled diplomatic outreach across continents and hemispheres, encompassing small, medium and large nations. At the level of the President, Prime Minister, Vice-President, External Affairs Minister, and Ministers, there were a record number of high-level arriving and outgoing visits.

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3 Security Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

3.1 Explanatory Variables

Generally, vulnerabilities and power imbalances leave India on the receiving end of security provisions, especially if those states are geographically close to one another.¹ This calls for strategic security management, such as through international cooperation (through military alliances or other forms of bi- or multilateral collaboration).² Traditional military components of territorial integrity and sovereignty continue to be India's top security objective. However, the danger spectrum's extension to cover a wide range of hybrid threats and challenges aimed at the societal level highlights the complex security situation in (not least) India. Having said that, there are four explanatory variables identified based on the sources. The sources include the annual reports of the Ministry of Defense, annual reports of the Ministry of External Affairs, political communique, speeches, news articles, opinion pieces, books and research articles.

- a India's Strategic Depth;
- b China's Security Activity in Central Asia;
- c Great Power Rivalry and Security Complex in Central Asia Region;
- d Non-Traditional Security Threat in India's Neighbourhood.

3.1.1 *India's Strategic Depth*

Afghanistan and Pakistan are strategically located on India's border, allowing land access to Central Asia and the Arabian Sea. India's expanding economy is primarily reliant on trade via the Arabian Sea and the land routes of Afghanistan and Iran. It is critical for India's economic success to ensure the security of these maritime and land channels. Strategic depth in Afghanistan and Pakistan might give India more clout over these critical trading routes.³

Originating in the field of military operations, the term "strategic depth" typically refers to the separation between an enemy's forces and a nation's major centres of gravity. These centres may be industrial and commercial hubs, military bases or front lines in combat. For a military expert, the likelihood of a successful defensive operation increases with the distance enemy forces must travel to reach these sites. This is mainly because it stretches the enemy's logistical chain

and provides the defender with more time and space to organize the defence. The French and German invasions of Russia and the Soviet Union provide the best examples. Russian strategy even adopted a scorched earth policy, exchanging time for space. Important industries were also moved to the hinterland. In summary, Russia possessed more strategic depth and the luxury of space. More recently, some in Pakistan have defended their intervention in Afghanistan by claiming that it will give them “strategic depth” in the event that they and India go to war. This implies, however, that the Pakistani military will attack India from Afghanistan after abandoning its people and nation. Many Pakistani commentators have mocked this proposal, and rightfully so.

Having said that, India is motivated by increasing its role and responsibility in Central Asia to gain strategic depth in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

3.1.1.1 Afghanistan

Afghanistan is crucial from a geopolitical standpoint for Indians. Afghanistan is critical for India's outreach to the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and as a counterbalance to Pakistan and China.⁴ The country is bordered on the north by the CARs, on the east by Pakistan and on the south by the Indian Ocean (IO), which passes via Iran and Pakistan. For Indian commerce with the CARs, the flow might be through the IO's maritime routes to Gwadar port, and then by land along the Delaram highway, which India built in Afghanistan, to destinations in CARs.⁵

The *Arthasāstra*,⁶ written by Kautilya in the 4th century, describes a conqueror's allies and adversaries in terms of geographical possessions. “That foe who ... occupies a territory close to that of the conqueror is a natural enemy.” Conversely, “He ... who is situated close to the territory of the immediate enemy of the conqueror is a natural friend.” In essence, the enemy of my enemy is a friend. Since the ancient period of the time Afghanistan has served as the friend rhetoric for India. After the independence and the troubled relations with Pakistan, Afghanistan became closer and the strategic country for India.⁷

India's ‘Afghanistan Policy’ and ‘Central Asia Policy’ have interconnectedness. There is always a geographical confusion about Afghanistan as it is duly considered as South and Central Asia, but contemporary India's policy includes Afghanistan in both Neighborhood and Central Asian Policy. As Central Asia remained vital in the Indian foreign policy radar due to the geostrategic salience of Central Asia in terms of its immense proven natural resources, competition of regional and extra-regional actors for strategic leverage to fragile Afghanistan most importantly due to its geographic proximity to fragile Afghanistan.⁸ India's redesigned foreign policy framework for Central Asia such as, Look North Policy, Look West Policy, Extended Neighbourhood and Connect Central Asia Policy (CCAP), have important space for Afghanistan.⁹ In terms of Security and Connectivity, both are the major concerns of India and Central Asia, India is dependent on Afghanistan. Likewise, Afghanistan remained particularly important for connectivity and defence. It has also been argued that the landlocked nation facilitates India's interest in Central Asia. Putting it in a simple word Kaur clarifies that the re-emergence of extremism

in Afghanistan gave India a strategic reason to intervene as it has split over impact in both Central and South Asia.¹⁰

India and Afghanistan have a long and symbiotic history and culture. India and Afghanistan have a long cultural and historical relationship that dates back to the Great Silk Route. During the ancient period, the Silk Route was a network of linked trade routes that connected Asia and Europe. In contemporary politics, India's ambitions in Afghanistan are only one part of a wider goal for India to be able to protect its interests well beyond South Asia.¹¹ India loathed the Taliban administration and the facilities it provided to a slew of Sunni Islamist terrorist organizations, and it feared and continues to dread Pakistan for its support for the Taliban regime and export of Sunni militants. Perhaps more importantly, India wants to keep Afghanistan as a friendly state from which it can observe Central Asia and possibly nurture assets to influence events in the region. Apart from the well-known difficulties in and over Kashmir, an equally major – if frequently misunderstood – worry is that events in Afghanistan have significant and typically negative consequences on India's domestic social fabric as well as its internal security.

All these internal security scenarios of Afghanistan have direct implications for Central Asia, thus impacting India's security strategy towards the region.¹² Especially after the withdrawal of US-led NATO forces from Afghan soil, various factors can implicate Central Asian internal dynamics. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in particular, are particularly vulnerable to internal consequences as Afghanistan's security situation deteriorates. The major spillover dangers for Tajikistan are the Taliban's probable return to power in Kabul or a fresh civil conflict involving Afghan Tajiks. Both scenarios might result in Taliban/Pashtun attacks against Tajik symbols of authority, wreaking havoc on official ties between Dushanbe and Kabul. Tajikistan's increasing societal Islamization might be impacted as well. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT), Tajikistan's sole legitimate Islamic opposition, may face Salafist groups, particularly if these movements get further international assistance. Local Islamic rebels, primarily Uzbek and Kyrgyz young men from the country's south, have been training in Afghanistan in recent years. The Kyrgyz armed forces cannot deal with rebel strikes on a long-term basis.¹³ However, the main protagonists in Kyrgyzstan's Islamization – Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat – are both indigenous and have no ties to Afghan concerns, and the country's socioeconomic conflicts are largely manifested via ethnic violence rather than radical Islamic violence.¹⁴ But increasing influence and control of the Taliban in Afghanistan can provide a safe space to train and operate, for radical militia from Central Asia in the coming future.

To mitigate the probable security threat from Afghanistan, India has adopted various strategies. India is one of the biggest non-western donors for Afghanistan. India and Afghanistan inked a strategic partnership agreement in October 2011 that serves as the foundation for military cooperation between the Indian Army and Afghan Security Forces (ASF). India has been training Afghan forces on Indian territory, and many have been taught since then. For the Afghan National Army, India offers custom-made training in "Military Policing Cadre."¹⁵ It also offers courses for professional development and capacity building. In late 2019, India offered

basic weapons training and leadership skills to an Afghan army and air force unit made up entirely of women.¹⁶ Apart from military aid, India has made considerable investments in Afghanistan. India has already pledged \$3 billion in development aid.¹⁷ Likewise, cooperation between India and Afghanistan has also paved the way for a burgeoning commercial relationship. The value of bilateral commerce between the two countries is \$1.5 billion.¹⁸ Over 500 flights have carried more than 5,000 metric tons of cargo directly helping Afghan farmers and small traders since the air freight route opened in 2017. Following the coronavirus epidemic, India donated 500,000 hydroxychloroquine pills and 100,000 paracetamol tablets to Afghanistan.¹⁹ India also sent the country 75,000 metric tons of wheat around the same period. The first shipment arrived in Herat, consisting of 251 containers carrying 5,022 metric tons of wheat via Chabahar port.²⁰

India is also trying to play a part in the post-NATO withdrawal peace process of Afghanistan. India's diplomat Rakesh Sood argues about how India can play their part in the peace process and that India has two choices in coming days. To begin, it may "wait and see" to see if Ghani and Abdullah can repair ties and restore political stability. Second, given the looming "enormous volatility," India may need to develop "new equities" in order to remain "involved in Afghanistan in the future." Azami, who was in Doha in February 2020, claims that the Taliban's capacity to interact with India is limited because "the mainstream Taliban is very wary of India." They aren't always as "ensnared by their Pakistani controllers' 'as they appear, he claims. He makes it apparent that certain Taliban members are "willing to cooperate with India."²¹ However, all the assumptions did not stand when Taliban took over Afghanistan within less than three weeks after the final withdrawal of NATO force on 30 August 2021. Following the Taliban's complete takeover of Afghanistan, India is at a loss as to how to address the country's new geopolitics. When the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, India's presence in the country was almost eliminated: consulates and embassies were closed, and ambassadors were evacuated.²² Due to the historically bad relations with Taliban of Afghanistan, India has struggled to align its position and the objective in Afghanistan.

3.1.1.2 Pakistan

Since 1947, when India and Pakistan gained independence from British control, their ties have been strained. The fact that when British India was partitioned in 1947, Muslim-majority areas were to be handed to Pakistan while Hindu-majority areas were to be assigned to India is the source of this sub-conflict. Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) were one of the 562 princely states that made up British India. It had a Muslim majority and was controlled by a Hindu maharaja who signed a cease-fire with Pakistan and began atrocities against the state's Muslim inhabitants. As a result, the populace revolted.²³

In the post-Cold War security paradigm, Pakistan paid close attention to the geostrategic relevance of Central Asian states. Pakistan's initial efforts to gain a foothold in Central Asia may have failed due to its ambiguous foreign policy aims, but the country remains a significant participant in the area. Pakistan's geostrategic

location, in fact, makes it impossible for Central Asian governments to overlook it.²⁴ Pakistan's ties with the CARs have strengthened in recent years. The present Central Asian regimes are attempting to develop new equations with Islamabad in the context of the evolving geopolitical scenario.

Pakistan's foreign policy has been shaped by two connected elements since its inception: fear of India and a desire to strike a strategic balance with India. Its self-proclaimed deep devotion to Islamic doctrine is another significant aspect of its foreign policy.²⁵ Acrimonious ties between India and Pakistan play a key part in the development of their national security strategies.²⁶ Pakistan's strategy towards the United States has always been based on the assumption that US military aid will assist Pakistan in achieving parity with India.²⁷ Likewise, Its strong politico-military relations with China are also intended to counteract India's regional dominance. On another level, Pakistan's ambition to lead the Islamic bloc is based on the belief that doing so will increase Pakistan's power in the bloc, which may then be utilized against India. Pakistan has long sought to portray itself as the only country in the area capable of competing with India. Islamabad's strategic thinking has always been based on this principle.²⁸ Thus, while accessing India's security relation with Central Asia it is necessary to factor Pakistan and its role in the region.

Pakistan's goals in Central Asia are driven by political and security concerns, economic and commercial advantages, opposing Indian influence, and a desire to serve as an energy transit hub between South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. In general Pakistan has three strategic advantages that concern India's security strategies for Central Asia.

First, Pakistan's geopolitical advantage in the region. Pakistan moved aggressively towards Central Asia when the CARs emerged, but policymakers were split on what Pakistan might gain from the region. Others want free trade routes via Afghanistan, while some desire an Islamic revolution in Central Asia. The disparity of viewpoints showed Pakistan's Central Asia Policy's limitations. Furthermore, Central Asian governments were apprehensive of Pakistan during this time because of its involvement in the Afghan conflict and backing for the mujahideen. Bilateral ties between Pakistan and CARs were at an all-time low during the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which was sponsored by Pakistan.²⁹ But after Pakistan joined as a frontline state in the global fight against terrorism, bilateral relations with the Central Asian region began to revive.³⁰ Since then a number of agreements spanning commerce and tourism, as well as cultural and economic cooperation, were inked. For this aim, Pakistan has created institutionalized systems. All of the CARs have formed Joint Economic Commissions (JECs).

Second, Pakistan policy towards Afghanistan is interlinked with India's Central Asia Policy. When it comes to Pakistan's Afghan strategy, it has been suggested that the country's defence planning has been hampered by a lack of geographical depth that would allow it to absorb an Indian strike and subsequently counterattack. Despite the numerous ramifications for Pakistan's social fabric and political culture, this illusive desire for strategic depth has motivated Pakistan's aggressive participation in Afghanistan. As a result, Pakistan's Afghan strategy was designed to produce a submissive Afghan government that would be sympathetic

to Pakistan, militarily too weak to dispute the Durand line, and unstable enough to raise the Pashtunistan problem. Furthermore, military strategists claimed that a friendly Afghanistan would provide a platform for Kashmiri terrorists to be trained, paid and armed. The Central Asian area was viewed as a strategic extension of Pakistan's domain.³¹ Currently, Pakistan is actively engaged in the peace process of Afghanistan. Pakistan has pushed for the Taliban to be included in discussions on Afghanistan's constitutional and political reforms. Pakistan held the first direct formal meetings between Taliban and Afghan government leaders on 7 July 2015.³² However, Prime Minister Imran Khan has mainly delegated decision-making on security and foreign policy to the top brass since assuming office in a disputed election in July 2018 and lacking a stable majority in parliament.³³

Likewise, the main roadblocks in India's desire to increase its economic and geopolitical holdings in oil-rich Central Asia are Pakistan's refusal to allow Indian products to travel through its borders and the instability in Afghanistan. Transit via Afghanistan is still a challenge because of the country's ongoing insecurity, which has been prompted by the Taliban's comeback.³⁴ Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has stated that peace with his nation will help India economically since it will allow Delhi to get direct access to resource-rich Central Asia via Pakistani territory.³⁵ The statement portrays visibly that Pakistan's denial to provide land connectivity to India is intentional.

Third, 'Islamic Leader' as a tool of strategic depth. Since the majority of the Muslim population in most CARs are Sunnis, it is assumed that they will naturally gravitate towards Pakistan. Pakistan has attempted to exploit its cultural ties with Central Asia to strengthen ties with the area. Pakistan is viewed as a cultural extension of the Central Asian area, which is in turn seen as fusing with the South Asian social milieu. Before 9/11 there were many instances that Pakistan had inclined with many religious-based extremist groups of Central Asia. In 1992 and 1993, the Pakistani political party, Jamaat-e-Islami backed Tajik extremists.³⁶ A summit of Muslim country leaders in Peshawar examined the steps to aid "Tajik brothers" in the "holy fight" and decided to deploy Afghans who had gained combat experience in the war against the Soviet army at the head of Tajik military formations. In addition, Tajik Islamists were given considerable material support.³⁷ At different times, the Uzbek government has alluded to the Jamaat-e-operations Islami as part of the great Islamic coalition against the Tajik government and its support for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).³⁸

Especially after 9/11, Pakistan had adopted a dual strategy towards CARs. On the one hand, it followed a policy of cordial ties with the CARs, but on the other, it continued to support dissident organizations in order to gain more power over the regimes. In March 2004, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan requested that Pakistan extradite a number of Al-Qaeda members who were detained during operations in Uzbekistan.³⁹ Pakistan's ambition to utilize Islam as a weapon to gain influence in these countries has been thwarted by its support for extremist groups in the Tajik civil war. Following this, the area was immersed in a surge of extremist activity, particularly in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and these countries began to view Pakistan with considerable mistrust.⁴⁰

Pakistan's activities concerning Central Asia directly oppose India's interest. Where India is working on mitigating religious extremism and improving connectivity with the region and Pakistan opposed India's both attempts. Pakistan has initiated its own connectivity projects like the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). Through this agreement, Afghan products are allowed to enter India through Pakistan's Wagah border crossing, while Indian goods are not permitted to enter Afghanistan through Pakistan. At the same time, India is exploring alternative routes and ways to connect with Afghanistan and Central Asia. Chabahar Port and Air corridors are the areas where India is attempting to bypass Pakistan to connect with the region. The Indian academic diaspora is also divided in context with India's option to deal with Pakistan to form a Central Asian Policy. During the visit to Delhi, the author finds two divisions where first believes that India is completely capable of connecting with Central Asia through Iran without dealing with Pakistan and second believes that the Indian government should start a channel of communication with Pakistan to find a possible way to cooperate regarding Central Asia. However, in both scenarios stability in Afghanistan is vital.

3.1.2 *China's Security Activity in Central Asia Region*

The Sino–Indian conflict of 1962, in particular, continues to influence India's views on China. Observers have speculated that the memory of the war is a visual scar of the severe “psychological trauma”⁴¹ and “huge shock”⁴² from which India's foreign policymaking may still be recovering. India and China are still engaged in a hard clash in their border regions. Chinese forces were observed on the Doklam plateau in June 2017, building a road through disputed terrain between China and Bhutan. India saw this as an intolerable alteration in the status quo and blocked the works by crossing its boundary – in this instance, a well-resolved one.⁴³ Likewise, on 15 June 2020, amid the COVID-19 outbreak, Chinese and Indian soldiers battled in the Galwan Valley, the first lethal combat between the two sides since 1975. China claimed the Galwan Valley in India as its own, which India rejected as an unjustified and unacceptable unilateral effort to change the status quo. The situation remains dangerous, despite both sides agreeing to remove soldiers from the border in February 2021.⁴⁴ Thus the rise of China in Central Asia is also another strategic challenge for India. Even though they share many features, such as being the world's most populous countries, having the fastest-growing major economies, and being in the developing world, their relationship has been plagued with suspicion and animosity since their 1962 conflict.

Not only in their shared border India and China's rivalry in the Asia-Pacific region is upscaling as well. India has its Indo-Pacific Strategy to challenge or mitigate the aggressive rise of China in the region. India's Indo-Pacific policy is motivated by the country's economic and cultural ties to the area, as well as security concerns and a wider goal of being more proactive in the world arena.⁴⁵ Considering China's assertive rise in the region Delhi has taken a strong stance on confronting China. In a veiled critique of China, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged the Indo-Pacific region to embrace freedom of navigation and overflight,

territorial integrity and respect for all states, regardless of their size, during the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on 1 June 2018. "We will promote a democratic and rules-based international order in which all nations, small and large, count as equal and sovereign. We will work with others to keep our seas, space and airways free and open."⁴⁶

By way of military weapon transfers, China has been pursuing direct security relations with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. As the fear of terror spilling over from Afghanistan and the alleged menace of the Islamic State intensified, China needed a new reason to enter the Central Asian security area strategically. China's proposal to form a four-nation antiterror quadrilateral regional alliance comprised of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and Tajikistan, made by General Fang Fenghui, Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), during his visit to Kabul in February 2016, came as a surprise. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has expressed his support for the plan.⁴⁷ China's strong involvement in Afghan security, which includes a guarantee of \$70 million in military aid, might change the regional security alignment, which now excludes Russia and India. On 3 August 2016, six months after General Fang Fenghui's visit to Kabul, top military commanders from China, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan formally formed a Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism (QCCM) in Counter-Terrorism in Urumqi, the capital of China's Xinjiang region.⁴⁸ The QCCM expands China's military operations in Afghanistan and Central Asia. The goal of the QCCM is to combat terrorism and extremism, both of which represent major risks to regional stability. It reaffirmed its desire and preparedness to work together to deal with those pressures in order to maintain all member nations' peace and stability.

While 'looking north' at Central Asia, India has acknowledged that it is not the only foreign player seeking to establish a presence in the region. It became clear very quickly that China is the other international player that India must compete with. New Delhi's opinions of Beijing's Central Asian agency are shaped by the convoluted history of their bilateral relations.⁴⁹ When it comes to economics, China's involvement in the area is considerable, but less so when it comes to security. Surprisingly, the two sectors are strongly linked here, as China's economic success in Central Asia is directly dependent on the latter's security condition. For China, its security interest in the region has two meanings. First, security within the region can guarantee the fluid implementation of the bilateral and multilateral projects running under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Second, due to the proximity Central Asia shares with the Xinjiang region, China's security concerns regarding the region means avoiding possible intrusion inside its territory.⁵⁰ Although China and India's foundational understanding regarding security in Central Asia roams around fighting religious extremism, terrorism and securing their investment in the region, the approach they adopt differs. While evaluating India's encounter with China in Central Asia, three probable scenarios can be found.

First, China as a partner. The proposal of a Central Asian alliance between India and China reflects the presumptions of their bilateral ties after 1998.⁵¹ In this regard, both nations "became considerably more balanced and open in respecting each other's perspectives and preferences"⁵² as they "became more secure of

their identities and [foreign policy] independence.” As a result, Beijing’s Central Asian agency has been viewed as a sincere effort “to assuage the natural anxieties of its neighbours and respond to their concerns.”⁵³ Indian observers, on the other hand, have praised the fact that the endeavour was not motivated by a desire to “control and influence”⁵⁴ the region. The potential for boosting India’s economic participation and, as a result, its political clout in the area is enormous. In reality, India’s long-standing democratic heritage and relatively superior track record in dealing with minorities (especially if it continues to treat internal Muslim concerns sensitively) make it more appealing to the Muslim-dominated area. In reality, a shared concern for Central Asia, India and China in this context would be to prevent the region from becoming a breeding ground for Islamic extremism from neighbouring Afghanistan. Instability in the Af-Pak area, as well as the prospect of extremists finding refuge in Central Asian countries sympathetic to their cause, poses a threat to all. Islam is now a cultural concern throughout Central Asia; however, it is more prevalent in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. “At the mass level, there is broad enthusiasm for cultural revival, which remains restricted to performing ancient traditions, folk rites, and ethos based in Central Asian civilization,” a scholar has pointed out.⁵⁵

Second, China is a threat.⁵⁶ Despite declarations of goodwill and pragmatic strategic collaboration, the Central Asian context suggests that both India and China are still haunted by the ghosts of the past in their international relations. According to the narratives around India’s Central Asian strategy, deep-seated “apprehensions” between New Delhi and Beijing have led both parties “wary of initiating [together] measures.” India, in particular, is concerned about the “uncertainty” surrounding China’s future political and military orientation, as well as “how [China’s] increasing strength [in Asia] will be employed.”⁵⁷ Despite the changed geopolitical context, many Indian analysts regard China’s relations with Central Asia as just a fresh iteration of the country’s long-standing policy of limiting India through aid to nations in New Delhi’s strategic region. Such sentiments about China’s Central Asian agency show that “despite patchy advances, Sino-Indian ties will remain competitive [because] the two nations have distinct self-images and political systems.” They both want to become significant players in Asia and beyond.” Likewise, the intersection between growing rivalry between China and India and increasing depth of partnership between China–Pakistan–Afghanistan can be used against India in the coming days.

Third, China as a model.⁵⁸ Indian opinions of China do not appear to be dominated by negative feelings as they were in previous years, but rather by a desire to learn more about what is going on there and to pursue trade and investment prospects.⁵⁹ India was concerned that when it opened its economy in the early 1990s, China’s better industrial competitiveness would force many Indian businesses out of business.⁶⁰ To the satisfaction of Indian officials, it rapidly became clear that the benefits of expanded commerce with China considerably exceeded the drawbacks. In the contemporary security environment of the region, India takes China as a model in various contexts. First, Beijing negotiated boundary delineation treaties with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan between 1994 and 2002,

and the problem is now considered settled, while the subject of cross-border river management with Kazakhstan remains unresolved.⁶¹ The second security goal was to handle the 300,000-strong Uyghur diaspora in Central Asia. The issue has now been resolved; all autonomist Uyghur organizations have been disbanded, Central Asian governments have control over their own Uyghur minorities, and bilateral friendship declarations signed between Central Asian states and China all include provisions for a joint fight against separatism, as well as procedures to expel Uyghur dissidents.⁶² On the other hand, China is discreetly working to protect its interests in post-US Afghanistan amid all of the regional turmoil. Beijing is said to be working closely with Kabul on the development of the Peshawar–Kabul highway, which would link Pakistan and Afghanistan and allow Kabul to participate in China's vast infrastructure and investment plan under the BRI.⁶³

3.1.3 Great Power Rivalry and Security Complex in Central Asia

The great power rivalry in Central Asia security sphere posed an immense threat to India. The rising competition between Russia, China and the United States in the region makes the region security complexities more volatile. So, the India's engagement in the region to establish the stability in the region, for the betterment of the South and Central Asia as a whole, comes under the scrutiny. The confrontation between India and China, or the United States and Russia or China or Russia, puts the future of the regional prosperity in the back seat.

The contemporary world is confronted with an unparalleled amalgamation of global security risks and instability. Climate change, mass migration, terrorism, artificial intelligence, conflict and shifting geopolitical conditions are just a few of the concerns that the world's leaders will need to work together to address in order to keep tensions from blowing up. In an increasingly interconnected world, this, along with rising rates of both domestic and international crime and criminal organizations that increasingly act internationally, can constitute an insurmountable threat to the global community. The Central Asian region continues to be linked by the world community to drug trafficking, the threat of terrorism and religious extremism and the underdevelopment of civil and political institutions. Five of the region's nations are still unable to fully regulate the issues that keep coming up. The escalating terrorist threat in Afghanistan and the challenging circumstances surrounding Syria are factors contributing to the region's increased securitization.⁶⁴ So, all the great powers are motivated by fulfilling their interests which time and again cause tension between them.

US Approach to Central Asia: The closeness of Central Asia to Russia and China is a major factor in US objectives. As is frequently claimed, American participation in Central Asia is essentially strategic in character, i.e., it is not primarily related to oil access or an endeavour to democratize the area.

The United States and the West in general find themselves increasingly dependent on the continued stability and development of the Central Eurasian region. The United States is heavily invested in Afghanistan, and

its engagement there and in Central Asian states is a long-term endeavour. The future of this region has a considerable bearing on the development of the Global War on Terrorism and in general on US security interests in Eurasia; the maintenance of access to airspace and territory in the heart of Asia; the development of alternative sources of energy; and the furthering of freedom and democratic development.⁶⁵

Lynn Pascoe, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, and Eurasia, underlined the region's importance in US foreign policy in June 2004:

The primary strategic goal of the United States in Central Asia is to see the development of independent, democratic, and stable states, committed to the kind of political and economic reform that is essential to modern societies and on the path to integration and to the world economy. The strategy that we follow is based on simultaneous pursuit of three related goals. The first of these goals is security. Our counterterrorism cooperation bolsters the sovereignty and independence of these states and provides them with the stability needed to undertake the reforms that are in their long-term interest. However, for these nations to be truly stable over the long-term and to be fully integrated into the international community, to achieve their potential, they must allow for greater transparency, respect for human rights, and movement toward democratic policy. Finally, the development of Central Asia's economic potential, including its extensive natural resources, requires free market economy reforms and foreign direct investment. This is the only way to improve the well-being of the region's people, diversify world energy sources, and facilitate the movement of these countries into the world economy.⁶⁶

The US policy of supporting Central Asian states' independence, integrity and security serves to extend the country's important geostrategic interest in preventing the establishment of a Eurasian empire on either continent. While Washington acknowledges that it desires competitive energy access for US companies, it is fully aware that it cannot totally replace Russian or Chinese interests in the region. Instead, to avoid any imperial rebirth in Eurasia, the United States merely wishes to prevent Russia or any other foreign force from dominating Central Asian energy markets.

Since the region's five countries' independence in 1991, US policy in Central Asia has gone through two periods. During the first period, which lasted from the dissolution of the Soviet Union until the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, US policy was focused on three priorities: securing the legacy of Soviet weapons of mass destruction; assisting Central Asian countries in achieving and defending their newly won sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity against a potential resurgence of Russian neo-imperialism; and breaking up Russia's monopoly over pipelines and transit troubles. After September 11, as the second phase of US policy towards Central Asia began to take shape, Washington's perspective and engagement in the region

shifted dramatically.⁶⁷ To be sure, there was still enthusiasm in pursuing the previous decade's long-term political and economic reform programme, but military and security considerations became more important factors in US engagement in Central Asia. The logistical requirements of supporting large-scale US military operations in Afghanistan, as well as the accompanying high reliance on access to regional military infrastructure, took precedence over a commitment to the development of political, economic and human rights reforms.

The US strategy for Central Asia is mainly based on security. The US focus on terrorism originates from the Taliban and Al-Qaeda's continued presence in Afghanistan, which has spread to Central Asia and beyond. During the Afghan War, the United States maintained two bases, one in Uzbekistan for a brief time and the other in Kyrgyzstan for a longer time. After condemning the Uzbek assault on protesters, the United States was ordered to leave the Karshi-Khanabad facility in Uzbekistan in 2005.⁶⁸ These bases were utilized by the US military as a transit point to supply soldiers in Afghanistan. An important site of engagement has also been the Manas airport in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Although Kyrgyzstan was glad to be part of the war on terror, due to the pressure from Moscow there were some disturbances for the United States to use these bases around the 2010 period. Later when the United States offered three times more rental support to Kyrgyzstan, they extended the contract which displeased Moscow. Likewise, the United States continues to utilize Termez, Uzbekistan, as a supply depot for Afghanistan. And a key aspect of this agreement is the use of local contractors to transport products, which serves to fill the coffers of numerous Uzbek enterprises, some of which are government-owned. In addition, the United States has provided Uzbekistan with US\$120 million to help establish a rail link between Termez and Mazar-e-Shans in Afghanistan.

As previously stated, the United States wants to halt drug trafficking, and in 2011, the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs established the Central Asian Counternarcotics Initiative (CACI).⁶⁹ To better identify, intercept and punish illicit trafficking, the United States has committed over \$90 million in border security, including customs and border guard training, enhanced border security equipment and the establishment of 13 operational border stations in the area. Likewise, exercises like Steppe Eagle⁷⁰ and the State Partnership Program, which brings together armed forces from throughout Central Asia, help to enhance confidence, interoperability and regional security. Regularly planned exercises and joint training have been helping US programmes build and sustain long-term ties and personnel linkages.⁷¹

Furthermore, the United States provides these countries with tiny sums of foreign aid. This assistance is a gift, not a debt, as China and Russia do. More than \$9 billion in direct aid has been donated by the United States to the area to help democratic transformation and economic growth, as well as humanitarian help.⁷² Also, over 70 initiatives in Central Asia have been supported by the United States to safeguard and preserve the region's unique cultural heritage, customs and archaeological sites for future generations. However, the volumes are tiny, and the influence is negligible. Even though US commerce with these Central Asian countries

Table 3.1 US Trade with Central Asian States

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>year</i>
1	Kazakhstan	\$740 million	\$1.2 billion	2019
2	Kyrgyzstan	\$21 million	\$5 million	2019
3	Tajikistan	\$7.5 million	\$0.9 million	2019
4	Turkmenistan	\$28.5 million	\$16.2 million	2019
5	Uzbekistan	\$506 million	\$34 million	2019

Source: Data is compiled from the US Office of the Trade Representative and the Census Bureau of the USA. From: <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia> <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/index.html>.

is limited, American corporations have built major interests, particularly in the energy sector. Chevron, for example, holds a 50% stake in the Tengiz oil reserves in Western Kazakhstan. Exxon controls 20% of the company, as does Kazakhstan's government.⁷³ Meanwhile, other private sectors in the United States have spent more than \$31 billion in commercial operations in the area, creating thousands of jobs and strengthening human potential (Table 3.1).

Kazakhstan is the US's largest trading partner in Central Asia. In the year 2019, Kazakhstan was the US's 86th largest export and 72nd largest import partner. The goods export has risen 1.2% compared to 2018 and 22.6% compared to 2009. But the import has gone down to 11.9% compared to 2018 and 20.6% compared to 2009. The United States mostly imports mineral fuels, iron and steel, inorganic chemicals, other base metals (uranium) and lead.⁷⁴ Likewise, Uzbekistan also has a substantial share of trade with the United States. In 2019 Uzbekistan was the US 101st largest export and 148th largest import trading partner. The import of goods went up 70.5% compared to 2018 and 418.3 % compared to 2009. The United States mostly imports agricultural products, fruits, spices, tea and herbals, tobacco and rice.⁷⁵

Additionally, the United States has established significant people-to-people links with each of the Central Asian nations. Central Asians visit American Spaces 1.4 million times a year to study English, experience American culture and develop in-demand skills. Since independence, the United States has funded approximately 40,000 Central Asian students, professionals and officials to travel to the United States for professional development.

In 2020, the US Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, released 'United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025: Advancing Sovereignty and Economic Prosperity'. The bureau has stated six main objectives that the United States have in Central Asia.

- a Support and strengthen the sovereignty and independence of the Central Asian States, individually and as a region.
- b Reduce terrorist threats in Central Asia.
- c Expand and maintain support for stability in Afghanistan.
- d Encourage connectivity between Central Asia and Afghanistan.

- e Promote rule of law reform and respect for human rights.
- f Promote US investment in and development of Central Asia.⁷⁶

To optimize cooperation efforts and ensure that US participation benefits Central Asian states' development and resilience, the US consults and collaborates with like-minded partners, including the European Union and those with C5+1 platforms. C5+1 events bring together representatives from the five Central Asian countries and the United States to discuss shared problems and foster regional discussion and cooperation.

The Secretary of State of the United States and the Foreign Ministers of the Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan met virtually on 23 April 2021 under the C5+1 format. Participants commemorated the C5+1 format's five-year anniversary, which began in November 2015, by praising the platform's achievements in boosting regional discussion, cooperation and partnership among the participating countries. The format has aided in expanding economic and energy connection and commerce, reducing environmental and health concerns, working together to confront security risks and pushing for women's full participation in all sectors of member countries' political, economic and social lives.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the long-term objective of both Moscow and Beijing to strengthen their influence in Central Asia may exacerbate tensions between these two countries and possibly among regional governments. The rivalry between the two powers has prompted CARs to seek continuing Western participation in the region in order to contain Russian and Chinese ambitions.⁷⁸ All of these changes set the stage for the third phase of US strategy towards Central Asia.

Russia's Approach to Central Asia: In Russian foreign policy, Central Asia is one of the most significant areas. In Central Asia, Russia's foreign policy has three primary objectives. The first is to promote military–technical cooperation and security (from the modernization of the armed forces of the states of the region to the construction of military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). The second is to make energy projects in the oil and gas sector, as well as hydropower, more accessible.⁷⁹ The third priority is to enhance the Eurasian Economic Union's (EAEU) integration structures, of which Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are full members and Tajikistan is a potential member. Likewise, having a foothold in Central Asia has ideological significance for Russia. Russia considers this region to be a part of the Russian world (*Russkiy Mir*), and involvement in Eurasian integration by the governments in this region is a need for Russia's objective of full reintegration of the post-Soviet territory.⁸⁰

Furthermore, a variety of variables influence the significance of the Central Asian area for Russia. Some factors, such as the apparent instability of borders (often arbitrarily drawn between republics during the Soviet period), centuries-old territorial disputes, interethnic (or inter-clan) conflicts both between and within the new independent states, and a chronically unstable neighbouring Afghanistan, threaten to destabilize the region.⁸¹ The formation of a 'vacuum of influence' and the porousness of borders might bolster criminal and fundamentalist groups, endangering Russia's security.

Russia prioritizes multilateral accords, which are supplemented with bilateral accords. The pattern can be seen that when multilateral agreements have been reached, they have been somewhat more effective in the field of security, but far less so in other areas. The CSTO⁸² (Collective Security Treaty Organization), which is modelled after NATO, has gained widespread acceptance as a security guarantee. Except for Uzbekistan, which opted out in 2010, all Central Asia's countries are presently members. Russians have played a vital role in peaceful resolution to the civil war in Tajikistan. Russia maintains air force bases in Kant (Kyrgyzstan) and Tajikistan (Base 201), as well as military installations in Kazakhstan. The CSTO organizes military exercises such as Rubezh⁸³ to safeguard the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border and Operation Channel to combat drug trafficking from Afghanistan on a regular basis. In the event of an emergency, the CSTO possesses special quick reaction troops to assist CARs.

Russia is using the platform of CSTO to promote their security interest in the region. For instance, in 2017 'Joint Statement by the Member States of the CSTO on the Situation in Afghanistan and the Threat of the Strengthening of International Terrorist and Extremist Organizations in the Northern Provinces of Afghanistan, issued during the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly' mentioned that

In this context, the CSTO Member States welcome the Russian initiative on the promotion of a settlement in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan within the framework of the Moscow consultations on Afghanistan, which is a series of practical talks that were launched to facilitate the national reconciliation process and a direct dialogue between the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban groups. These consultations are a mechanism for attaining a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan in keeping with the UN Security Council criteria.⁸⁴

In this context, Russia's activities in Afghanistan have increased during this time and have been backed by the member states of CSTO.

Russia also has a strong role in the Central Asian economy; however, its position is deteriorating year after year in comparison to China's. The total trade volume between Russia and Central Asia accounted approximately \$18 billion. With the largest trade partner of the region Russia and Kazakhstan, trade accounted \$1.9 billion in 2018.⁸⁵ Russia has invested \$12.2 billion in Kazakhstan by the end of 2018.⁸⁶ Russia has made a total investment of more than \$200 million in Kyrgyzstan, another Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) member.⁸⁷ The overall amount of Russian investment in Uzbekistan in 2018 was over USD 9 billion.⁸⁸ Russian investment in Tajikistan has totalled USD 1.67 billion.⁸⁹ Russia's primary regional investors were energy corporations. Lukoil made a \$7 billion investment in Kazakhstan.⁹⁰ Gazprom has made a \$1 billion investment in Kazakhstan.⁹¹ Lukoil made a \$8 billion investment in Uzbekistan.⁹² Gazprom has made a \$400 million investment in Uzbekistan.⁹³ The Atyrau–Samara oil pipeline (15 million tons per year), the Makhachkala–Tikhoretsk–Novorossiysk oil pipeline (2.5 million tons per year), the Tengiz–Novorossiysk Caspian Pipeline Consortium (35 million

tons per year), the Central Asia–Centre gas pipeline and the Bukhara–Ural gas pipeline all connect Central Asia with Russia. Kazakhstan's mining sector received a 2.6-billion-dollar investment from Russia. Russia and Uzbekistan inked an inter-governmental agreement in September 2018 to develop a nuclear power plant developed by Rosatom.⁹⁴

As a political tool, Russia employs cultural links, historical legacy and Russian-language media. Connections among the political elite, both the elder generation descended from the Soviet nomenklatura, and the younger generation linked to Russia through commercial ties, are also important. Several public institutions, such as the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Federal Agency for the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), as well as Russian minority organizations and Slavic colleges, promote Russia's interests.⁹⁵ Russian minorities, particularly in Kazakhstan, where Russians make up roughly 23% of the population, are another tool of influence in the area. It is believed that nearly half of the residents in the five Central Asian countries speak Russian fluently.

On the other hand, Central Asian countries have been independent for more than 20 years and have gradually separated themselves from Russia as part of their identity construction. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan switched from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet shortly after gaining independence. Kazakhstan intends to follow suit in 2025. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the official language is now the national language, which is used in all documents. Only 20% of Kazakh and 9% of Uzbek schools teach Russian, while Turkmenistan and Tajikistan have shuttered two-thirds of their Russian schools.⁹⁶

In October 2020, the Foreign Ministers of five Central Asian States and Russia has identified the area of cooperation in coming future, which includes:

- a Cooperation in the Political and diplomatic sphere.
- b Security.
- c Trade and economy.
- d Transport.
- e Environmental protection and climate change adaptation.
- f Energy.
- g Sanitary and epidemiological safety.
- h Migration.
- i Culture and education.⁹⁷

Among all, Russia's Central Asian strategy will continue to prioritize security. It prefers bilateral connections with regional nations, stronger military ties and a larger military presence in the area.

China's Approach to Central Asia: Primarily China's interest in Central Asia contains, Security, Economy and Energy. These three interests can be broken down into six sub-interests that sums China's aim and objectives in the region: (a) border security; (b) energy; (c) economic interests; (d) combating the "East Turkestan" movement; (e) geopolitics; and (f) the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁹⁸ China maintains the timely communication and strategic discussion through the

C+C5 mechanism which holds various levels of talks including foreign, defence and finance ministry.⁹⁹

China's peripheral security in Central Asia includes two aspects. First, the stability, economic well-being, political order and security of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China's westernmost region, which shares a long border with Russia, Mongolia and three Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The second goal, the establishment of a friendly and secure ring of nations encircling the Xinjiang area, is inextricably tied to the first one.¹⁰⁰ One of the key goals of its regional security strategy is to keep Central Asia free of hegemonic domination by major adversaries like the United States, given that Russian influence has waned and alliance with Russia is regarded to promote strategic goals.¹⁰¹ Beijing has given the 3000 km of border China shares with Central Asia top priority in resolving all issues and stabilizing the area, which is important to the security stability of China's western frontier.¹⁰²

Between 2000 and 2019, the consumption of oil products in China grew rapidly (4.7%/year).¹⁰³ Almost half of oil product consumption is accounted for by the transport market, led by industry with about 30% in 2019. China imports more than half of its crude supplies from West Asian countries of Iraq, Oman, Yemen, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and all these countries are exposed to geopolitical risk. Additionally, considering the South China Sea disputes along with Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, China's supply route is also at a vulnerable state.¹⁰⁴ Thus, hydrocarbon-rich Central Asian countries have been considered crucial for diversifying China's domestic energy mix. Likewise, the estimated uranium reserves of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are pegged at 450,400 tonnes and another 477,800 tonnes of inferred uranium, according to projections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Assured Resources.¹⁰⁵ Around 16.9% of the world's total uranium resources are accounted for by the total amount of reserves in Central Asia. China has commissioned 13 nuclear power projects with an installed capacity of 14.7 GW and will build 31 new reactors to raise its capacity to 58 GW by 2020.¹⁰⁶ To minimize the increasing gap between the demand and the supply of uranium in China's nuclear programmes, overseas equity in uranium resources was acquired by China Nuclear International Uranium Corporation (SinoU) and China Guangdong Nuclear Uranium Resources Co Ltd (CGN-URC).¹⁰⁷ SinoU is operating in 'Zalpak Mine' of Kazakhstan and CGN-URC is operating in 'Irkol & Semizbai Mine' of Kazakhstan and 'Boztau black shales Mine' of Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁸ As per the prediction made by Chen, Xing & Du in their paper that due to less mining of uranium in domestic soil, China is going to have 80% dependency abroad for their uranium supply which makes the uranium-rich Central Asia crucial for China.

Even though Central Asia only accounts for around 1% of China's total imports and exports, China is Central Asia's most significant commercial partner. On the other hand, considering the substantial amount of population that Central Asia has, it is a good market for China's goods and supplies. According to official figures from each nation in 2019, China is Kyrgyzstan's and Uzbekistan's main trading partners in terms of imports, and Turkmenistan's major trading partner in terms of exports. China is also a popular destination for imports and exports

from Central Asian nations. Likewise, by April 2017, China has signed contracts worth US\$304.9 billion with its regional partners in transportation, communication, energy infrastructure, financial connections, technology transfer and trade facilitation.¹⁰⁹ Exports of products from Central Asian nations to China increased by 35% from US\$15,054 million to US\$20,276 million between 2015 and 2019, with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan having the largest growth rates of over 50%.¹¹⁰ And in terms of FDI inflows in the region, China became number one beating Russia.

China also has an interest in containing the impact of the 'East Turkestan Movement' (ETIM). The movement was created by a Uighur from Kashgar Province of Xinjiang goes by the name Hasan Mahsum. The movement wants to establish an independent state known as East Turkestan, which would encompass portions of Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the XUAR. ETIM serves as a nexus for a variety of breakaway organizations, including those operating in Pakistan and Central Asia. One of the most significant factions is the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), which was founded in 2006 by Uighurs who migrated to Afghanistan and Pakistan in the 1990s.¹¹¹ In China, the Uighurs number over 10 million people, the majority of whom live in Xinjiang, which became a province in 1884. They are Turkic in origin, speak Uighur, and the majority follow Sufi Islam. Following the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the Uighurs were granted statehood twice: once from 1931 to 1934, and again from 1944 to 1949, when the communists grabbed power and gained entire control of the province. Although many Uighurs complained of forced assimilation, Xinjiang was designated as an "autonomous territory" of the People's Republic of China in 1955.¹¹²

According to Sébastien Peyrouse, "If Chinese influence in Central Asia has evolved during the two post-Soviet decades, China's key interests have not changed. The Central Asian zone has strategic value in Beijing's eyes owing to its relationship with Xinjiang."¹¹³ China's economic interests in Central Asia, according to Huasheng Zhao, are small in terms of explaining Chinese interest in the area, however, its role in ensuring the stability and economic growth of Xinjiang, and hence China's territorial integrity, is critical.¹¹⁴ In addition, he claims that the justification of China's involvement in Central Asia is intrinsically driven by internal demands, notably in terms of security. As Clarke argued,

Xinjiang, like Taiwan and neighbouring Tibet, is a neuralgic issue for China, which desperately needs internal stability in that predominantly Muslim, resource-rich and strategically important region. Beijing's strategic and energy objectives are based on stability in Xinjiang, and its Central Asian policies grow out of its preoccupation with stability there.¹¹⁵

Geopolitically, China's approach towards central Asia has few significance. Firstly, in the post 2001 scenario and increasing US presence in the region China's approach was guided by limiting US influence in the region. However, the US decision to leave Afghanistan within September 2021 forced China to rethink their political agendas in the region as security instability in Afghanistan and Central Asia

both have spillover impact on China. Secondly, Central Asian geography holds an important significance in China's 'March West' and connecting Eurasia to Western World projects. Thus, China is aiming to balance Russia, mitigate the US and EU presence and block new powers to gain influence in the region.¹¹⁶

The SCO is China's attempt to take a multilateral approach to Central Asia. The norms, declared policies and rhetoric of the SCO are heavily influenced by China's evolving foreign policy thinking since the early 1990s, especially Beijing's formulation of "new regionalism" and "new security concept" to promote China's "peaceful rise" in international affairs. SCO is a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance founded in June 2001 by China's Shanghai Five, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, followed by Uzbekistan joined in 2001. India and Pakistan joined in June 2017, and there are a slew of observer countries, including Iran and Afghanistan.¹¹⁷ It makes the organization the world's largest and most powerful in terms of geographic size and population. SCO put strong emphasis on work against three evils in the region that are terrorism, separatism and extremism. The SCO, which was established in June 2001, is critical not just for understanding China's approach to Central Asia, but also for the development of its larger foreign policy grand plan. Indeed, the SCO is the first multinational organization founded by China. The SCO, according to Beijing, is an example of "new regionalism" since it is defined by "open, functional, interest-based cooperation among contiguous nations," which is founded on mutual respect for member states' sovereignty.¹¹⁸

While addressing the virtual summit to commemorate the 30th anniversary of China's diplomatic presence in Central Asia, president Xi proposed five proposals to the leader of the region¹¹⁹;

- a To highlight the role model of excellent neighbourly friendship China will act on the principles of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness, and will collaborate with Central Asian countries to increase high-level exchanges and strategic communication, as well as to ensure the continued success of the "China plus Central Asia" foreign ministers' meeting and other dialogue and cooperation mechanisms.
- b To create a collaboration belt for high-quality development China is eager to welcome Central Asian countries into its large market. China will continue to convene the China-Central Asia Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum and import more high-quality items and agricultural products from the region.
- c To reinforce the shield in defence of peace China and Central Asia must continue to combat terrorist, extremist, and separatist movements, boost regional security, and expand cooperation in areas such as border management and control.
- d To create a family with a variety of interactions China and Central Asia must develop a framework for people-to-people exchanges, accelerate the creation of culture centres in each other's countries, actively engage in conversation on cultural heritage, and continue to promote contacts between women, think tanks, media and other sectors.
- e To safeguard the global village, which enjoys peace and progress The Chinese government will provide 500 million US dollars in grant assistance to Central

Table 3.2 Bilateral Trade of China (in Billions \$)

Country	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Kazakhstan	22.36	17.25	10.56	7.8	10.46	11.62
Kyrgyzstan	1.4	1.2	1	1.5	1.5	2
Tajikistan	0.78	0.71	0.57	0.48	0.45	0.58
Turkmenistan	9.6	9.9	8.2	5.6	6.6	7.9
Uzbekistan	6.2	6	5	3.6	4.2	5.7

Source: Pradhan, Ramakrushna. "The rise of China in Central Asia: The new Silk Road diplomacy." *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 11 (2018): 9–29.

Asian countries in support of livelihood programmes by 2025, as well as 5,000 seminar and workshop opportunities to help Central Asian countries train professionals in health, poverty reduction for agricultural development, connectivity, information technology, and other fields, and to strengthen the driving force for self-generated development.

China's trade with Central Asia grew from \$700 million in 1998 to \$25 billion in 2008 and then doubled again in 2013 to \$49 billion, surpassing Russia as the region's largest trading partner (Table 3.2).¹²⁰

There is an increasing trade deficit between Central Asian states and China. However, the ongoing energy-related projects in the region are expected to boost Central Asian states' trade relations with China as it will make China a biggest consumer of Central Asian hydrocarbons.

Likewise, evaluating the behaviour of the Chinese administration under president Xi, BRI is one of the major strategies for him to achieve global economic dominance. Similarly, Central Asia has become the centrepiece of China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB).¹²¹ President Xi Jinping launched the BRI in late 2013, which combines a land-based SREB and a sea-based 21st Century Maritime Silk Road to connect China and Europe. While connecting China with Europe, the development of Central Asian infrastructure and securing those infrastructures for uninterrupted connectivity beyond the region is essential for China. Chinese investment in Central Asia mostly consists of energy-related connectivity projects. China has made strategic investments within the BRI framework which not only give them access to the energy resources of Central Asia but due to increasing trade deficit and debt put China in a politically influential position in the region.

3.1.4 Non-Traditional Security Threat in India's Neighbourhood

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, there has been a change in how "security" is understood, leading to the acceptance of non-military, or "non-traditional," security concerns. A wide range of issues affecting human security fall under the umbrella of non-traditional security (NTS), including mass migration, resource depletion, infectious diseases, natural disasters and transnational crime. This is referred to as the human security–development nexus by experts. Historically,

debates on more “immediate” dangers to national security, including territorial invasion, have generally excluded these NTS areas. Transnational actors must frequently be involved in order to address these issues.¹²² Having said that India’s security policy towards Central Asia has such transnational issues involved which are non-traditional in nature.

3.1.4.1 Religious Extremism and Terrorism

For decades, India has suffered greatly as a result of cross-border terrorism perpetrated by terrorist organizations utilizing illicit weapons smuggled across the country’s borders. Illicit transfers and destabilizing stockpiles of small arms and light weapons, as well as their ammunition, continue to be a defining factor in undermining peace and security at the national, regional and global levels and have exacerbated situations for vulnerable populations already experiencing conflict. According to the Ministry of Defense, Government of India:

The emergence of ideology linked terrorism, the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW), the proliferation of WMD (Weapons of Mass Destruction) and globalisation of its economy are some of the factors which link India’s security directly with the extended neighbourhood.¹²³

Terrorist assaults on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001 and the devastating attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, both carried out by Islamic Jihadi forces headquartered in the Pakistan–Afghanistan area, have brought the need to confront armed religious extremism into sharp focus.¹²⁴ In regards to Central Asia, the rise of the IMU, a transnational militant Islamist organization, and its criminal operations connected to heroin trafficking from Afghanistan have been repeatedly linked to extremism and terrorism throughout Central Asia.¹²⁵ It’s important to note that extreme Islamic forces are on the rise in the Fergana Valley, which has historically been the country’s most devout region. It is now the “educational centre” for extremists in Central Asia. Most religious leaders in Central Asia are still in the ‘proselytising phase,’ more concerned with educating new clerics and raising religious literacy among the public than with changing society’s rules to conform to Islamic ones.

Central Asians have been linked to both Daesh and Al-Qaeda-affiliated organizations. There are regions of concern in Central Asia, such as the Fergana valley; in particular, southern Kyrgyzstan, where ethnic tensions between Uzbek and Kyrgyz people have traditionally been severe. It’s hard to estimate the exact number of Central Asian militants in Syria and Iraq. Estimated numbers in 2015 varied from 1,400 to 2,000. Apart from the normal difficulties in identifying exact statistics, defining exact nationality vs ethnicity is challenging.¹²⁶ Recruitment can take place on a small scale, through individuals or small groups, making detection difficult. For example, just a few members of an all-female prayer group in Osh, which had around 30 members, travelled to Syria, while the others were unaware of their plans.¹²⁷ Central Asia is more a recruiting ground rather than a subject to attack.¹²⁸

Thus, rising religious extremism and the volatility of terrorism in the region imply its neighbouring countries, including India.

In J&K, Pakistan sponsors cross-border terrorism, as does Russia in Chechnya, and Central Asia in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Meanwhile, there are rumours that Khattab, a Jordanian-born Chechen field commander, and Jumabai Namaughani, a Central Asian fellow-militant, have claimed that their goal is to establish new Islamist nations in the CIS. They want to do so with the support of Afghanistan's, Pakistan's and West Asia's hard-line Islamic groups.¹²⁹ Likewise, currently, there is the emergence of a few more religious extremist groups within Central Asia. Wahhabism is an ultra-conservative Islamic philosophy that originates in Saudi Arabia and has influenced several Central Asian terrorist groups.¹³⁰ Wahhabism, which is based on the theological work of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, an 18th-century Arabian cleric, represents a "campaign of purification and renewal" in the Islamic world, motivating believers to scorn those who have strayed too far from what is considered true Islam, deeming those who are thought to be practising insufficiently as "false Muslims."¹³¹

New Delhi regards the region as a hotbed of religious extremism and is concerned about the growth of radical Islamist organizations that may pose a terrorist danger.¹³² Central Asia has been a fruitful recruitment area for such groups since the fall of the Soviet Union, and there are reportedly dozens of jihadist groups headquartered in the region.¹³³ Given the global character of these organizations, as well as their ties to the Taliban and other terrorist groups in neighbouring countries, New Delhi is understandably concerned. The concern is that if jihadist organizations continue to form, they would represent a significant threat to India's security, particularly in the disputed state of Kashmir.¹³⁴ Among five Central Asian states, Tajikistan is extremely important to India. It is India's closest Central Asian neighbour, and it is separated from Pakistan-occupied Kashmir by only a 20-kilometre strip of Afghan territory known as the Wakhan corridor.¹³⁵

3.1.4.2 Drugs and Arms Trafficking

Drug trafficking is another terrorism-related issue that India, Russia and the CARs are dealing with. The lucrative drug traffic in Central Asia is a serious danger to the region's stability. Drug trafficking may support terrorism in a variety of ways, according to academic and policy studies, including through diverse socioeconomic and geographical variables.¹³⁶ Although terrorist groups have been linked to a variety of illegal economic activities (including human trafficking, money laundering, oil smuggling, and the looting of diamonds and cultural artefacts), it is their involvement in the drug trade that has drawn the most attention from politicians, academics and policy analysts.¹³⁷ Drug trafficking has been placed to the top of the list of illicit money-making operations of terrorist groups since it represents the most profitable source of cash for organized criminal organizations.¹³⁸ Especially after 9/11, as public awareness grew, the US and other states were able to successfully halt the flow of funds to these organizations. As a result, these organizations were forced to go underground in order to get the funds they needed to recruit

membership, supplies and carry out their missions. And, because underground or black markets, particularly drug markets, are profitable and non-discriminatory, a range of criminal actors have utilized, and continue to exploit, drug trafficking as a method of obtaining the required cash.¹³⁹ While the incentive for networking across these groups is primarily financial, globalization has made the process much easier. The Northern Route, which runs across Central Asia, is becoming a major trafficking route for illegal opiates and precursor chemicals. Central Asia has become a fertile ground for illegal activity because of its advantageous placement between a big consumer of opiates (Russia) and a leading producer of opiates (Afghanistan). The opiate industry is estimated to be worth \$65 billion by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), with Afghanistan dominating 80–90% of manufacturing and distribution for more than a decade.¹⁴⁰

On the other hand, illegal arms trade in Central Asia raises mounting concerns on India's security perception regarding the region. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, large stockpiles of military hardware and nuclear material were left in newly independent governments with limited, if any, capacity to manage them. This scenario, along with Central Asia's weak economy and permeable borders, has drawn worldwide attention to the possibility of materials being stolen, sold or moved without difficulty. Central Asia acts as a transit zone for drug, human and weapon trafficking. Because the security dynamics in Afghanistan and Central Asia are so tightly linked, Afghanistan is critical to understanding the environment that nurtures the manifestations of international terrorism that can currently be seen in the region. Furthermore, most ties between Afghanistan and Central Asia are influenced by Central Asian countries' intrinsic weakness and Afghanistan's division.¹⁴¹

3.2 Intervening Variables

The internal environment or the conductors are equally responsible for the formulation of the security policy of any country. For India as well, the internal scenario plays a vital role in its security policy towards Central Asia. This section identified and discussed three intervening variables that play a role in the security policy towards Central Asia:

- a Kashmir Conflict;
- b Communal Polarity in India: Growing Hindu–Muslim Division;
- c Energy Security Vulnerability of India.

3.2.1 Kashmir Conflict

The Kashmir conflict is one of the major conflicts that exist in the world which has the potential to trigger a full-fledged nuclear war between India and Pakistan. On top of that China has presented itself as a new player in the sphere. Since British India and Pakistan were partitioned in August 1947, the Kashmir dispute between the two countries has become intractable. They fought four wars in 1947,

1948, 1965 and 1971 (Kashmir was peripheral to Bangladesh's independence), and the Kargil war in 1999, but have yet to resolve the conflict. When British India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, Hari Singh, the autocratic and unpopular Maharaja (king) of Kashmir and Jammu, a predominantly Muslim state, refused to accede to either Pakistan or India, hoping to gain independence or autonomy from both. To buy time and achieve this goal, he signed a cease-fire agreement with Pakistan on 16 August 1947 and was attempting to sign a similar agreement with India. India refused, but after the partition, communal rioting between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims erupted in Punjab as the state was divided between India and Pakistan. Rioting against Muslims erupted in Kashmir in September.¹⁴² Alarmed by the possible invasion, Singh sought India's help, but the latter refused until the king signed the Instrument of Accession, a standard procedure by which other princely states had acceded to either India or Pakistan, which he did. India agreed to his accession of J&K to India after Sheik Abdullah, the secular and popular leader of the state's National Conference party (NC) at the time, agreed.¹⁴³

As the major part of academia consists of mainstream conflicts like state-to-state war and territorial disputes, there is another side of it as well. The second dimension is the major armed conflict between India and insurgents in J&K, which has resulted in over 29,351 battle-related deaths since 1989. This conflict has two distinct aspects. Militant insurgency was initially created and supported by indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁴ Early militant organizations such as the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), the People's League, the 'Haji' group, Al Barq, Al Fateh, Hizb-ul Mujahideen and the Al Jihad were made up of disgruntled Kashmiris who resorted to guerrilla warfare to oppose Indian rule in J&K and the eroding of the special status J&K had held since 1947.¹⁴⁵ Pakistan provided military and political support,¹⁴⁶ believing that the jihadi movement would be a potent, low-cost and strategic weapon against a larger adversary. 'After 57 years of forced alliance with India, the people are unsatisfied and resentful,' writes Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, one of the leaders of the separatist organization All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC).¹⁴⁷ Since 1987, Kashmiris have lost faith in democratic institutions and have had to rely on the power of guns to fight for the "cause" of self-determination.

Similarly, there are internal and external aspects to the Kashmir conflict. The hostile ties and four wars fought between India and Pakistan over the disputed territory are related to the external component. According to Sumit Ganguly, Kashmir is significant to both nations, but for different reasons. The justifications are irreconcilable and closely tied to cultural identity in Pakistan.¹⁴⁸ Kashmir is a province with a large Muslim population that leans against Pakistan, which is also a Muslim nation. Pakistan's national identity won't be complete unless the entirety of Kashmir is incorporated. The matter is significant for India since it touches on both security and democracy. If Kashmir secedes, there may be a cascading effect and other borderlands may also decide to secede, leaving mainstream India, or the heartland of India, open to foreign aggression, especially from other growing Asian mainland giants like China.

Internally, threats in India come from five different types of groups/movements, arranged in descending order of intensity: the Kashmir conflict, the Naxalite

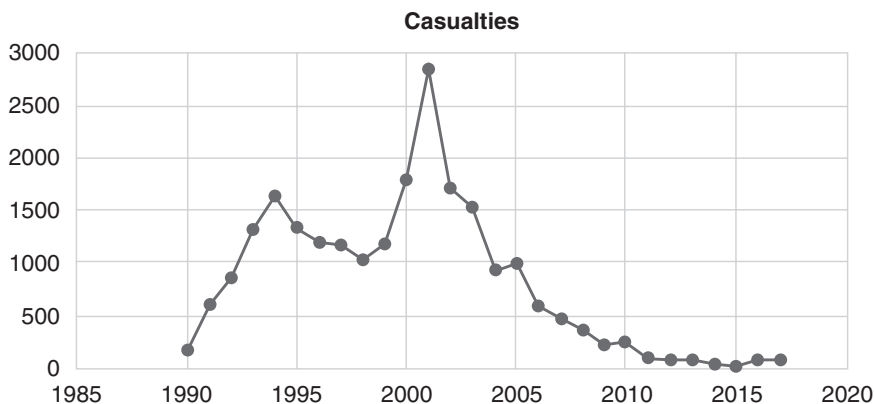


Figure 3.1 Casualties in Kashmir Region.

Source: “41,000 Deaths in 27 Years: The Anatomy of Kashmir Militancy in Numbers.” *Hindustan Times*, September 25, 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/the-anatomy-of-kashmir-militancy-in-numbers/story-UncrzPTGhN22Uf1HHe64JJ.html>.

insurgency, the North-East Separatist groups, Islamist threats and Hindutva extremism in the country (casualties borne). Each category contains a variety of challenges, nuances and subgroups that necessitate creative solutions. Since 1988, India has faced a sustained insurgency in and from Kashmir with internecine violence, resulting in over 45,000 deaths (Figure 3.1).

Given India’s geopolitical location, which shares international borders with several countries that have been used by terrorist groups as launch pads, getaways and safe havens, the emphasis has shifted from domestic rebels to terrorists supported, aided and funded by hostile nations.¹⁴⁹ The challenge for India’s security forces is to combat an invisible and mostly unidentified enemy whose goal is not only to kill its citizens and destroy its institutions in order to instil fear and panic but also to win the hearts and minds of its sympathizers and indoctrinate neutrals in its philosophies and ideologies. For India terrorism, religious extremism and increasing radicalization posed an extreme internal security threat and Kashmir has become the anchor point of India’s source of internal security threat. Thus, for India, while designing security policy towards a certain region or country, it is necessary to consider Kashmir as a variable. Considering the religious proximity that Kashmir and Central Asia share and the increasing radicalization on both ends present the challenges to India’s national security.

3.2.2 *Communal Polarity in India: Growing Hindu–Muslim Division*

Being one of the most diverse countries in the world, the complexities of the society are enormous in India as well. The partition itself was the outcome of the struggle between two major existing religions in India. The idea of partition is grounded on the division of a country based on religion. But a large chunk of the Muslim

population decided to remain in India. Thus, communal politics in India remain a vital factor within Indian political discourse. Political parties have instrumentalized the commonality that has caused the huge drift in a society which has nurtured the extremist and radicalized flavours in the society.

Since the 1880s, communalism has been a major theme in Indian politics. No political force gained significant power in the name of Hinduism during the first three decades after independence, even after the subcontinent was partitioned into India and Pakistan in 1947. There has been a resurgence of a belligerent and new kind of Hindu nationalism in India's public life and political institutions since the mid-1980s. The Hindu nationalist movement has largely defined itself in opposition to Islam and Muslims. Hindu revivalists have promoted the claim that India's Muslim minority poses a threat to Hindus, and they have sought to establish India as a primarily Hindu nation (*rashtra*), based on a Hindu ethos, values and religion. In the 1980s and 1990s, the ideology and politics of *Hindutva* – the quality of being a Hindu – were accompanied by a rapid increase in large-scale communal (Hindu–Muslim) riots. Major communal violence erupted across India in 1990 and again in 1992, following the destruction of the Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya.¹⁵⁰

Gujarat, one of India's wealthiest states, has been critical to the spread of communalism. Gujarat has been the site of recurring communal violence since the mid-1980s. The state became a nerve centre for the Hindu nationalist movement and is now known as the *Hindutva* laboratory. Gujarat's rising communalism culminated in a massacre of Muslims across the state in February 2002.¹⁵¹

The rise of Hindu nationalist politics coincided with the rise in popularity of the Sangh Parivar, a family of extremist Hindu organizations. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),¹⁵² the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP),¹⁵³ and the Bajrang Dal¹⁵⁴ have been the most prominent organizations. These groups, with tens of thousands of members, had their origins, respectively, in the 1920s, 1960s and 1980s. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political face of the *Hindutva* movement, was founded in 1980 as a reconstitution of the Jan Sangh Party. The BJP rose to prominence both nationally and in Gujarat, becoming a major political force in the 1990s. The party was able to form a minority government at the centre in 1996, but it fell within two weeks. In both the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP emerged as the largest party, winning 182 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats and forming a government with its National Democratic Alliance allies.¹⁵⁵ The BJP and its allies lost the 2004 elections, with the BJP losing 138 seats in parliament despite a slight decrease in its vote share. The rise of the BJP in power in 2014 brought communalism into Indian politics back. Due to the massive electoral support in 2014 and 2019, BJP have fuelled communalism institutionally, which can have a long-term impact on India's security from the perspective of extremism and radicalization.

The BJP was successful in introducing a 'ideological foundation' of Hindu nationalism into Indian politics in 2014, winning by a landslide. This event also cemented Narendra Modi's status as a powerful orator within the Party. Modi was the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Gujarat before becoming Prime

Minister in 2014. His rise coincided with the rise of a “muscular, pro-Hindu brand of nationalism.” Hindu nationalism, which became a key term in Indian democracy, was largely developed under the new political leadership of the BJP (2.0).¹⁵⁶ The BJP’s political affiliation is thought to be with the RSS family, which is a cultural organization (more accurately a radical Hindu nationalist organization).

The RSS defends the party’s political ideology, which is “expected to implement pro-Hindu policies.”¹⁵⁷ The RSS is made up of over 200 organizations, all of which claim to be the true guardians of Indian Vedic culture and Hindu civilization. However, the RSS includes a Muslim organization, which may explain why they consider themselves superior to other, secular organizations.

In recent years (after the BJP came into power), religiously inspired nationalist movements have gained power in a number of countries, including India. Hungary and Poland are two more examples in Europe. According to George, “the Sangh Parivar’s ideology is dubbed Hindutva (“Hindu-ness”) in order to distinguish it from Hinduism itself.”¹⁵⁸ The movement does not advocate for a theocratic state, nor does it explicitly support Hinduism as the state religion. Hindutva is a national-cultural rather than a religious category, and its adherents consider it to be synonymous with the concept of India. According to the Sangh Parivar, Indians of other faiths, including Muslims, should have no trouble accepting Hindutva. If they refuse, they must be “traitors to the nation.” Hindutva nationalism, according to Indian historian Ramchandra Guha, is based on “19th Century European and mediaeval Middle Eastern (Islamic) ideas.” This means that Hindu nationalism is spreading through a shared religion, a shared language and a shared external enemy. “The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a country that follows perfect European nationalism,” he said.¹⁵⁹

This above-mentioned evidence and the trend project the increasing polarization between Indian Hindus and Muslims. Due to the inclination of the government of India towards the Hindu nationalist, the Muslims have faced many atrocities. The changing communalism in India is now fuelling the radicalization of Muslim population of India and that is a great deal of security threat for India. For instance, the first issue of *Sawt-al-Hind*, also known as the Voice of Hind, was published on 24 February 2020, by the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)-affiliated *Sawt-al-Hind* Media Center. It was available in Bengali, English, Hindi and Urdu.¹⁶⁰ So where are you going? was the title of the publication’s introductory essay. A Call to Indian Muslims Three days later, the magazine urged Indian Muslims to join its Jihad as riots¹⁶¹ broke out in Delhi over the Citizenship Amendment Act.¹⁶² As for the larger period of time, Indian Muslims were less exposed to radical groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS; however, social media platforms have more capacity to spread the word about previously obscure or constrained online portals as human interactions have migrated more and more into the digital domain.¹⁶³ Thus, polarization of society and possible radicalization of Indian Muslims have a great deal of national security threat to India and possible interaction between the radical groups of Central Asian and Indian Muslims always play a vital role in India’s security policy orientation towards the region.

3.2.3 *Energy Security Vulnerability of India*

Due to the major security concerns of India in Sea Lane Communication and its correlation with energy security, Central Asia has a potential to be an alternative energy source for India continentally.¹⁶⁴ Energy dynamics of India are discussed in Chapter 4 in detail. India's trade and energy flow are mostly done through the IO and sub-regions with the IO. And the IO and the sea lines of communication is one of the fragile places regarding the security of the supply chain.

The main shipping lanes, known as Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), are where important maritime trades, such as the transit of crude oil, are transported. They have small openings, often known as "chokepoints," that ship captains must navigate with extreme care so as to prevent mishaps that could spill the cargo their ships are carrying and obstruct the movement of other ships. As a result, it is anticipated that a growing number of ships will be based in the world's SLOCs, including the Strait of Malacca (the busiest shipping lane in the world), the Strait of Hormuz (the most strategic passage for seaborne global crude oil transportation) and the South China Sea (a maritime region that is the subject of claims, counterclaims and disputes, as well as strategic power play among naval powers). As shipping traffic via these routes increases, a sharp international focus will be on the safety of navigation, security and environmental state of these passages.¹⁶⁵

The maritime lanes of Asia are exposed to numerous dangers. Although there has been a decrease in piracy in the Gulf of Aden, geopolitical tensions between major world powers continue to endanger the peace and stability of the region. The risks to seaborne trade remain high because of the conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan and the tense stand-off between claimant states in the South China Sea.¹⁶⁶

The threat in sea lane communication mainly can be divided into three parts. First, the non-state threat. While natural disasters and threats from non-state actors are the most frequent, they are also the most unpredictable due to their abundance and variety. The historical evidence implies that non-state actors often have a limited ability to cause disruptions, both in terms of duration and extent. Within the non-state threat, there are categories such as terrorism and piracy.¹⁶⁷ Second, a failed and rough state threat. Piracy and terrorism are made more likely by the presence of failed states, and rogue states may try to use these and other tactics to disrupt energy distribution in order to further their own goals. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand have all seen unrest and are still at risk of experiencing more instability in Asia. Additionally listed as some of "the least stable countries in the world" are Pakistan, Iran and Burma.¹⁶⁸ And, third, state-to-state conflicts. State-to-state disputes may obstruct the flow of energy in one of two ways: a state may purposefully stop it as a means of coercion, or a violent war between states may render it too risky for energy tankers to travel the seaways. An encounter between nations is not out of the question given the ongoing territorial disputes and historical and present-day geopolitical tensions in the region between important countries (China and India, Japan and China, and India and Pakistan).¹⁶⁹

Of all the major powers, India is the closest to the Gulf; it takes less than four days to sail from Fujairah, the UAE's port in the IO, to Jamnagar in Gujarat, the location of the largest refinery in the world. Yet the security of New Delhi's oil and gas supplies has frequently been a source of worry. These worries need to be reframed as the Middle East experiences geopolitical realignment due to the pandemic, market downturn and changes in energy technology.¹⁷⁰

India until 2020 imports 57% of its crude oil from the Middle East, and predictions indicate that this percentage will increase to 63% by 2040.¹⁷¹ India needs to come up with some novel solutions to the problems associated with accessing energy supplies.¹⁷² Accelerating oil source diversification will assist India in spreading the weight of its energy security over a number of emerging sources outside of the Middle East. However, India has been unable to move past its import-export mentality and has discovered that it has lost a significant advantage in accessing Iran's resources.¹⁷³ The main issue is supply interruptions brought on by the instability in the area and along the routes, which forces India to find oil reserves to lessen the negative effects of temporary interruptions in oil supplies.

Not only energy India uses IO Trade Route for most of its international trade functioning and it is considered one of the fragile regions in terms of maritime security. The IO Region is divided into five sub-regions: the Middle East and Gulf, the Red Sea and Horn, East Africa and Sub-Saharan, South Asia, and Southeast Asia/Oceania.¹⁷⁴ These regions represent the full range of economic development levels, ranging from the world's poorest to its richest nations, from those whose economies rely on fishing to those who control 40% of the world's oil production, to failed states that are at war with terrorists to those that are still in active service.¹⁷⁵

3.3 Goals and Assumptions

India's goals and assumptions of India's security policy towards Central Asia have been shaped by their look north policy and CCAP. India's 'Look North Policy' is an extension of the country's warm and excellent relations with Central Asia's energy-rich states. Going a step further, during his visit to Turkmenistan in September 1995, then-Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao made it very apparent that Central Asia is an area of great significance for India and would remain so in the future.¹⁷⁶ He went on to say in his speech that 'We intend to maintain a long-term relationship with the CARs. We are a self-sufficient couple with no ulterior intentions. We just want genuine and open friendship, as well as stability and collaboration, without harming any third countries.' This declaration encapsulates the origins of the 'Look North Policy.' At the heart of this strategy is its vision of peaceful interaction with neighbours and the expansion of such relationships in the framework of commerce and business. Furthermore, the 'Look North Policy' proposes secularism, democracy, and literacy' as national strengths that India and Central Asia share, which would assist to develop the relationship even more. Ironically, such a debate was not mentioned in the aftermath of India's Narasimha Rao regime. Although the Gujral Doctrine is a stepping stone in terms of India's

relations with its neighbours for a variety of reasons, it is limited to South Asia. When it comes to Central Asia, the Gujral ideology isn't very innovative. That is why, in Modi's policy decisions, this strategy of peaceful engagement with Central Asia's energy-rich states should be given full consideration, as the area provides India far more in return than India offers them.

An Indian perspective of Central Asia after the Cold War is defined by several characteristics: (i) the rise of religious extremism in the post-Soviet period; (ii) rising levels of trafficking in goods and people; (iii) an incomplete, erratic and uneven process of political and economic reform; and (iv) CARs' volatile geopolitical position (aided by their natural riches) renders them vulnerable to the interests of a variety of extra-regional third parties.¹⁷⁷ Such descriptions suggest that the "Look North" strategy did not originate in a vacuum, but was deeply influenced by India's post-Cold War foreign policy trajectory.

Similarly, India's CCAP lays the plans to approach the region in a prompter way. Despite the fact that 2012 marked the twentieth year of India–Central Asia ties in the post-Soviet era, India had acquired minimal strategic advantage during this time, and as a result, anxiety of losing out in the New Great Game was prevalent in political and diplomatic circles. As emphasized by the Honourable Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari,

It is thus evident that the new ground realities in the post-Soviet period called for a redefining of India's strategic interests in the region. Our primary interest was stability in the region. The task of diplomacy was to build new relationships and protect and enhance economic and commercial interests. We were successful in the first and are still struggling with the second.¹⁷⁸

In light of the foregoing, the Minister of State for External Affairs, E. Ahmed, announced CCAP¹⁷⁹ and delivered a keynote address at the inaugural meeting of the India–Central Asia Dialogue, a Track 2 initiative, held on the 12th and 13th of June 2012 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The goal of this conference was to re-establish India's stalemate with the five CARs (Table 3.3).

In his keynote speech, Ahmed mentioned that

The policy calls for setting up universities, hospitals, information technology (IT) centres, an e-network in telemedicine connecting India to the CARs, joint commercial ventures, improving air connectivity to boost trade and tourism, joint scientific research, and strategic partnerships in defence and security affairs.¹⁸⁰

Based on these policy orientations this section aims to analyse the applicability of India's security policy towards Central Asia. While doing so the first section divides India's goals and assumption of the security policy towards Central Asia which includes managing the security threat coming from the region as the security threat has trans-nationality in nature. Similarly, engaging Central Asia for the stability of Afghanistan and aiming to mitigate the rise of China in the region are the goals of

Table 3.3 Elements of Connect Central Asia Policy

Political Cooperation	Build strong political ties through high-level exchange and interaction between leaders at bilateral and multilateral levels.
Economic Cooperation	Develop long-term partnership in energy and natural resources; cooperate in production of profitable crops with value addition; participate in the construction sector; India to help set up several medium-sized industries; help increase trade and investment in Indian banks to expand their presence in Central Asia.
Strategic Cooperation	Strengthen strategic and security cooperation with focus on military training, joint research, counter-terrorism coordination and close consultations on Afghanistan.
Connectivity with the Region	To address the problem of connectivity work jointly to reactivate the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) with focus on
Information Technology	Working on setting up a central Asia e-network linking all five Central Asian states with its hub in India to provide tele-education and tele-medicine connectivity.
Cooperation in Education	Setting up of a Central Asian University in Bishkek to provide World-class education in areas like IT, Management, Philosophy and languages.
People-to-People Contact	Exchange between youth and future leaders of India and Central Asia. Greater interaction between scholars, academics and civil society. Setting up of civil hospitals/clinics in Central Asia.
Cooperation in Regional Groupings.	Boost multilateral cooperation through regional institutions like the SCO, Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and Customs Union.

Source: Roy, Meena Singh. "India's Connect Central Asia Policy: Building Cooperative Partnership." *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 8, no. 3 (2013): 301. <http://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol8/8.3/8.3-ARTICLE-1.pdf>.

India's security policy. The second section discusses India's security-related activities in the region which has been divided into Bilateral cooperation and Multilateral cooperation.

Having said that, based on the author's visit to Delhi and informal discussion with scholars from various organizations, goals and assumptions of India's security policy towards Central Asia have three different facets:

- a Minimize China's Influence in the Central Asian Region;
- b India's Security Depth and Stability;
- c Minimizing India's Energy Security Vulnerability.

3.3.1 *Minimize China's Influence in the Central Asia Region*

India's other goal is guided by minimizing the influence of China and Pakistan in the region. India in the current security diaspora explains China and Pakistan as a 'Two-Front Challenge'. Although India was aware of a two-front military threat during the India–Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971, recent discussion on such a

military challenge only began in 2006,¹⁸¹ when the China Study Group suggested building border infrastructure in response to significant infrastructure improvement on the Chinese side. A long-standing policy of keeping border infrastructure underdeveloped to prevent advancing Chinese troops from using it was reversed by the Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government.¹⁸² A task force led by former foreign secretary Shyam Saran made three trips to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and developed a proposal for the construction of 73 India–China border roads with a total length of 4643 km, mostly connecting the areas where the two countries' borders were in dispute.¹⁸³ The order was confirmed by the then-Army Chief General Deepak Kapoor at the end of December 2009 when he said that the army needed to be ready for a two-front conflict while speaking at an Army Training Command seminar. In 2012, the defence minister told the legislature that “even as the armed forces prepare for their primary task of conventional wars, they must also factor in the eventuality of “a two-front war” breaking out.”¹⁸⁴ General V. K. Singh, Kapoor's successor, referred to China and Pakistan as “two irritants” in October 2010 and said that the armed forces were preparing for a scenario in which they might have to fight both countries at once. However, most commentators at the time did not consider the threat to be urgent or real. Are we anticipating a full-fledged war between the three nuclear-armed neighbours? asked Lieutenant General V. K. Kapoor in a 2011 article. Nothing is falsier than this.¹⁸⁵

Especially after the announcement of BRI and the emergence of China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship joint project of China and Pakistan, the Indian policy-making community started to see China–Pakistan as a single joint front that challenges India's security. In addition to the BRI and Pakistan threat in South Asia, it also has many facets involved in Central Asia. BRI's flagship connectivity project has a big space in Central Asia. So, if one analyses India's approach to Central Asia from a perspective of security, it is also guided by reaching out to as many partners as possible to minimize or mitigate the threats that are posed by China and Pakistan by check and balance. This was verified during the author's visit to India.¹⁸⁶

When particularly talking about the ‘status quo’ there are two dynamics in it. First, China's policy towards Central Asia may look like it is guided by hegemonic ambition but in reality, China also wants to maintain the status quo of the region. Where India's ambition is to maintain the status quo with China. For China, the establishment of political and economic stability in the region was crucial since unrest and potential violence in the area might have spread to its unruly Xinjiang province. China quickly realized this and in 1994, 1996 and 2002, respectively, reached agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to end their long-standing border disputes. Beijing utilized the economic and political unrest in the region as a negotiating chip to settle its border issues, and as a result, it received from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, respectively, 22%, 32% and 3.5% of the entire amount of territory it had requested.¹⁸⁷ To maintain such status quo China uses SCO, where India is a member as well.¹⁸⁸ China maintains its status quo in the region on a ‘give and take’ basis where it gives money for infrastructure projects and in return Central Asian states remain silent on the Uyghur issue. As India

lacks behind in terms of monetary involvement compared to China, India pushes to balance China with its positive image.

3.3.2 *Increasing India's Security Depth and Stability*

India is motivated by minimizing terrorism, extremism and radicalization. India's susceptibility to attacks on its sovereignty and way of life, which are typical of the targets of terrorism in the 21st century, is one of the typical weaknesses of a robust and growing democracy. If the democracy is multi-ethnic, secular and pluralistic, like India, with an expanding federal structure built on an increasing number of states, the risk rises. As a result of ethnic groups', religious extremists' and old-fashioned ideological forces' displays of discontent, there are also higher chances that internal fissures and schisms may develop. Every act of terrorism motivated by religious extremism is a deliberate attempt to undermine India's rich and secular tradition. Thus, if one is accessing India's security policy in general, terrorism, extremism and radicalization are the anchoring factors. After 9/11 and the presence of the United States in Afghanistan and in Central Asia have somehow assisted India in managing transnational terrorism and radical movements. Since the NATO joint force has left the region, India is working hard to bring back the focus into terrorism, extremism and radicalization.¹⁸⁹ This can be verified through the similar pattern and the stress that the government of India put after 2015. India has used various platforms to bring the attention of the world towards the seriousness that terrorism and extremism is causing. For instance, India has used multilateral forums such as the UN General Assembly, BRICS and SCO summit to project India's stance towards these issues.¹⁹⁰ Similarly, terrorism, extremism and radicalization are always in the conversation while having bilateral meetings with partners from Central Asia.¹⁹¹ Because terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are operating in Central Asia, security is a major worry for New Delhi.¹⁹² These dangers were manifested for India during the 1992–1997 civil conflict in Tajikistan. Indian critics blamed the Tajik civil war on foreign Islamist parties that took advantage of inter-regional and inter-clan tensions in Tajikistan and were aided by the Afghan Mujahideen, who were supported by Pakistan. Therefore, concerns that Pakistan would try to establish strategic depth in the area motivated India's outreach to Central Asia during this time.¹⁹³ Thus, cooperative efforts to combat terrorism and radicalization are on India's agenda in Central Asia.

3.3.3 *Minimizing India's Energy Security Vulnerability*

India's other goal regarding the security policy towards Central Asia is related to energy. India's growth is prone to "an endless source of exogenous energy."¹⁹⁴ Therefore, one of the biggest obstacles to India's energy security is the provision of energy. The nation has not yet achieved energy independence in terms of domestic production, including renewable energy sources and domestic hydrocarbon resources. The external energy supply is prone to significant volatility, which can be attributed to problems with pricing, geopolitical imperatives, as well as

the escalation of violence in the nation that supplies the hydrocarbons. India has always experienced the worst type of energy crisis whenever violence in the West Asian region has intensified.¹⁹⁵ India's energy drive towards central Asia was mainly constrained by two factors. The accessibility and widespread penetration of external players in this region of the world presented challenges for India. Up until the middle of the 1990s, India's economy was in shambles. It lacked sufficient economic resources to engage in aggressive energy diplomacy that could compete with outside investors' investments.

These two external structural issues, which prevented India from actively engaging in this region, can be used to analyse India's energy policy towards Central Asia. When India launched its "Extended Neighbourhood Policy," which is primarily focused on advancing its "enlightened national interests" in this area of the world, it marked a significant shift in its policy towards this region. As part of its "Extended Neighbourhood Policy," New Delhi took into account its investment in the energy industries. Even so, it was up against some fierce rivalry from established players in the area including China, Russia and Western superpowers led by the United States. The fact that Indian energy corporations attempted to acquire assets in the region is one indication of India's robust foreign policy stance towards this area. One could also add that Vajpayee's trip to Kazakhstan in June 2002 gave India the impetus it needed to conduct robust energy diplomacy in this area. The "New Silk Road Initiative" was described by Vajpayee during his press conference. Additionally, he stressed the importance of "Energy Trade" for the mutual benefit of both nations. Based on this foundation Indian policy and decision-making diaspora have embedded energy security as one of the major factors in India's security policy conduct.¹⁹⁶ This can be seen in India after 2014 having signed many bilateral agreements with Central Asia Republics which concerns India's security which will be discussed in Section 3.3.2 in detail.

3.4 Instruments

India did not have the tools of economic and financial leverage in the early 1990s, and as a result, despite great goodwill in the area, it was unable to achieve commercial advances. Geopolitical restrictions, Pakistani enmity and Afghan instability, among other factors, kept India and Central Asia geographically separated. There was also the fundamental issue of a lack of scientific awareness of the region's history, social composition and language. The propensity to see the region via a Western lens obscured rather than clarified the primacy of Indian perception. Likewise, India has two major hurdles to imbed consistency in their Central Asian Policy. First, India is concerned about the political uncertainty that is developing in Central Asia as a result of regional leaders' succession issues. Kazakhstan's, Tajikistan's, Turkmenistan's and Uzbekistan's leaders have resisted political reform so far, relying on internal political processes of different styles to maintain power. Second, surging engagements of India's strategic rivals in the region.¹⁹⁷

India has rekindled its interest in strengthening its strategic position in Central Asia. Prime Minister Modi's six-day integrated tour of Central Asia in June 2015,

which included all five states, was not only a symbolic feat for Indian diplomacy, but also a smart strategic move that paved the way for overcoming predicaments that had stymied India's outreach to an important region lying in its strategic vicissitudes. The Prime Minister's journey to Central Asia was one of the most important aspects of his foreign policy vision, which aspired to reconstruct India based on its historic history but with modern substance. Reconnecting with Central Asia was an important component of this strategy. The visit was also significant for India and Central Asia in terms of expanding strategic perimeter and inspiring personnel to think about the area beyond Pakistan and China.¹⁹⁸

So, this section has been divided into two sections. First, the security relations have been presented from a bilateral engagement perspective. The second section presents India's multilateral engagement with the region.

3.4.1 *Bilateral Engagement*

India's engagement with the region after the devastating 9/11 attacks was cautious as non-military security risks surfaced and great power rivalry grew throughout the region. Without much cooperation with other major nations and regional organizations, the US built military bases in the area.¹⁹⁹ Following 9/11, India likewise made the decision to handle the issue in Afghanistan and counter-terrorism in CARs on its own. To strike a balance in India's relations with the two major powers – the United States and Russia – this policy option was used. Additionally, handling internal issues in the five CARs has benefitted from this course.²⁰⁰ For instance, the development of Uzbekistan as a regional power worries Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan is more important than other countries in the region from the perspective of Indian strategic considerations. In comparison to other peers, India has not done much for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the early years of independence.²⁰¹ India's Central Asia strategy is dictated by its Kashmir policy and its desire to maintain peace along its borders with Pakistan and China from the perspective of regional security.²⁰²

India since the first half of the 21st century has scaled up its engagement with CARs. The space given to the region can be identified via the Defense Ministry annual report. For instance, the realization of Kazakhstan's defence industries and the technology can already be found in the ministry report of 2001/2002. The report says,

The opportunities for cooperation with Kazakhstan in the area of defense industry and technology are also excellent given its advanced defense sector. As part of the Prime Minister's visit to Kazakhstan in June 2002, a Defense Cooperation Agreement was signed, which is expected to boost bilateral defense cooperation.²⁰³

Likewise, Tajikistan hosted a combined airborne exercise between India and Tajikistan in July and August 2003. The drill was held on 5 August 2003, which was Tajikistan Air Force Raising Day. Three An-32 aircraft, paratroopers, and Para

Jumping Instructors (PJIs) made up the Indian contingent. In the practice, which culminated in a paradrop at Fakrabad DZ, paratroopers from the seven Assault Brigade of the Tajikistan Army and the Indian Army Para Brigade also took part.²⁰⁴ Similarly, the first visit by an Indian defence minister to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan was in November 2003. Building on earlier trips to Tajikistan in April 2002 and Uzbekistan in February 2003, it was an opportunity to review the cooperation on the provision of defence equipment and training, to develop the Defense Cooperation Agreement that was signed during the Prime Minister's visit to Kazakhstan in June 2002, and to investigate opportunities to stimulate and expand them.²⁰⁵

3.4.1.1 Joint Working Groups (JWG)

Apart from economic and political participation in Afghanistan, India was eager to join Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's JWG on counter-terrorism. Since then, India's defence ties with other Central Asian countries have also become stronger. India shared the same security and stability aims as the United States, namely, the reduction of drug trafficking and terrorism in the area. India has participated in the JWG on a bilateral and international basis. In truth, India's relationship with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan dates back to the Northern Alliance's assistance in Afghanistan. In 2001, India established a tiny field hospital near the Afghan border in Farkhor, Tajikistan, reportedly to treat Northern Alliance troops battling the Taliban.

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, India took a bold strategic step to be militarily engaged in the area by renovating the Ayni air base in Tajikistan in 2002. This was part of a bilateral endeavour between India and Tajikistan, but it was India's first attempt to undertake a military project outside of its borders, which brought a new aspect to the geopolitical conflict in Central Asia at the time. The Ayni air base project was seen as a practical demonstration of India's commitment to Central Asian security.²⁰⁶ Being present at advantage point to watch strife-torn Afghanistan and hostile operations by Pakistan vis-à-vis India was also seen as part of India's grand strategic thinking, especially after the Kargil conflict. India's defence cooperation with Central Asian governments has grown to include a wide range of activities, from military-to-military collaboration to the acquisition of defence spares.

India has strengthened the institutional foundation for its defence cooperation with the area on a bilateral level. During Prime Minister Modi's trips to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in 2015, India signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and agreements pertaining to defence and military technology cooperation.²⁰⁷ India and Kyrgyzstan decided to undertake their annual bilateral military exercise, Khanjar, to reflect their increasing relationship. They decided to build a Mountain Training Centre the following year to give instruction, train Kyrgyz Armed Forces troops, and hold joint mountain training exercises (Table 3.4).²⁰⁸

Though India's multifaceted connection with these governments has been limited, significant components include information cooperation, training, and support, military hardware repair and upgrade, and the import of transport planes from Uzbekistan and torpedo parts from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The Indian navy

Table 3.4 India's Defence Engagement with Central Asian States between 2011 and 2019

<i>S.N</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Activities</i>
1	Kazakhstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The second meeting of the India–Kazakhstan Joint Working Group (JWG) on Military Technical Cooperation was held in New Delhi on 6–7 September 2011. The Chief of Army Staff visited Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan from 16 to 19 November 2011. • The fourth meeting of the India–Kazakhstan JWG on Military Technical Cooperation (MTC) was held in New Delhi on 30 April 2015. An Agreement between India and Kazakhstan on Defence and Military Technical Cooperation was signed on 8 July 2015 during the visit of the Prime Minister of India to Kazakhstan. • The joint military exercise on Counter Terrorism ‘Prabal Dostyk’ has been made into an annual event starting 2016. Three Indian companies participated in KADEX-2016^a during June 2–5, 2016. An 11-member delegation of Garuds participated in the ‘International Army Games 2016 Sniper Line’ from 28 July to 10 August 2016. Under the Youth Exchange programme, an NCC delegation consisting of 2 officers and 12 cadets visited Kazakhstan from 26 September to 8 October 2016. • The Chief of the Army Staff visited Kazakhstan from 1 August to 4 August 2017. The bilateral Army Joint exercise ‘Prabal Dostyk’ was held from 2 November to 15 November 2017 at Bakloh, India. Both sides have agreed to enhance the scope and complexity of the exercise in future. Lt Gen, Deputy Defence Minister of Kazakhstan visited India from 6 to 8 November 2017 and met the Defense Minister, Chief of Army Staff and Defence Secretary. Both sides have agreed to take forward enhanced cooperation on UN peacekeeping and discussions are underway to finalize modalities in this regard. • Fifth meeting of India–Kazakhstan JWG on Defence and Military Technical Cooperation was held in Astana from May 31 to June 1, 2018. An MoU and Technical Agreement between India and Kazakhstan concerning arrangements for joint deployment of the Kazakh Peacekeeping contingent as part of the Indian Battalion in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was signed on 21 August 2018. A delegation led by Raksha Mantri visited Kazakhstan from 3 October to 4 October 2018 for holding bilateral meetings with the Defence Minister of Kazakhstan. • Defence met the Defence Minister of Kazakhstan Lt. Gen. Nurlan Yermekbayev in Moscow on 4 September 2020, on the sidelines of the SCO Defence Ministers meeting.
2	Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defense Minister of India visited Kyrgyzstan from 5 to 6 July 2011 for inauguration of the Kyrgyz-Indian BioMedical Research Centre (KIMBMRC) at Bishkek which has been jointly set up by Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and the National Centre for Cardiology and Interventional Medicine (NCCIM), Bishkek. This was followed by the visit of the Kyrgyz Defence Minister Maj. Gen Abibilla Kudaiberdiev to India

(Continued)

Table 3.4 (Continued)

<i>S.N</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Activities</i>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kyrgyz Defence Minister Maj Gen Taalaibek Omuraliev visited India on 11–15 September 2013. During the visit, he held discussions with Raksha Mantri on a range of issues concerning the bilateral defence relationship and it was agreed to further strengthen cooperation between the defence establishments on both sides. • An Agreement on Defence Cooperation was signed on 12 July 2015 during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Kyrgyzstan. • The third joint army exercise Ex. KHANJAR –III was conducted in India during March–April 2016. An MoU on NCC was signed during the visit of the President of Kyrgyzstan to India in December 2016. • Defence cooperation with Kyrgyzstan received a boost with the visit of the Kyrgyz Chief of General Staff (CGS) to India from 26 November to 1 December 2017. CGS met Raksha Mantri on 1 December 2017. Both sides agreed to further enhance cooperation in military training as well as explore other areas of mutual benefit. The annual bilateral joint army exercise KHANJAR was successfully held in the Kyrgyz Republic.
3	Tajikistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raksha Mantri visited Tajikistan on 3 October 2011 and had discussions with the Tajik Defence Minister. • The second meeting of the India–Tajikistan JWG on Defence was held in India on 22–23 March 2013. The joint Special Forces exercise was held between the Armies of India and Tajikistan from 26 October to 7 November 2013 in India. The third JWG meeting was held in Tajikistan on 9–11 March 2014. • The fifth JWG, co-chaired by the Joint Secretary, was held in Tajikistan from 1 to 4 November 2016. • Traditionally close defence cooperation with Tajikistan received a fillip with the successful visit of the Minister of Defence of Tajikistan in February 2018. In addition to delegation-level talks with RM, the Minister also visited Pune. Both sides have agreed to step up cooperation in training and capacity building. • Tajik Defence Minister visited India from 6 to 9 February 2018 and held bilateral meetings. A delegation led by the Defence Secretary visited Tajikistan from 26 to 28 July 2018 to attend the 7th JWG meeting. • The defence minister met the Defense Minister of Tajikistan Col. Gen. Sherali Mirzo in Moscow on 3 September 2020, on the sidelines of a joint meeting of the Defense Ministers of the CIS, SCO and CSTO to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the victory in the Second World War. • On 31 August 2020, the second Meeting of India–Tajikistan JWG on Peaceful Use of Space Technology was held through digital video conference.

(Continued)

Table 3.4 (Continued)

<i>S.N</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Activities</i>
4	Turkmenistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Deputy Minister of Defence Colonel Jepbar Akyyev visited India from 31 May to 3 June 2011. • Defence relations with Turkmenistan have gained momentum in recent years, following the bilateral Agreement on Defence Cooperation signed in July 2015. The Chief of Army Staff visited Turkmenistan from August 4 to 6, 2017. Turkmen Deputy Defence Minister led delegation visited India in August 2017 and met senior MoD officials to discuss ways and means to enhance bilateral defence cooperation. He also interacted with a cross-section of the Indian defence industry during the visit.
5	Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Uzbek Defence minister visited India from 4 September to 6 September 2018 and held various bilateral meetings. The President of Uzbekistan visited India and an MoU on cooperation in the field of Military Education between the Ministry of Defence of India and the Ministry of Defence of Uzbekistan was signed on 1 October 2018. The first India–Uzbekistan JWG meeting on Defence Cooperation was held on 27 February 2019 in New Delhi. A delegation led by Defence Secretary visited Uzbekistan from 25 March 2019 to 29 March 2019.

^a KADEX is ‘International Exhibition of Weapons Systems and Military Equipment’.

Source: Defense Ministry of India. All information has been fetched from “Defense Ministry of India,” *Annual Report*. <https://www.mod.gov.in/documents/annual-report>. (Accessed 11 November 2022).

has been obtaining replacement parts for thermal and electrical torpedoes from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the two countries have a solid working relationship in terms of undersea naval weaponry research and development.

Civil nuclear cooperation has been the sole important success in the energy industry. Kazakhstan aided India in gaining a special exemption from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2008, allowing civil nuclear cooperation between the two countries. In the next year, India and Kazakhstan agreed to provide India with 2,100 tonnes of uranium till 2014. They signed an agreement for ‘Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy’ two years later, during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Kazakhstan.

Prabal Dostyk, India’s first joint army exercise with Kazakhstan, was held in 2016. This was renamed the KAZIND in 2018, and it was held yearly after that.²⁰⁹ This exercise focuses on cooperative counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations in urban and rural settings, hilly terrains and operations carried out under UN authority. In addition, in April–May 2018, the Kazakh Armed Forces Unit received peacekeeping training in India and was then sent to United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) Lebanon under the direction of an Indian Battalion.²¹⁰ Both parties committed to enhance cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism, military training exercises, military education and military medical during Uzbek

President Mirziyoyev's visit to India in 2018. They also decided to formalize their partnership by forming a JWG on defence-related issues.²¹¹

Tajikistan, which shares borders with Afghanistan, China, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, is a key node in the Indian and Russian-led efforts to stabilize Afghanistan. Tajikistan's government has expressed its concern about the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan and the rise of extremist threats within the country on several occasions. While the resurgent Taliban and the ISIS pose a threat to the Central Asian region, its leaders have used the threat to tighten repression, tighten control and extract backing from neighbouring nations.²¹² Tajikistan is constrained to have active defence partnership besides Russia due to its membership with CSTO but India has been cooperating with Tajikistan in various defence activities. At its National Defence College and Indian Military Academy, India gives military training to a large number of Tajik soldiers, commanders and cadets. India has also established an India–Tajikistan Friendship Hospital near Qurghonteppa, Tajikistan, where Indian doctors and medical personnel are caring for civil and military patients. Tajikistan's military and security infrastructure has also benefited from India's assistance and contributions.²¹³

In 2019 three major developments happened between India–Uzbekistan security relations. First, from 1 to 4 November 2019, Singh paid an official visit to Tashkent. In the last 15 years, this was the first visit to Uzbekistan by an Indian Defence Minister. Second, Dustlik-2019, the first India–Uzbekistan Joint Field Training Exercise, was held from 3 to 13 November 2019 at the Chirchiq training region near Tashkent. The Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, and his Uzbek counterpart, Major General Bakhodir Kurbanov, launched the drill. The counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations in urban environments were the emphasis of this ten-day joint exercise.²¹⁴ Third, on November 20, Uzbek Interior Minister Pulat Bobojonov paid a visit to New Delhi and met with Indian Home Minister Amit Shah. The two ministers led delegation-level negotiations that resulted in the signing of a Security Cooperation Agreement between the two ministries. The goal of this agreement is to improve bilateral cooperation in the areas of counter-terrorism, organized crime and human trafficking.²¹⁵ Both parties talked about building capacity, border security and disaster management. The training of Uzbek security professionals in Indian institutions was another highlight of the meeting.²¹⁶

3.4.2 Multilateral Engagements

Although the security cooperation between India and Central Asia started to get attention at the start of the 21st century, the relationship got a mileage when the Modi government came into power in 2014. Through the India–Central Asia Dialogue forum, political connections have risen during the Modi administration.²¹⁷ The Central Asian Region's High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) have been implemented more quickly because of this forum, which has strengthened member governments' mutual confidence and cooperation. For instance, Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) has increased in

scope and volume. According to joint statements, India “offered to increase the number of ITEC slots as per the requirements of the Central Asian countries and also organize customized training programmes in India for the professionals from the Central Asian countries in the fields of counter-terrorism, cyber security, space, energy, WTO, etc.”²¹⁸ India’s and Central Asia’s national security council’s frequently consult on a variety of new security issues.²¹⁹

In the midst of Afghanistan’s developing crisis, India and CAS have made an effort to reach a “regional consensus” on the security architecture needed to combat terrorism, enable “a truly representative and inclusive government,” and provide humanitarian aid.²²⁰ The establishment of security mechanisms and defence cooperation through reciprocal discussions with regional stakeholders was the goal of the third iteration of the Regional Security Dialogue, held in Delhi in November 2021.²²¹ Through the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), India and CAS examine defence collaboration.²²² The fifth Summit Meeting of CICA was attended by India’s Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, who travelled to Tajikistan in June 2019.²²³ In addition, India joined the SCO as a permanent member in June 2017, and since then, it has increased its involvement and cooperation in the organization’s efforts to combat terrorism, fundamentalism and other NTS concerns through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS).²²⁴ Since October 2021, India has served as head of the RATS Council, stepping up diplomatic efforts to create a regional security architecture to combat terrorism and cyber security threats.²²⁵ According to a joint statement from SCO RATS, “participants supported the Indian side’s proposal to hold a joint antiterrorist exercise of the SCO member states’ competent authorities titled ‘Manesar-Antiterror-2022’ in the Republic of India.”²²⁶

With SCO member nations, India has a well-thought-out system and a shared strategy to fight the issue of terrorism and radicalization. Regular meetings of the JWG on Combating International Terrorism with all Central Asian governments are conducted. Central Asian professionals can attend specific training courses in India on counter-terrorism and information security. Officers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have been taking courses at the UN Training Centre, National Defense College (NDC), Defense Service Staff College (DSSC), National Defense Academy (NDA), Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Collage, Counter-insurgency and Jungle Warfare (CIJW) School and High-Altitude Warfare School (HAWs). India has been providing specific training courses in the sphere of international terrorism and information security for professionals from Central Asian countries. Mountaineering excursions with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been held by the Indian Army.

To teach their military troops, the Indian army has constructed English Language Training Centres and Computer Labs in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, India is also establishing English-cum-IT laboratories and deploying army training personnel. The Ministry of Defence is working on additional projects in Central Asia, including the Ayni base in Tajikistan. However, the real value of these facilities for Indian security objectives is debatable, unless they are used to curry favour with the Indian public. On 24

April 2018, India's Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met with Central Asian Defense Ministers for the first time during the SCO's Annual Defence Ministerial Meeting. Under the SCO framework, India's security relations with Central Asia will expand. Likewise, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar in 2019 explained that

India stands committed to any process, which can help Afghanistan emerge as a united, peaceful, secure, stable, inclusive and economically vibrant nation, with guaranteed gender and human rights. I wish to once again underscore the importance India attaches to SCO Afghanistan Contact Group and welcome an early conclusion of the Draft Roadmap of further actions of the Contact Group.²²⁷

India's Defense Minister, Rajnath Singh, gave a lecture at the recent SCO conference on regional security problems, particularly terrorism, and how to address them.²²⁸

Although the first India–Central Asia Dialogue was concentrated towards economic cooperation, the second India–Central Asia Dialogue brought other dynamics of cooperation like security, development and humanitarian partnership. The India–Central Asia Dialogue had its second meeting via digital video conference on 28 October 2020, under the chairmanship of India's External Affairs Minister. The conference was attended by the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as the First Deputy Foreign Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic. As a special invitee, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister attended the conference.²²⁹

The Ministers praised the 1st meeting of the India–Central Asia Dialogue, which took place in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) on 13 January 2019, for establishing a platform for strengthening cooperation between India and Central Asian countries in political, security, economic and commercial, development partnership, humanitarian and cultural spheres, as well as exchanging views on regional and international issues of mutual interest and enhancing cooperation under the framework of the India–Central Asia Dialogue. They urged for the establishment of a comprehensive and long-term India–Central Asia cooperation based on historical, cultural and civilizational ties, as well as historically intimate people-to-people connections.

The Ministers denounced terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations and reiterated their nations' commitment to combating the threat by dismantling terrorist safe havens, networks, infrastructure and financing routes. They also emphasized the need of each country ensuring that its soil is not utilized to conduct terrorist strikes against other nations. The Ministers praised Afghanistan's involvement in the India-Central Asia Dialogue. They demanded that the Afghan war be resolved on the basis of an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled peace process. The Ministers indicated an interest in bolstering collaboration for Afghanistan's growth and economic rehabilitation, notably through infrastructure, energy, transit and transportation projects.

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4 Economic Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

4.1 Explanatory Variables

India's economic relations with Central Asia have various dynamics involved. As the region has many complexities involved due to its geographical significance, India's economic policy also is anchored by many explanatory variables. Based on Indian primary documents and strategic discussion, the dissertation has identified three explanatory variables:

- a Energy Resources in Central Asia;
- b Market Size and Economic Opportunities in Central Asia;
- c Economic Initiative of China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

4.1.1 *Energy Resources in Central Asia Region*

Central Asia has grown more significantly in global oil and gas resource supply and demand, as well as energy geopolitics, in recent years because of its unique geographic position and substantial energy reserves. According to the British Petroleum Corporation's World Energy Statistics Yearbook 2019, Central Asia's proved oil reserves are over 4.1 billion tons, or roughly 1.8% of the world's total proved oil reserves. The 21.7 trillion cubic metres of confirmed natural gas reserves constitute around 11% of the total world proven gas reserves. Most of these hydrocarbon reserves are concentrated in three nations: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan has Central Asia's greatest oil storage and development capacity; its oil reserves were 3.93 billion tons in 2017, ranking 12th in the globe and accounting for around 1.8% of the total known worldwide amount. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has the highest natural gas storage and development capacity in Central Asia, with a reserve of 19.5 trillion-metre cube in 2017, ranking fourth in the world with a storage-to-production ratio of more than 300 years. Although Uzbekistan's oil and gas reserves are slightly smaller than Kazakhstan's, the country's natural gas output is second only to Turkmenistan, and it has a full pipeline system (Table 4.1).¹

However, Central Asian nations' oil and gas refining capacity remains low; in comparison to rich known reserves and constantly expanding production capacity, consumption in Central Asian nations remains low, and most output is exported.

Table 4.1 Hydrocarbon Reserves and Potential Renewable Energy Sources in Central Asia

<i>Resources</i>	<i>Kazakhstan</i>	<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	<i>Tajikistan</i>	<i>Turkmenistan</i>	<i>Uzbekistan</i>
Oil Reserve	30 billion barrels	5 million barrels	12 million barrels	600 million barrels	600 million barrels
Natural gas	2.7 trillion cubic metres	6 billion cubic metres	5.633 billion cubic metres	19.5 trillion cubic metres	1.2 trillion cubic metres
Coal reserve	25.6 billion tons	1.3 billion tons	4.5 billion tons	*	1.375 billion tons
Hydro potential (Theoretical)	199 TWh/year	163 TWh/year	527 TWh/year	24 TWh/year	88.5 TWh/year
Solar potential	3760 GW	267 GW	195 GW	655 GW	593 GW
Wind potential	354 GW	1.5 GW	2 GW	10 GW	1.6 GW

Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2020, <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2020-full-report.pdf>.

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Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia's oil supply capacity remained steady at around 50 million tons to 60 million tons. However, with the help of global corporations, oil and gas output has continued to grow since 2000. In 2005, the discrepancy between production and sales surpassed 100 million tons (i.e., 109 million tons) and has been consistent since then. In 2016, there was a 122-million-ton disparity between production and sales. This indicates that, even if the Central Asia-Caspian area's oil and gas output grows, the former region alone may contribute roughly 120 million tons of oil and gas annually over the next 20 years.² As a result, Central Asia holds a critical place in the global oil and gas supply chain. While Central Asia has physical control of oil and gas deposits, it lacks the cash and technology to go into production on its own, a characteristic that attracts governments and international firms seeking a piece of the production and income pie. As a result, one significant geopolitical consequence of the Soviet Union's disintegration was the emergence of fierce political and commercial struggle for control of the massive energy resources of Central Asia's newly independent and vulnerable governments.³

Additionally, various political forces have begun a bruising and complicated battle for energy resource development and the Central Asian oil and gas pipelines. Central Asia swiftly became the focus of strong struggle between major global political groups and international money due to its strategic geographic location and huge oil and gas resources. Oil companies from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Canada, Japan, India, South Korea, Russia, China, Argentina, Hungary, Oman and the United Arab Emirates have all established operations in Central Asia for oil exploration and development, crude oil refining, sales and other activities, according to incomplete statistics.

4.1.2 Market Size and Economic Opportunities in Central Asia Region

The states of Central Asia have a strong economic foundation and much room for expansion. The overall GDP of Central Asia is \$347 billion.⁴ The GDP of Central Asia increased more than sevenfold over the last two decades. Since 2000, Central Asia's contribution to the global GDP (PPP) has increased by a ratio of 1.8. Since 2000, the country's 77 million inhabitants have grown by a factor of 1.4. The region's burgeoning population creates a sizable sales market and a growing supply of labour resources.⁵ The demographics of Central Asia favour economic growth. The existing age distribution predicts an increase in labour resources in the future.

Over the previous 20 years, Central Asian nations' average annual economic growth rate has been 6.2%, compared to developing nations' growth rates of 5.3% and the global average of 2.6%. The increase in export profits, migrant workers' remittances and foreign direct investment all helped to lower poverty and raise incomes. The majority of the region's nations saw a tripling of their GDP per capita at PPP. The number of commodities exported from the area in 2021 was \$165.5 billion, a six-fold rise over the previous 20 years.⁶ Even more quickly than their combined international trade, bilateral commerce between the nations is increasing (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Overview of Central Asia's Economy (2020)

S. No.	Country	Population	GDP Size (USD/Billion)	GDP Growth %	Major Industries
1	Kazakhstan	18,589,667	181.66	6.13	Agriculture, oil, coal, iron ore, services
2	Kyrgyzstan	6,415,850	8.46	4.5	Agriculture, small machinery, textiles, food processing, cement, shoes, lumber, refrigerators, furniture, electric motors, gold, rare earth metals
3	Tajikistan	9,321,018	8.12	7	Agriculture, aluminium, cement, coal, gold, silver, antimony, textile, vegetable oil
4	Turkmenistan	5,942,089	45.43	6.33	Agriculture, natural gas, oil, petroleum products, textiles, food processing
5	Uzbekistan	32,981,716	60.49	5.6	Agriculture, machine building, metallurgy, mining, hydrocarbon extraction, chemicals

Source: "The Influence of Chinese Economic Growth on Central Asian Countries (Business Reference Services, Library of Congress)". 2020. *Business Reference Services*. <https://www.loc.gov/tr/business/asia/CentralAsia/centralasian.html>.

The table above indicates the overall economic profile of the region which varies from each other depending on their offer to international actors. The countries with hydrocarbon richness and the high population are having stable economic growth. Likewise, it also shows the increasing foreign engagement due to the sizable market and hydrocarbon richness in the region.

Similarly, the importance of the Caspian basin and Central Asian republics as a trade crossroads cannot be overstated. Since ancient times, this region has served as a crossroads between East and West. It was formerly the corridor that connected Beijing with the Mediterranean Sea, and it was used by camel caravans carrying Eastern commodities destined for Western markets. The moniker “Silk Road” was well known in this corridor. Additionally, with a 75 million population Central Asia presents itself as a substantive market for emerging economies around them. Where China, India, Pakistan and Russia are competing to secure the market.

Also, prior to 1991, the central Soviet government was responsible for Central Asia’s external and internal security. Its hasty exit from the scene left a vacuum, immediately exposing the region’s susceptibility to a variety of dangers. Two early instances of how difficulties in one country flow beyond national boundaries and affect everyone in the neighbourhood were the Tajikistan civil war in 1992 and the Aral Sea environmental disaster.⁷ Contemporarily, border wars, political upheavals, violent labour unrest and inter-ethnic violence have all occurred in Central Asian countries. Concerns have been raised concerning the expansion of transnational extremist networks linking Central Asia to neighbouring countries, particularly Afghanistan. Regional countries, notably Russia, are increasing their military participation in Afghanistan as the NATO-led multinational force prepares to leave.⁸

4.1.3 Economic Initiative of China under Belt and Road Initiative

Chinese President Xi Jinping called on him to develop a new regional cooperation model during his visit to Kazakhstan by constructing the “Silk Road Economic Belt” together in September 2013. A month later, President Xi again advocated for the foundation and development of a “21st Century Maritime Silk Route,” the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank (AIIB), in Indonesia. The ideas are formally referred to as the One Belt One Road (OBOR) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The initiative was incorporated in November 2013 into the broad reform plan declared as a key political objective by the party leadership before 2020.⁹ In 2015 while asked about the announcement of BRI and its implication for India, the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs, responded that the government of India is aware of such initiations and does not consider it as a threat or a challenge to India’s interest with external partners.¹⁰

The potential of transport BRI projects for citizens in the participating nations is significantly improved, but only if China and other corridor economies adopt a far-reaching policy reform that increases transparency, expands trade, improves debt sustainability and mitigates the risks of environmental, social and corruption (Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Summary of the BRI

Basic principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respecting sovereignty, mutual inviolability, non-interference to internal affairs, peaceful coexistence, equality and reciprocity, • Pen framework, • Cooperative relations, • Market mechanism, and • Win–win relationship.
Target area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking East Asian and European economic areas, and • Vast interior areas located between them.
Priority sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy coordination, • Infrastructure (transportation, energy, communication) development, • Trade and investment cooperation (facilitation, barriers reduction, investment climate improvement and FTA), • Finance cooperation (expanding currency exchange, cultivating Asian bond market, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS New Development Bank and Silk Road Fund), and • Human exchange.
Cooperation framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN plus one (China), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC).
Implementation body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each province/region in China

Source: Hideo Ohashi “The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the context of China’s opening-up policy.” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 7, no. 2, (2018): 85–103, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2018.1564615>.

The Indian government also considered that the revival of the old Silk Route with the modern connectivity plan is going to contribute to India’s interaction with those countries in and around the projects. Mentioning about the relevance of Silk Road, the Ministry of External Affairs in 2015 said,

The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road and the Silk Road Economic Belt are two recent Chinese initiatives that the Indian government has taken note of. The Silk Route, the Spice Route, and numerous more comparable routes were among the early trading routes in Asia. These were the avenues for brisk trade within the area and beyond, serving as the foundation for Asia’s prosperity. They supported cultural, artistic, religious, and spiritual interchange. India, which served as the hub of many of these trade networks, imparted its ancient knowledge to the cultures along these routes. The government continuously assesses synergy-based partnerships with numerous nations to develop physical infrastructure connectivity to promote trade, business, and people-to-people interactions.¹¹

On the broader spectrum, while analysing the BRI and its significance in Chinese or in global politics, four arguments can be drawn based on the academic work.

First, the BRI is a significant endeavour by China in its exploration of new kinds of international business collaboration with new partners in order to continue its economic growth. Second, China hopes to retain a bigger worldwide impact by combining some of its experience, through the BRI and contributing to international economic architecture. As a power developing, China has demonstrated a readiness to take larger international economic governance duties.¹² Third, the development of infrastructures is an essential component of the Road and Belt Initiative; nevertheless, the scope of the initiative is considerably broader, embracing policy discussion, infrastructure connection, trade unfettered, financial assistance and exchanges between people. Given China's own experience in economic growth, infrastructure will likely play a critical role, especially at the early stage of the Initiative, in promoting regional collaboration and development.¹³ A variety of projects, including high-speed railways, oil and gas pipelines and energy and telecom connections are already being studied for connecting various sub areas (Table 4.4). In addition to the financing given by international organizations such as the AIIB, the BRICS New Development Bank, and even the World Bank, China's institutions (including the Silk Road Fund, Chinese Development Bank (CDB) and numerous Chinese corporations) will undoubtedly make major investments (Asian Development Bank [ADB]).

Finally, the Belt & Road Initiative provides tremendous potential both to create a new economic pillar and to contribute to the formulation of new policies.

Table 4.4 Comparison of Estimates of Global Infrastructure Investment Needs

<i>Sectoral Scope</i>	<i>Actual/Expected Annual Investment</i>	<i>Investment Need (USD Trillion)</i>		
	<i>(USD Trillion)</i>	<i>Time Frame</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Per Annum</i>
Including power generation, transmission and distribution, primary energy supply, energy demand and efficiency, transport, water and sanitation and telecommunication	3.4 (2015)	2015 –2030	75–86	5–6
	–	2015 – 2030	96	6.4
	3.4–4.4 (2017)	2016 – 2030	95	6.3 (or 6.9 under a 2°C scenario)
Including roads, railways, airports, electricity generation, transmission and distribution, water and telecommunication	2.3 (2015) growing to 3.8 (2040)	2015 – 2040	94	2.9 (2015)–4.6 (2040)
Including transport (roads, railways, airports and ports), water, power and telecommunication	2.5	2016 –2030	49	3.3

Source: OECD, China's Belt "Road Initiative in the Global Trade." *Investment and Finance Landscape* (2018).

However, there are also considerable insecurities and hazards such as geopolitical risk management, international policy coordination and cross-border financial sustainability. There are split prospects for transforming the globe by means of this new Chinese endeavour, since it is untraveled water for China and the rest of the world. China's attempts to help economic growth should, nevertheless, be appreciated in this undeveloped region.¹⁴ However, caution must be taken to make this initiative succeed, both financially and politically.

When finished, BRI projects may shorten travel times along economic corridors by 12%, enhance commerce by up to 3.4% and elevate 7.6 million people from severe poverty by 2.7–9.7%.¹⁵ By 2040, GDP in the world is expected to rise by \$7.1 billion a year. In 2040, GDP worldwide increased by 4.2% of probable GDP (or 8.3% of GDP in 2019). The BRI has a broad range of advantages. There are expected to be more than \$10 billion in yearly GDP growth in 56 different nations by 2040. Other than China, it will be by far the greatest economy in the world by 2040.¹⁶ The biggest potential recipient of BRI is likely (surprise) the United States, while it does not actively participate in the project, to benefit from a boost to the global economy. This is because the US economy is purely large and hence wins from the indirect impact of global GDP. Although America's GDP increase is just 1.4% (far lower than most other big economies), the US economy's absolute size is still such that it is greater than just the absolute boost for any other economy saves China.

Beijing viewed Central Asian Republics (CARs) as a crucial geographic feature since they serve as a connection hub for markets in Eurasia, Europe and Russia.¹⁷ As the BRI's continental corridor, the PRC depends on Central Asia. As a hub for transportation and a connection to other prosperous markets, the region is important to Western Asia, the Gulf States, Russia and the European Union. The Chinese side intends to connect domestic producers with these markets through a sophisticated network of roads and trains.¹⁸ The "New Eurasia Land Bridge (NELB)," the "China–Mongolia–Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC)," the "China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor (CAWSEC)," the "China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)," the "China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CIPEC)," and the "Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor" (BCIMEC) are six mega connectivity projects planned through the land, and four of them involves Central Asia.¹⁹

China needs to keep boosting its economic capacity and retaining its influence in global politics, whether on a bilateral, regional or multilateral scale. As a result, as part of its global aspirations, China has intensified its trading efforts in Central Asia. China now has more commerce with Central Asia than Russia, which it surpassed in 2013, after growing from \$700 million in 1998 to \$25 billion in 2008 and then doubling once again.²⁰ BRI, when assessing the actions of the Chinese government under President Xi, is one of his main plans to seek global economic supremacy.

As China now invests, influences and controls major economic activities, India's policy towards the region is anchored by the BRI and its economic activities. Author wrote a paper in 2021 about how China is instrumentalizing the economy

to gain political and strategic control in Central Asia.²¹ The paper highlighted how China is acquiring the drilling, mining and operational rights of many hydrocarbon resources in Central Asia. While India's goals to the region includes energy security dynamics as well as the diversification of India's export market, BRI certainly works as a one of the external determinants to shape India's economic policy towards the region.²²

4.2 Intervening Variables

After accessing the explanatory variables of India's economic policy towards Central Asia, there are equally internal determinants involved to shape India's economic policy towards the region. For instance, the economic liberalization of 1991 is one of the major factors which not only shaped India's economic policy towards Central Asia but changed the course of India's approach to globalization. There are two intervening variables that dissertation has identified based on primary and secondary resources analysis:

- a Economic development in India: Industrialization and Urbanization;
- b Demand for Energy Resources in India.

4.2.1 *Economic Development in India: Industrialization and Urbanization*

Due to the economic liberalization that happened in 1991, India saw a stiff spike in its economic progress that not only contributed to India's internal development but also provided flexibility on India's external approach. A post 1991 economic reform and India's economic progress can be divided into four parts to understand it. First from 1991 to 1992, due to the mounting crisis this phase was dedicated to economic reform. Fiscal slackness, an increase in reliance on borrowing from abroad, a deteriorating financial system, and onerous regulation of commerce and industry are well-known causes of the crisis that began in 1991.²³ The Gulf War in the second part of 1990–1991 was the primary cause of the 1991 crisis since it increased global oil prices (and India's cost of oil imports) and decreased remittance inflows from the Gulf.²⁴ Uncertain coalition politics in 1990–1991 exacerbated economic issues and sped up the onset of a full-blown balance of payment crisis. In the beginning of 1991, exports decreased, short-term external debt skyrocketed, and foreign exchange reserves dipped below \$1 billion.²⁵ Even though there were strong import restrictions in place by mid-1991, when the new Congress Party government took office, a payment default was likely. With Manmohan Singh serving as finance minister, this administration moved swiftly to stabilize the macroeconomic environment and launch long overdue structural reforms.²⁶

The second phase was between 1992 and 1997. The reforms quickly helped India's external industry get back on track. In the three years following 1993–1994, the increase of exports climbed to 20%. Non-resident Indians' inward transfers increased fourfold, from \$2 billion in the United States in 1990–1991 to \$8 billion in 1994–1995 and then more than \$12 billion in 1996–1997. After 1990–1991,

the current account deficit in the balance of payments never again reached 2% of GDP and averaged under 1% for ten years. From a meagre \$100 million in 1990–1991 to more than \$6 billion in 1996–1997, foreign investment skyrocketed.²⁷ From the fragile levels of 1991, foreign exchange reserves rose sharply, reaching almost \$25 billion by the end of the 1994–1995 fiscal year. Over a decade, the debt service ratio was cut in half. The key level of short-term foreign debt to foreign exchange reserves fell from the astronomical highs (380%) of 1991 to a very safe 20% by March 1995. This level was proven important again in the Asian crisis of 1997–1998.²⁸

A significant resurgence of investment and growth was also brought about by the reforms of the early 1990s (with a focus on deregulation and market orientation) and some degree of success with budgetary consolidation. From 22.6% of GDP in 1991–1992 to almost 27% in 1995–1996, total investment increased. In the five years from 1992 to 1997, GDP growth averaged an exceptional 6.7%, quickly recovering from a crisis-year low of under 1% in 1991–1992.²⁹ Compared to little over 1% in the three decades from 1951 to 1980, the per capita GDP increased by about 5% annually. Growth was widespread, with all significant industries performing better than in the 1980s and significantly better than during the 30 years between 1951 and 1980. The productivity gains from deregulation of trade, industry and finance; the surge in exports assisted by reform; the investment boom of 1993–1996; the partial success with fiscal consolidation; the improvement in terms of trade for agriculture; and the brisk global economy were some of the factors driving this growth acceleration.

The third phase was between 1997 and 2002. A turning point that marked the demise of the economic party was the year 1997. Specifically, three occurrences that took place over a six-month period slowed down growth.³⁰ The political crisis that brought down the Deve Gowda United Front administration in March and brought in the Inder Gujral United Front government was a manifestation of the volatility inherent in coalition governments. The Asian crisis narrative began in July with the Thai financial crisis, and for the next eighteen months, it dominated the global economic scene. Finally, the Gujral government published its choices about the Fifth Pay Commission report (concerning government pay scales) in September. These choices would prove costly for the nation's economic and fiscal health.

In the “Ninth Plan” period, 1997–2002, the average GDP growth rate decreased to 5.5%. The steep decreases in agricultural and industrial growth were especially unsettling.³¹ Indeed, if not for the tremendous dynamism of the services sector, which averaged growth of 8% during these five years, the decline in GDP growth would have been much greater. There are concerns about future sustainability as a result of the fact that India's recent strong expansion in services was far quicker than in industries. The tremendous vitality in the relatively young industries of information technology and business process outsourcing only accounts for a very modest portion of overall services expansion. Despite starting from a very small base, growth was quick.

By 2002, these new sub sectors contributed only 2% to the GDP, as opposed to the services sector as a whole, which contributed over 50%. Macroeconomic and structural reasons both played a role in the slowdown in growth. The consolidated deficit

of the federal and state governments significantly worsened on the fiscal front, with government pay hikes following the Fifth Pay Commission accounting for nearly half of the rise. Initially decreasing from 9.4% of GDP in 1990–1991 to 6.4% in 1996–1997, this gap increased significantly in the following years to reach about 10% by the end of the decade.³² Government dissaving (revenue deficits) increased by more than 3% of GDP and completely explained the steep decrease in aggregate and public saving. Similar decreases in total investment were reflected in the loss in savings.³³

And the fourth phase was between 2002 and 2020. Since 2003, there has been a resurgence of confidence regarding the Indian economy's development potential. The "Tenth Plan," which was released in early 2003, predicted an overall growth of 8% from 2002 to 2007.³⁴ The country's foreign exchange reserves have unexpectedly increased to high levels (exceeding \$100 billion), as a result of a surge in software exports and remittances (together with reduced import demands of a relatively sluggish industrial sector). This has allayed previous concerns about a "foreign exchange constraint." Rapid economic growth is predicted by the demographic outlook of a labour force that is fast expanding and dependence ratios that are declining.³⁵ The real GDP growth in 2003–2004 was higher than 8%, supporting the projections made in the Tenth Plan. By the time India reached 2010, it was having a double-digit economic growth. Surprisingly, there was no impact of 2008s financial recession on the Indian economy. Year 2020 saw a slower growth rate due to the pandemic and the halt of world trade. Due to India's exponential economic growth, India's foreign relations also got anchored by it.

4.2.2 Demand of Energy Resources in India

Energy is the most important factor in every country's economic prosperity and security. The long-term energy supply from inexpensive, accessible and environmentally friendly sources is a critical prerequisite for future economic growth. In recent decades, the rising need for development has triggered an enormous surge in energy consumption.³⁶

Although energy security in politics is of great importance, numerous scholars have noted that it is not defined properly. "Safety of energy supply, or in short, 'energy security,' appears to be very fluid".³⁷ Others say this "there is not a common meaning"³⁸ for energy security or "slippery" or "tough"³⁹ to define the notion. This has to be seen by others. In political activities too, the uncertainty over energy security is evident. Energy safety has historically concentrated in the United States on reducing susceptibility to political extortion, which has led politicians to demand for energy independence and increasing renewable energy shares. In Brazil, on the other hand, when the ideal of energy independence has become reality, politicians have been advocating increased imports of fossil fuels and a decrease in renewable energy proportions to enhance energy security.⁴⁰

India must continue the 8% growth rate to help eradicate poverty and achieve its economic and social development goals.⁴¹ India is expected to become one of the world's greatest economies. More expansion implies more energy; therefore, the security of energy moves the political agenda forward. In January 2005, President

Table 4.5 India's Major Energy Outlook (2021)

		<i>Own Consumption</i>	<i>Production</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>
Electricity	Total (bn kWh)	1137	1386	5.62	5.15
	Per capita (kWh)	823.91	1004.34	4.07	3.73
Crude Oil	Total (Barrel/ day)	N/A	709,000	N/A	4.06 mil Barrel
	Per capita		0.001 bbl		0.003 bbl
Natural Gas	Total (Cubic metres)	55.43 bn cubic metre	31.54 bn cubic metre	23.96 bn cubic metre	76.45 mln cubic metre
	Per Capita	40.17-metre cube	22.85-metre cube	17.36-metre cube	0.06-metre cube

Source: World Data. "Energy Consumption in India," 2021. <https://www.worlddata.info/asia/india/energy-consumption.php>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam underlined that energy security as a transition to absolute "energy independence" was essential to his address to the country on the eve of the 59th Independence Day.⁴² Since then, Indian Premier Manmohan Singh has stressed the need of energy security as the major safety issue. A fresh strategy is obviously necessary. India has the fundamental issue of responding to a fast-growing energy demand. In terms of overall energy consumption, India ranks sixth in the world. It has to speed up sector development in order to fulfil the growth ambitions of over a billion people. India has exceptionally low current per capita energy usage compared to the rest of the globe (Table 4.5).

To build and maintain a nation, together with a vibrant energy industry, a country needs a solid economic basis. The same applies to India as well. The demand for energy is growing in a country. The rise in energy use occurs not just nationally but also industrially and especially individually. The measurement of the development of the country has largely been scaled down by the increase in both absolute and relative growth in gross domestic product (GDP) during the past years. The increased demand for energy is measured by the use over time of various energy sources, such as crude oil, natural gas, coal, solar, hydro, nuclear and other renewable energy sources.⁴³

India, due to increasing incomes and improved livelihoods, is worldwide the third largest energy-consuming country. Since 2000 energy usage has risen and coal, oil and solid biomass continue to provide 80% of the demand. India's energy consumption and emissions per capita are less than half the world average, as with other major metrics such as the ownership of vehicles, steel and cement production.⁴⁴

In a real-world scenario, India imports over 80% of its hydrocarbon consumption. As a result, the country is primarily reliant on the unpredictable Middle East, which has seen several fuel supply outages, price fluctuations and unparalleled monopoly from Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members. According to Export and Import Data Bank (EIDB) data, India imported crude oil worth USD 122.45 billion in 2021–2022. It is more than double the value of

imports in 2020–2021, when the value of crude oil imports plummeted to USD 59.48 billion. Crude oil's percentage of total imports has also climbed to nearly 20% in 2021–2022, up from 15.1% in 2020–2021. The proportion in 2019–2020 was 21.6%.⁴⁵ India paid \$76.90 per barrel in October 2018.⁴⁶ Given the current trend, India's oil import bill is likely to rise by the end of 2018.⁴⁷ This has had a significant impact on India's foreign reserves, and the depletion of those reserves has led the rupee to fall to a new low of 74.32 against the US dollar in October.⁴⁸ The excessive spike in the price of fuel, diesel and LPG, on the other hand, has agitated the public, allowing the opposition to bolster and focus their attack on the administration for the first time since 2014. That is sufficient evidence of the importance of energy to India's economic narrative and day-to-day functioning. That is maybe why energy is seen as the foundation of everything and hence a universal currency. As India recovers from the downturn triggered by Covid in 2020, its energy growth is beginning a very active age. Likewise, considering the arrangement of India's energy sector, it is highly dependent on imports.

Seeing the date of 2019, India is highly dependent on coal to generate energy, which sometimes also causes the coal shortage and the energy scarcity.⁴⁹ The COVID-19 outbreak has disrupted India's energy use; the IEA's latest forecast shows a 5% drop in the country's energy demand in 2020 due to lockdowns and related restrictions, with coal and oil use suffering the most. The pandemic has also had an impact on energy investment, which is expected to fall by 15% by 2020, worsening financial constraints across the board, particularly among India's electricity distribution corporations.⁵⁰ However, considering the rapid economic growth of India, the energy demand in the country will continue to increase (Table 4.6). Below are two tables that present India's economic growth in four different scenarios in the future and energy demands based on the annual growth scenario (Figures 4.1–4.3).

Table 4.6 India's Crude Oil Import by Sources 2019

Middle east	59%	Iraq	22%
		Saudi Arabia	19%
		UAE	9%
		Kuwait	5%
		Iran	2%
		Other Middle East	2%
Western Hemisphere	17%	Venezuela	7%
		United States	5%
		Mexico	4%
		Other W. Hemisphere	1%
Africa	16%	Nigeria	8%
		Angola	3%
		Other Africa	5%
Former Soviet Union (FSU)	4%		
Asia-Pacific Region	2%		
Other	2%		

Source: US Energy Information Administration. "India's Energy Overview," *Country Analysis*. Washington: US Energy Information Administration, 2021. https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/India/india.pdf. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

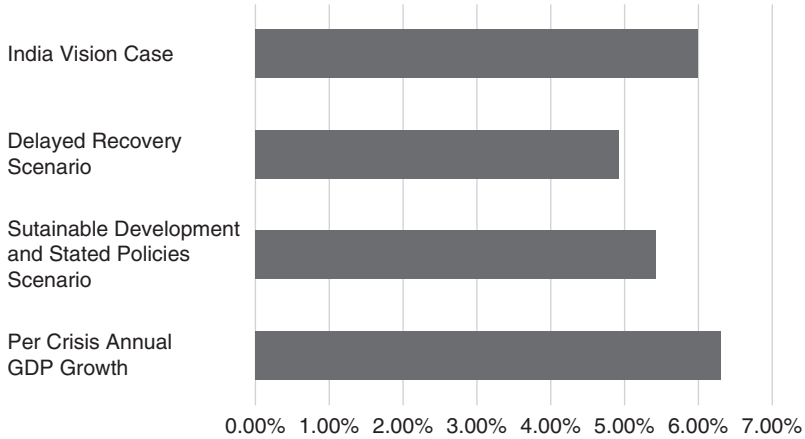


Figure 4.1 Average Annual Growth in India GDP by Scenarios (2019–2040).

Source: International Energy Agency. India Energy Outlook, “IEA, Paris, 2021. Accessed: Mar. 28, 2021,” 2021. https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/1de6d91e-e23f-4e02-b1fb-51fdd6283b22/India_Energy_Outlook_2021.pdf. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

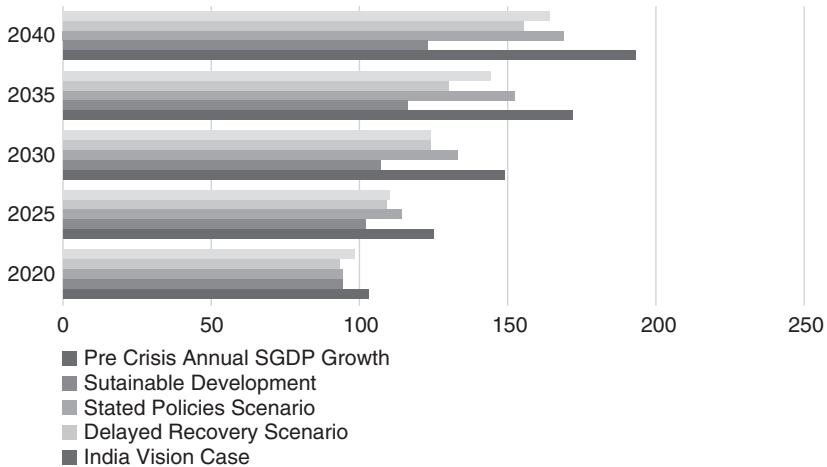


Figure 4.2 India's Demand Growth in India by Scenario (2019–2040).

Source: International Energy Agency. India Energy Outlook, “IEA, Paris, 2021. Accessed: Mar. 28, 2021,” 2021. https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/1de6d91e-e23f-4e02-b1fb-51fdd6283b22/India_Energy_Outlook_2021.pdf. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

India relies mostly on imports of oil from West Asia (Middle East) because of its energy demands. This region is highly politicized and threatened because of its geostrategic location and geological riches.⁵¹ Rivalries and fighting between and within states, including power incursions, were everyday issues. The high-quality

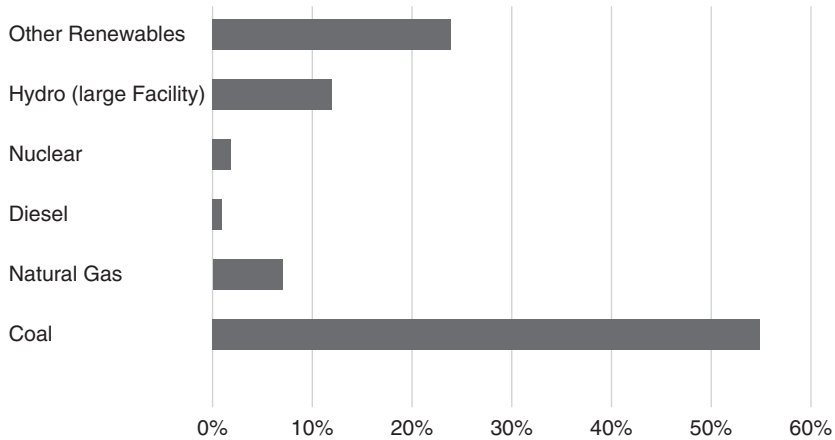


Figure 4.3 India's Installed Power Capacity by Fuel 2020.

Source: US Energy Information Administration. "India's Energy Overview," *Country Analysis*. Washington: US Energy Information Administration, 2021. https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/India/india.pdf. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

Table 4.7 Oil Reserve in Central Asia

Country	Barrels (Billions)	World Share
Kazakhstan	30	1.80%
Kyrgyzstan	0.04	0.00%
Tajikistan	0.012	0.00%
Turkmenistan	0.6	0.04%
Uzbekistan	0.6	0.04%

Source: "Oil Reserves by Country," *Worldometer*, 2021. <https://www.worldometers.info/oil/oil-reserves-by-country/>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

and mostly undeveloped resources in oil and gas and the investment-friendly climate have further contributed to the region. With decreased consumption in the home nations, a big portion is intended for export. Moreover, Central Asia is stable and popular rebellion against external forces, unlike the Middle East and African nations wealthy in energy, seems to be missing. As compared to other places of the globe which produce gas, Central Asia and the Caspian is a widely untapped market. All these are the driving forces in the selection of the Central Asia energy centre for any country in general and India in particular (Tables 4.7 and 4.8).⁵²

Prime Minister Narendra Modi articulated India's energy security perspective well in his address to the 16th International Energy Forum in New Delhi in 2018, saying, "My vision for India's energy future has four pillars – energy access, energy efficiency, energy sustainability, and energy security," and that energy issues are critical for the country's continued growth and prosperity.⁵³ To support the idea of sustaining and maintaining the energy security of India there is Hydrocarbon Vision 2025 of India.

Table 4.8 Natural Gas Reserve in Central Asia

Country	MMcf	World Share (%)
Kazakhstan	85	12
Kyrgyzstan	2	0.003
Tajikistan	2	0.003
Turkmenistan	265	3.8
Uzbekistan	65	0.9

Source: "Natural Gas Reserves by Country," *Worldometer*, 2021. <https://www.worldometers.info/gas/gas-reserves-by-country/>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

The 'Hydrocarbon Vision 2025' published by government of India have five objectives to be achieved by 2025:

- a To assure energy security by achieving self-reliance through increased indigenous production and investment in equity oil abroad.
- b To enhance quality of life by progressively improving product standards to ensure a cleaner and greener India.
- c To develop the hydrocarbon sector as a globally competitive industry which could be benchmarked against the best in the world through technology upgradation and capacity building in all facets of the industry.
- d To have a free market and promote healthy competition among players and improve the customer service.
- e To ensure oil security for the country keeping in view strategic and defence considerations.

There is no 'Energy Security Policy' that India has adopted besides the generalized discussion on the 'India's National Security Strategy'. Thus, 'Hydrocarbon Vision 2025' is the only official strategy, which strategizes India's hydrocarbon security. And considering India's primary energy sectors, hydrocarbon share is still large. There is no doubting the need for consistent access to Central Asian energy resources for India's continued expansion. However, there is rising worry about how deeply India has invested in the energy-rich region and how much more it needs to do.

4.3 Goals and Assumptions

Based on the interviews of Indian scholars, document analysis and India's behaviours in Central Asia, authors have identified four goals and assumptions of India's economic policy towards the region:

Increasing economic interdependence and Cooperation between South and Central Asia.

- a Increase the Economic Potential and Development of India.
- b Diversification of Energy Resources for India.
- c Balance China Economically.

4.3.1 *Increasing Economic Interdependence and Cooperation between South and Central Asia Region*

Trade links between the regions of Central and South Asia are long-standing. Movements of people and things have almost always occurred between the regions, influencing political relations as well as their cultural and religious linkages. However, trade between the two regions is still very low today, far lower than trade between regions in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

The contemporary economic growth and development of countries in Central and South Asia are contingent upon trade, investment and cooperative economic efforts amongst these regions. The two regions comprise Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics, landlocked nations that depend on air and land connections with neighbouring nations and each other to access regional and international markets. Despite the great potential for trade and investment between Central and South Asia, these two regions have some of the lowest levels of economic integration in the world; interregional trade between the five Central Asian Republics and the three South Asian nations of Afghanistan, India and Pakistan makes up less than 1% of total trade.⁵⁴

Many different efforts are being proposed in an attempt to change that. They include the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement, a cross-border transport agreement between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and multilateral initiatives to secure better market access through Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO).⁵⁵ Much of the help provided by the US government to improve connectivity throughout South and Central Asia and reinstate Afghanistan's historic position as the crossroads of Eurasia is based on its vision of a New Silk Road. There are plans for new trade routes. Through a network of energy grids, communication networks and commerce corridors that run north–south and east–west, they link Europe with the markets of Central and East Asia. The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) programme of the ADB has influenced the creation of the new routes. It has carried out more than 100 projects related to regional transportation, trade facilitation, trade policy and energy, and it has also facilitated over \$20 billion in infrastructure and investment in the area.⁵⁶

In this scenario, India's goal is to increase the economic interdependence between Central and South Asia. India's rising economy requires it to find a market that serves their economic expansion. As a result, India as a regional power of South Asia aims to create an interdependency between two regions which plays a vital role in India's progress. The significance of intraregional economic interdependence for the advancement of regional integration initiatives is emphasized by traditional integration theories, either overtly or covertly. According to neo-functionalism, interdependence is the essential conveyor belt that allows regional integration to spread from one industry to another and ultimately into politics.⁵⁷

One may contend that the goal of regional integration is to make use of economic advantages both within the individual region (as emphasized by European integration theories) and in interactions with other regions of the world (as suggested by

several “New Regionalism” methods).⁵⁸ As a result, intraregional interdependence among an area’s member states and interregional dependence between that region and other global regions primarily determine the relative importance of the two types of gains. The degree of economic development in any region determines the possibility of taking use of economies of scale and comparative cost benefits within the region, making it crucial for either dependence or interdependence.⁵⁹

In general, an integrated international system works towards growth by performing four tasks. These are

- 1 The centre, or the dominant power, creating current account surpluses;
- 2 Financial institutions using these surpluses to make acceptable loans or investments;
- 3 Producer goods and modern technology production and sale; and
- 4 Maintenance and, when required, the use of military force to maintain peace and uphold contracts.

So, India as a regional power of South Asia wants to create a more interdependency between South and Central Asia to contribute to its own economic development.

4.3.2 Increase the Economic Potential and Development of India

Historically, India has had a vital trade and cultural relationship with Central Asian countries. The relationship between the two countries has diminished since the 19th century, particularly during the colonial period. Because India’s commercial relations with the five Central Asian republics were regulated by Moscow throughout the Soviet era under the ‘Rupee Trade System,’ the real trade volume remained below potential after independence till the cold war.⁶⁰ After the cold war and India’s booming economic performance due to market liberalization, Central Asia became a vital region in India’s economic sphere. On the other hand, Central Asia has also gained economic momentum since the mid-1990s. Several fundamental changes in the framework of economic growth in Central Asia have occurred throughout the last two decades of transition. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central Asian economies had a period of stagnation until a spectacular resurgence in the late 1990s. Between 1997 and 2012, the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of all Central Asian nations increased dramatically. Turkmenistan’s average annual growth rate was 7.4% from 1997 to 2012, Tajikistan’s was 7.2%, Kazakhstan’s was 6.7%, and Uzbekistan’s was 6.5%, according to the World Development Indicators. The period of healing has been extended until now.⁶¹

It’s critical to comprehend the various causes and repercussions of Central Asia’s recent economic performance. The five nations studied here can be separated into oil- and gas-exporting countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and non-oil-exporting countries (Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan).⁶² Based on the economic performance of the countries in the region India particularly sees three opportunities there.

Table 4.9 Population of Central Asia

<i>SN</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Density (KM Sq.)</i>	<i>Growth Rate</i>	<i>Growth Rate Rank</i>
1	Uzbekistan	33,935,763	75.85	1.54%	79th
2	Kazakhstan	18,994,962	6.97	1.27%	99th
3	Tajikistan	9,749,627	68.13	2.39%	45th
4	Kyrgyzstan	6,628,356	33.15	1.76%	65th
5	Turkmenistan	6,117,924	12.53	1.56%	74th

Source: “Central Asia Population 2021,” *World Population Review*, 2021. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/continents/central-asia-population>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

First is the sizable consumer market. Pharmaceuticals and healthcare are two significant areas of collaboration between India and Central Asia. In this industry, India enjoys a competitive advantage in the worldwide market. Claris Life Sciences, Ranbaxy, Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories, Lupin Laboratories, Unique Laboratories and Aurobindo Pharma are some of the Indian pharmaceutical businesses exporting to Central Asia. Some of these firms intend to establish manufacturing facilities in Central Asia. The pharmaceutical factory of Kazakhstan Pharma, a joint venture between Kazakhstan and India, is nearing completion in Almaty.⁶³ Considering the increasing population of Central Asia, not only pharmaceuticals and healthcare facilities, India has an opportunity to export their consumer goods in the region (Table 4.9).

Second, investment potentiality. In the recent decade, Indian policymakers have established an institutional framework to enable trade and investment with this region. With all of the CARs, the government has established intergovernmental commissions for trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, which have been meeting on a regular basis. These ties have been formalized through collaborative working groups in a variety of disciplines, including information technology, research and technology, hydrocarbons, military-technical cooperation, and so on. The Indian government also provides CARs with limited lines of credit, allowing Indian exporters to sell to these markets without fear of not being paid. Importers pay around 15–20% of the contract value in advance under this plan, with the remaining contract value disbursed by India’s EXIM bank upon shipping of goods. EXIM Bank is in charge of credit recovery.⁶⁴ Double taxation avoidance agreements (DTAAs) have also been made in order to encourage and facilitate trade. In the financial industry, there have also been advancements in terms of cooperation. Canara Bank has ties to Tajikistan’s Commercial Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs. The State Bank of India has ties to Kazakhstan’s Turan-Alem Bank, Kyrgyzstan’s Commercial Bank, Tajikistan’s National Bank, Turkmenistan’s State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs and Uzbekistan’s National Bank for Foreign Economic Activity.

4.3.3 *Diversification of Energy Resources for India*

Energy is necessary for a sustainable economy to thrive and flourish globally, particularly in light of climate change. Energy is essential to the social and economic

advancement of a nation. In the upcoming years, a number of variables, including population growth and technology advancements, are predicted to raise the need for energy supplies. Energy companies have been exposed to significant risks in the last few decades as a result of wars, unstable oil prices, geopolitical unrest and extreme weather.⁶⁵

India's increasing reliance on external sources of supply, at least in the short term, must be based primarily on imports – either through trade agreements with specific foreign partners or by purchases on the open market – given the difficulties it faces in the direct acquisition of hydrocarbon resources from other sovereign countries. After the United States and China, India is the world's third-largest oil user. India has been heavily dependent on West Asian nations for its oil and, more recently, its gas (LNG) supplies ever since oil imports started to rise in the 1980s.⁶⁶ For example, the Persian Gulf region currently supplies over three-fourths of the nation's imports of oil. However, as part of its source diversification plan, India has recently been looking more and more, in concert with China, elsewhere in Africa and Central Asia for oil supplies. India is now completely dependent on the Middle East for its primary energy resources. As explained above, the Middle East as a region is volatile to various aspects of social disturbances. On the other hand, India's primary energy demand is growing each year due to its industrial based economy structure. Central Asian energy resources, notably the Caspian Sea region, will be crucial to India's energy policy. The oil and gas reserves in Central Asia are of excellent quality and virtually unexplored. The investment climate is open and welcoming.⁶⁷

Although the issue of sustainability⁶⁸ has been in the talk in India's policy-making, the hydrocarbons still majorly occupy India's energy sectors. The Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell estimates that India purchased roughly 198 million tons of crude oil in 2020–2021 for a total estimated value of \$62.7 billion. About 3.9 million barrels of crude were imported and consumed daily in India in 2021 – a 22% increase over the previous year. India is the third-largest oil importer and consumer in the world. India has 17% of the world's population, but its oil and natural resources make up only 0.8% of the total worldwide. The petroleum industry in India is mostly dependent on the import of crude.⁶⁹

Due to the vulnerability of the supply route and instability, India's regular source of oil and gas from the Middle East remains under the risk. On the one hand, India's demand is increasing, and on the other hand, the sources that India is dependent on are vulnerable, which guides India to plan their energy diversification. And Central Asia has become a vital region from the perspective of energy diversification.

4.3.4 Balance China Economically

As discussed above, India's one of the major concerns related to China's BRI is related to challenging India's position in the region. India is therefore obligated to suggest an alternative to the BRI in the form of its own international transit lines and advantageous trade deals in order to reduce China's influence on neighbours, including its long-standing economic and political allies. This is necessary not only to oppose the BRI and China but also to advance the economic growth of India.

Given that the Himalayan Mountains encircle the entirety of its northern border, India is infamous for its poor physical location for trade with its neighbours. On the one hand, they put up a barrier between China and India, whose relations are far from perfect. On the other hand, the majority of India's trading partners are nations that can be accessible by water (the United States being the main trade partner for 2019–2020, for example). Except for the hostile Pakistan and China, all of the nations that border India on land have relatively low purchasing power: Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. This condition has an especially negative impact on the economies of the landlocked northern Indian states.⁷⁰ Additionally, using only sea transportation often makes it impossible to utilize a vast country's full commerce potential. As a result, India made the decision to build overland trade routes to the east, such as Myanmar, in order to connect the nations of the Indochinese Peninsula through it and then all of Southeast Asia, in order to get around geographical restrictions.⁷¹

On the other hand, India is instrumentalizing the aid and soft loan to counter BRI. The Financial Times said that since President Modi took office in 2014, lending through India's Development Partnership Administration, through which it gives lines of credit to other countries, has nearly tripled in value compared to the prior eight years. The entire amount lent since Modi took office is close to US\$32 billion. Bangladesh has been the biggest beneficiary of this funding, receiving a US\$7.9 billion credit line from India. With regards to BRI, Sri Lanka, which has had problems, has US\$2.1 billion, while Nepal has US\$1.7 billion.⁷²

Similarly, India is partnering with like-minded partners on a regional level to push the idea of alternative investor or lender. Sri Lanka, India and Japan have all committed to work together to enhance the Colombo port.⁷³ The significantly expanded East Container terminal will be the subject of the trilateral work that will start in March 2023. This development will be viewed as an alliance between Japan and India opposing the BRI.⁷⁴ Additionally, the Indo–US partnership is thought to go beyond defence cooperation, and it is in this area that the quadrilateral might move forward with the development of infrastructure facilities and intensive interoperability cooperative exercises. In line with its Act East strategy, India has also strengthened ties with ASEAN. We are at a turning point where collaboration might be increased in many sectors, including defence. Partnerships could be established through the ASEAN–India Connectivity Summit (AICS), which connects physical and digital connectivity between South Asia and Southeast Asia.⁷⁵

If India's approach to international relations in the neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood is generally analysed, it is guided by reducing China's economic activities. So, India has initiated many strategies that present itself as an alternative approach to BRI in Central Asia.

4.4 Instruments

Based on the goals and assumptions of India's economic policy towards Central Asia this section assesses India's applicability of those goals and assumptions. While doing so it has been divided into two parts. First, it will extensively discuss India's bilateral economic cooperation. Considering the economic opportunities that each Central Asian country offers, it is necessary to understand India's bilateral

trade pattern. And second, it presents India's collective economic approach towards the whole region. India has been working on the multilateral trade and investment pattern in the region to substitute its ongoing bilateral cooperation in the region.

4.4.1 Bilateral Economic Engagement

Despite the focus on trendy ideas like “globalization,” bilateral ties are still used to compare the effectiveness of different national economic policy frameworks. Examining specific bilateral relationships at the very least enables more in-depth analysis to be given to the interaction between unique national economic organizational patterns and the kinds of policies intended to enhance or accommodate such variances. Having said that, the section analyses India's bilateral economic interaction with Central Asian countries separately. And then it also discusses India's multilateral economic approach to the region.

4.4.1.1 India's Bilateral Trade Relations with Kazakhstan

The Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) between India and Kazakhstan, which was founded in 1993, is the top bilateral institutional structure for strengthening commercial, economic, scientific, technical, industrial and cultural cooperation between the two nations. The key ministries on the Indian side are the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, and on the Kazakh side, the Ministry of Energy, with their respective Ministers serving as Co-Chairs of the Commission. The most recent IGC meeting took place in Astana on 19–20 September 2017. In the fields of counter-terrorism, trade and economic cooperation, defence and military-technical cooperation, information technology, hydrocarbons, textiles, tea debt and space cooperation, eight Joint Working Groups have been created. To advance bilateral cooperation in the relevant domains, it was resolved to form two new Joint Working Groups on Transportation & Connectivity and Health (Figure 4.4).⁷⁶

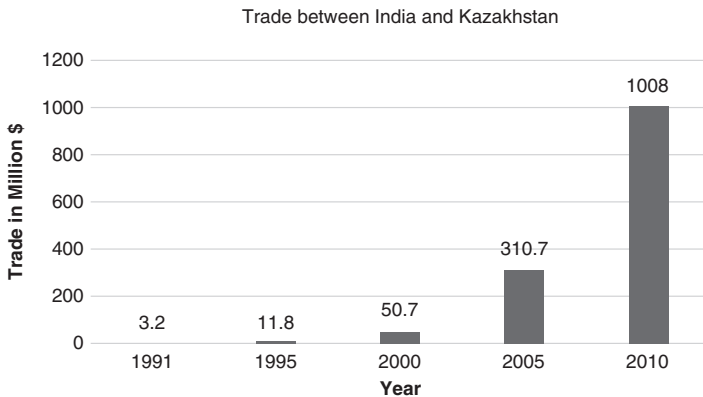


Figure 4.4 Trade Between India and Kazakhstan.

Source: Kaur, Jaspreet. “Indo-Kazakhstan trade: Trends and protocols in the post-Cold War era.” (2012).

Kazakhstan is India's top Central Asian trade and investment partner. A Joint Business Council (JBC) has been established between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Kazakhstan's Chamber of International Commerce to enhance trade, economic and investment relations between the two nations. On 16 February 2018, the JBC convened its second meeting in New Delhi. In June 2018, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), which is responsible for promoting Indian agro-products, visited Almaty and Astana and performed wet samplings of various types of Indian mangoes in notable Kazakhstani supermarkets.⁷⁷ The people of Kazakhstan greeted this with tremendous excitement. Similarly, in August 2018, a tea delegation visited Almaty and held B2B meetings as part of a tea marketing event. Engineering Export Promotion Council (EEPC) India, under the auspices of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, established an India pavilion at Kazbuild and Aquatherm 2019, which took place from 4 September to 6 September in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

Around 30 Indian engineering businesses exhibited their products and capabilities in the India Pavilion, including construction materials and equipment, hardware and tools, roofing and technology, window Décor, HVAC equipment and services, water purification, accessories and valves.⁷⁸ A CAPEXIL⁷⁹-led delegation of 18 Indian firms presented their goods at the Kazcomak Expo in Almaty from 18 September to 20 September 2019 and had B2B discussions with local businesspeople. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Travel Mart 2019 was held in Nur-Sultan on 18–20 September 2019 to promote tourism in India. It was attended by tourism ministers from Kerala and Rajasthan, as well as delegations from the Ministry of Tourism, the Government of India, and businesses from the Indian tourism sector (Table 4.10).⁸⁰

The changes in bilateral trade show the substantial percentage growth in India's trade with Kazakhstan (Table 4.11).

4.4.1.2 *India's Bilateral Trade Relations with Kyrgyzstan*

India–Kyrgyzstan bilateral relations started in 1993. India granted Kyrgyzstan a US\$5 million line of credit in 1995, with US\$2.78 million going to four projects: a toothbrush manufacturing factory, a polythene bag manufacturing plant, a toothpaste production plant and a pharmaceutical plant. The Kyrgyz Republic reimbursed US\$1.66 million, with the remainder converted to a gift.⁸¹ During President Akaev's visit to India in August 2002, the Indian government promised to establish an IT development centre and a potato processing factory in Kyrgyzstan. On 20 March 2006, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the establishment of an IT Development Center was signed in Bishkek. The Indo-Kyrgyz Centre for Information Technology was established in Bishkek by HMT (I), the Indian implementing agency, and was formally launched by the Indian Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Shri Murli S. Deora on 15 August 2007. This centre is now offering short-term IT courses and has already taught over 1000 Kyrgyz professionals (Figure 4.5).

Table 4.10 Bilateral Trade between India and Kazakhstan during the Last Five Years (in US\$ Millions)

<i>Bilateral Trade</i>	<i>2016</i>	<i>% Change over Previous Year</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>% Change over Previous Year</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>% Change over Previous Year</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>% Change over Previous Year</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>% Change over Previous Year</i>
Exports to Kazakhstan	203.81	(-) 15.7	182.91	(-) 10.25	247.78	(+) 32.73	292.5	(+) 20.66	383.7	(+) 31.16
Imports from Kazakhstan	414.61	(+) 88.39	575.9	(+) 38.9	954.08	(+) 65.67	1572.7	(+) 64.77	1991.5	(+) 26.59
Total Trade	618.42	(+) 33.9	758.81	(+) 22.7	1196.86	(+) 57.73	1865.2	(+) 55.93	2375.3	(+) 27.34

Source: Embassy of India, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, "Bilateral Trade/Investment Statistics," *Indembastana.Gov.In*, 2021. <https://www.indembastana.gov.in/page/investment-statistics/>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

Table 4.11 Trade and Economic Cooperation Related Agreements/Protocols/Treaties/MOUs/Declarations Signed/Issued between India and Kazakhstan

<i>SN</i>	<i>Agreements/Protocols/Treaties/MOUs/ Declarations</i>	<i>Date and Place of Signing/Issue</i>
1	Agreement on the Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation	16 October 1992, Kazakhstan
2	Agreement on technical cooperation between India and Kazakhstan	16 October 1992, Kazakhstan
3	Agreement on cooperation in science & technology	25 May 1993, Almaty
4	Air transport agreement between the governments of India and Kazakhstan	10 September 1993, Almaty
5	MOU on Cooperation between the Ministry of Science & New Technologies of Kazakhstan & the Department of Atomic Energy of India	13 January 1996, Almaty
6	Convention for the avoidance of double taxation and for the prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income and on capital	9 December 1996, Almaty
7	India–Kazakhstan Joint Declaration	12 February 2002, New Delhi
8	Agreement on cooperation in the field of tourism	3 June 2002, Almaty
9	Protocol between India and Kazakhstan on accession of Kazakhstan to the WTO.	24 January 2009, New Delhi
10	Agreement between the governments of India and Kazakhstan on protection of certain indications of tea, rice and mango on the territory of Kazakhstan.	23 January 2009, New Delhi
11	MOU between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. and JS NAC KazAtomProm of Kazakhstan	24 January 2009, New Delhi
12	Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Kazakhstan	24 January 2009, New Delhi
13	Agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture of India and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan for Cooperation in the field of Agriculture & Allied Sectors.	16 April 2011, Nursultan
14	Air Services Agreement between the Governments of India and Kazakhstan	28 June 2012,
15	Long-Term Contract for Sale and Purchase of Natural Uranium Concentrates between JSC “NAC Kazatomprom” and Directorate of Purchase & Stores, Department of Atomic Energy, GOI	8 July 2015, Nursultan
16	MOU between the Ministry of Railways of India and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy on Technical Cooperation in the field of Railways.	8 July 2015, Nursultan
17	MOU on amendment of Air Services Agreement between the Governments of India and Kazakhstan	19 October 2015, Antalya, Turkey
18	Protocol amending the Convention for Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income and capital	6 January 2017, New Delhi

Source: “Embassy of India, Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan: Agreements Signed,” *Indembastana.Gov.In*, 2021. <https://www.indembastana.gov.in/page/agreements-signed/>. (Accessed 5 January 2023).

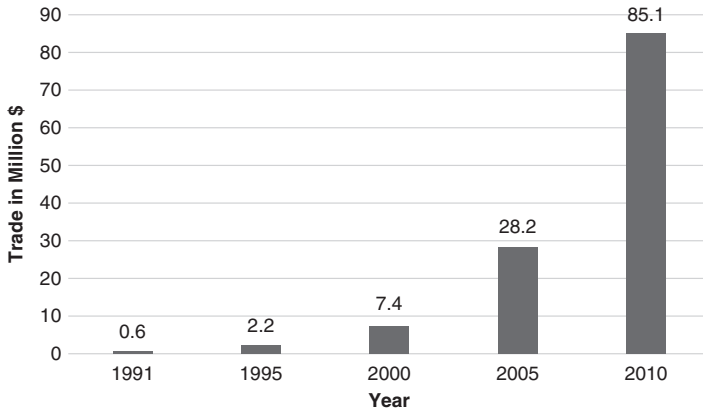


Figure 4.5 India Trade with Kyrgyzstan.

Source: Baitha, S. "India-Kyrgyzstan Relations: Future Prospects and Challenges." *International Journal of Applied Social Science* 2, no. 9 (2015): 313–320.

The relations between the two countries have been revived and energized after Prime Minister Modi came into power in 2014. In 2019 both signed multiple agreements covering trade, defence, health and investment. The agreements were signed, and paperwork was exchanged in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov.

The following agreements are mentioned:⁸²

- a Joint declaration between India and the Kyrgyz Republic on strategic partnership.
- b Road map on trade and economic cooperation between the Republic of India and the Kyrgyz Republic for the five-year period (2019–2024).
- c Bilateral investment treaty (BIT) between India and the Kyrgyz Republic.
- d MoU for cooperation between the National Security Council Secretariat of India and the Office of the Security Council of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- e Protocol to amend Article 26 of India–Kyrgyzstan DTAA.
- f MoU on cooperation in the field of health.
- g MoU between DRDO and Kyrgyz–India Mountain Biomedical Research Centre.
- h MoU on cooperation between National Security Guards of India and National Guards of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- i MoU on cooperation between National Defence Academy of India and Kyrgyz Military Institute of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- j MoU on cooperation between High Altitude Warfare School (Gulmarg), Indian Armed Forces and Joint Mountain training Centre of the Armed Forces of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- k Memorandum of Cooperation between Export–Import Bank of India and the Investment Promotion and Protection Agency of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Table 4.12 Bilateral Trade Between India and Kyrgyzstan (in Million \$)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Total</i>
2016	2.36	29	31.36
2017	2.8	34	36.8
2018	4.5	33.4	37.9
2019	2	39.9	41.9
2020	3.74	41	44.74

Source: OEC, “Kyrgyzstan (KGZ) and India (IND) Trade | OEC”. 2021. OEC – The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/kgz/partner/ind?dynamicBilateralTradeSelector=year2019&dateAvailableSelectorCountry2=exportDateCountry2Available4>.

- l MoU between India and the Kyrgyz Republic on cooperation on Information and Communication Technology.
- m MoU between the Ministry of Consumer Affairs of India and Ministry of Economy of the Kyrgyz Republic on cooperation in the field of Legal Metrology.
- n MoU between Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) of India and National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS) of the Kyrgyz Republic.
- o MoU between YS Parmar University of Horticulture and Forestry, Himachal Pradesh and Kyrgyz National Agrarian University (KNAU).

The Prime Minister of India also announced a USD 200 million line of credit to boost Kyrgyzstan’s economic initiatives. In 2019, the Prime Minister told the India–Kyrgyz Business Forum that India and Kyrgyzstan have finalized the DTAA and the BIT, which would assist in creating a conducive environment for bilateral commerce (Table 4.12).⁸³

4.4.1.3 *India’s Bilateral Trade Relations with Tajikistan*

India’s economic engagement with Tajikistan mostly consists of three main dynamics. First India has a very long-run development assistance relationship with Tajikistan. In 1995, India provided a USD 5 million credit line for the establishment of a pharmaceutical facility (Ajanta Pharma). During Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s visit to India in November 2003, the Indian government turned the principal sum of USD 3.37 million, plus accumulated interest, into a donation.⁸⁴ In January 2005, HMTT (I) developed a Fruit Processing Plant in Dushanbe with a USD 0.6 million funding. In 2006, an Information and Technology Centre (Bedil Centre) was established with a USD 0.6 million grant. The initiative lasted a complete hardware cycle of six years and taught nearly all first-generation IT specialists in Tajikistan’s government sector. And, with a USD 0.75 million donation, India established a Modern Engineering Workshop, which was commissioned on 2 June 2011. The project is on schedule and on budget. Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC) were also involved in the repair and upgrading of the Varzob-1 HydroPower Station, which

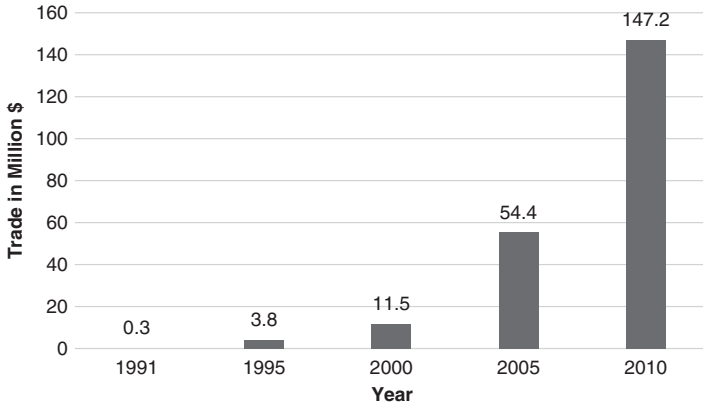


Figure 4.6 India Trade with Tajikistan.

Source: Warikoo, K. "REVITALISING INDIA-TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS." *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies* 20, no. 2/3 (2016): 4.

was built in 1936 (NHPC).⁸⁵ The installed capacity was increased from 2x3.67 MW to 2x4.75 MW after refurbishment. The restored Power Station was reopened on 28 December 2012 and is now operational (Figure 4.6).

A project to build computer laboratories in 37 Tajik schools (announced during Prime Minister Modi's July 2015 visit) was completed and delivered in August 2016 at a cost of USD 6,02,701/-. The building of phase-I of an eight-lane motorway from Chortut village to Ayni roundabout in Dushanbe would cost around USD 17.54 million under the USD 20 million grant announced during President Modi's State Visit to Tajikistan in October 2018.⁸⁶

Second, there are notable private investments of Indian MNCs in Tajikistan. M/s CHL Limited, India, built this five-star hotel. President Rahmon officially opened the hotel in September 2014. In October 2010, an ADB-funded project saw an Indian firm, KEC/RPG, complete the building of a 116-kilometre power transmission line from the Sangtuda-1 hydropower plant to the Afghan border. In 2011, BHEL completed a commercial deal with the Tajik business "Pamir Energy" to supply a 7 MW generator.⁸⁷ Under ADB finance, Indian company M/s Kalpataru was awarded a contract for the building of electric transmission lines worth roughly USD 22 million, and the project was completed in early 2017. In 2017, the business was awarded another USD 35 million project as part of the CASA-1000 power transmission project. There are several additional modest private projects/companies/clinics in Tajikistan that provide healthcare and other services.⁸⁸

Tajikistan has potential in hydroelectricity generation, power transmission, mining, cotton processing along the entire value chain, tourism and medical tourism to India, among other things (Table 4.13).

From an Indian perspective, India's economic relationship with Tajikistan is in upward trend, as its export to the country is increasing substantially each year.

Table 4.13 Bilateral Trade Between India and Tajikistan (in Million \$)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Total</i>
2015–2016	9.98	22.6	32.58
2016–2017	21.82	20.44	42.26
2017–2018	50.29	23.94	74.23
2018–2019	4.24	22.28	26.52
2019–2020	n/a	23.5	23.5
2020–2021	1.06	53.45	54.51

Source: Economic Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs, “Tajikistan Archives – Indbiz | Economic Diplomacy Division,” *Indbiz | Economic Diplomacy Division*, 2021. <https://indbiz.gov.in/country/tajikistan/>. (Accessed 20 January 2023).

4.4.1.4 *India’s Bilateral Trade Relations with Turkmenistan*

India–Turkmenistan trade relations started to get a momentum from the start of the 21st century. On 2–3 October 2006, the IGC had its first meeting in Ashgabat. The Indian delegation was led by Shri E. Ahamed, Hon’ble Minister of State for External Affairs and co-chair of the India–Turkmenistan IGC on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technological Cooperation. Shri Ahamed and his counterpart conducted in-depth discussions on all areas of the bilateral relationship as well as regional cooperation issues such as India’s involvement in the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline project.⁸⁹ The Joint Working Group on Hydrocarbons reviewed potential areas of bilateral collaboration, such as India’s interest in prospecting, exploration and production in Turkmenistan’s offshore Caspian blocks. India has also agreed to make it easier for Turkmenistan’s approved carriers to travel to other Indian cities, including Ahmedabad and Kochi. India also proposed to create an India–Turkmenistan Centre for Information Technology in Ashgabat to help Turkmen people improve their information technology skills. Both parties agreed to work together to strengthen economic ties through trade-related joint ventures. Turkmenistan decided to make it easier for Indian medicinal items to enter the country. Cooperation in research and technology was also agreed upon, notably in seismic investigations and combating desertification. The two Co-Chairs signed a joint protocol describing the particular areas of collaboration at the end of the IGC (Figure 4.7).⁹⁰

On the other hand, India have engaged with Turkmenistan as a development aid provider. India has provided two credit lines, one for \$5 million and the other for \$10 million. Since its inception in December 1998, one joint venture, Turkmen-Ajanta Pharma Ltd, has been operating in Ashgabat using the first line of credit. The Turkmen Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, as well as the Indian enterprise Ajanta Pharma Ltd., have joined forces to form this joint venture.⁷ It includes a cutting-edge facility that produces 70 various sorts of medications. In Turkmenistan, all of the items produced by this joint venture are quite popular. The initial investment has been reimbursed in full. The second line of credit provides US\$2.3 million for food processing (juice production) and wool processing (Table 4.14).⁹¹

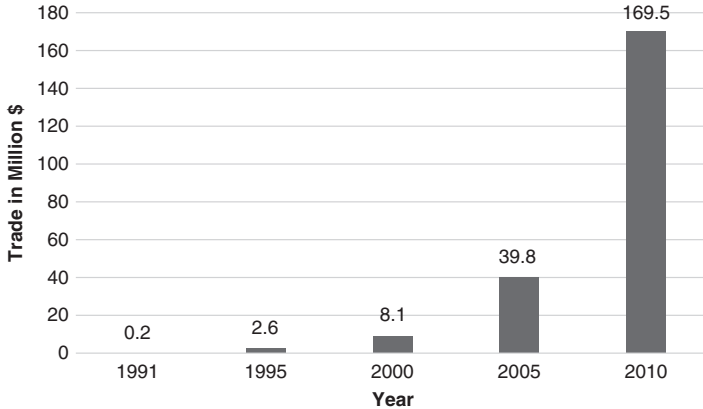


Figure 4.7 India Trade with Turkmenistan.

Source: Roy, Meena Singh. "Strategic Importance of Turkmenistan for India." *Strategic Analysis* 35, no. 4 (2011): 661–682.

Table 4.14 India's Bilateral Trade with Turkmenistan (Million \$)

Year	Export	Import	Total Trade
2015	80	47	126.96
2016	58	21.3	79.32
2017	43	26.1	69.1
2018	41	20.6	61.6
2019	38	3.9	41.9
2020	42	0.23	42.23

Source: Trading Economics "India Exports to Turkmenistan – 2021 Data 2022 Forecast 1993–2020 Historical," *Tradingeconomics.Com*, 2021. <https://tradingeconomics.com/india/exports/turkmenistan>; Connect to India. "Import to India from Turkmenistan," *Connect2india.Com*, 2021. "Turkmenistan (TKM) and India (IND) Trade | the Observatory of Economic Complexity." n.d. The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/tkm/partner/ind>.

India and Turkmenistan have been discussing ways to collaborate in the petrochemical sector. During the Hon'ble Prime Minister's visit to Ashgabat on 11 July 2015, a MoU on the delivery of chemical products was signed between 'Turkmenhimiya' (Turkmen Chemicals) and Rashtriya Chemicals and Fertilizers. From the 8th to the 12th of July 2018, a five-member Turkmen Vehicle team visited New Delhi and Pune to explore potential in the automobile business. They spoke with TATA Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Maruti & Hero MotoCorp, and other companies. On the 20th and 23rd of July 2018, 15 Indian pharmaceutical businesses attended the International Health 'Expo 2018', while a 26-member Pharmexcil team from India visited Ashgabat from the 24th to the 28th of November 2018 to examine potential prospects in the pharmaceutical industry.⁹²

4.4.1.5 *India's Bilateral Trade Relations with Uzbekistan*

India and Uzbekistan have had trading partners since 1991. Over a ten-year period, bilateral trade remained stagnant and unfulfilled. For three reasons: first, Uzbekistan's internal political and economic circumstances; second, the establishment of the new Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) model during the early stages of India's financial system; and third, a lack of connectivity (Table 4.15). For the past ten years, bilateral trade has been seeing an increase in it (Figure 4.8).

Bilateral trade is roughly USD 442 million in 2020, which is far less than its potential. Pharmaceuticals, mechanical equipment, car components, services and optical instruments and equipment are among India's top exports. India imports

Table 4.15 Bilateral Trade between India & Uzbekistan (Million \$)

Year	Export to Uzbekistan	Import from Uzbekistan	Total
2014	248.8	67.9	317
2015	260.6	58.7	319
2016	318.2	48.3	367
2017	291.1	33.8	325
2018	261.4	25.1	287
2019	330.5	25	356
2020	423	19.7	443

Source: Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade, Uzbekistan, Bilateral Trade with India, "India (IND) and Uzbekistan (UZB) Trade | the Observatory of Economic Complexity." n.d. The Observatory of Economic Complexity. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/ind/partner/uzb>.

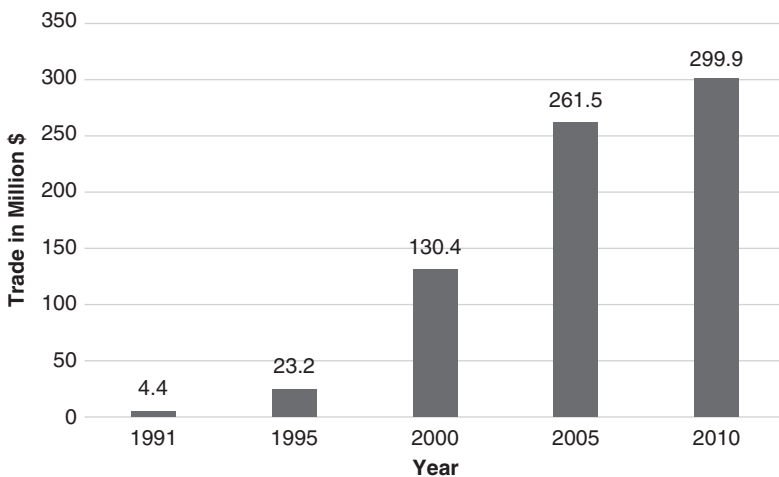


Figure 4.8 India Trade with Uzbekistan.

Source: Kumar, Gitesh. "India-Uzbekistan Relations: Economic Perspectives." *Research Review*, 4 (2019): 41–46.

mostly fruit and vegetable goods, services, fertilizers, juice products and extracts and lubricants from Uzbekistan.

In September 2019, India and Uzbekistan signed a Joint Statement to establish a joint feasibility study for embarking into negotiations for a preferential trade agreement (PTA). Pharmaceuticals, amusement parks, car components and the hospitality industry are examples of notable Indian investments by Indian enterprises. GMR, an Indian conglomerate, has indicated interest in investing in airports, developing the air corridor, and developing the Navoi freight complex in Uzbekistan; KDAH (Ambani Hospital), a Mumbai-based hospital, has expressed interest in establishing a specialist hospital. A ground-breaking ceremony for a pharmaceutical factory with a USD 50 million investment was performed during CM Gujarat's visit. Investments in pharma and healthcare, textiles and auto components, agriculture and food processing, and the mining and jewellery industry are all being discussed at various levels.⁹³

Indian institutes such as iCreate are actively collaborating with their Uzbek counterparts to promote the Uzbek start-up ecosystem and train entrepreneurs in the establishment of incubators. Dev IT, an Indian company, has gone into bilateral collaboration with blossoming Uzbek partners in field research, technology, start-ups and innovations. National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) is also involved in a number of bids in Uzbekistan, including solar PV power plants and consulting assignments for gas projects. Both nations are currently negotiating a BIT.⁹⁴

4.4.2 Multilateral Trade and Investment Structure

India's multilateral economic engagement with the region can be defined in seven main policies and stages. **First, through the angle of 'Look North Policy'**. India's 'Look North Policy' is an extension of the country's warm and excellent relations with Central Asia's energy-rich states.⁹⁵ Going a step further, during his visit to Turkmenistan in September 1995, then-Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao made it very apparent that Central Asia is a region of high interest for India and will remain so in the future. In the address, PM Rao stressed on,

We aim to stay engaged far into the future with the Republics of Central Asia. We are independent partners with no selfish motives. We only desire honest and open friendship and to promote stability and cooperation without causing harm to any third country.⁹⁶

The basis of this policy is based on a vision of peaceful engagement with neighbours, with a focus on expanding that connection in the framework of trade and business. Within this framework, India broke the claustrophobic engagement with the South Asian region and extended its engagement beyond the region. Look North Policy portrays the intention of the Indian government to engage with Central Asia which later translated to the economic partnership and the growing trade engagement between India and the region.

Second, the announcement of ‘Connect Central Asia Policy’. Political, security, economic and cultural ties are all part of India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ programme. Through its ‘Connect Central Asia’ policy, which is centred on proactive political, economic and people-to-people involvement with Central Asian countries on a bilateral and multilateral basis. When announcing it in the India–Central Asia dialogue in Bishkek, External Affairs Minister of India E. Ahmed presented 12 points of aim and scope of the policy. Out of 12 strategies, seven are connected with economic cooperation and connectivity⁹⁷:

- a Increase multilateral engagement with Central Asian countries by using the synergy of existing fora such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) and the Customs Union. To link its markets with the unified Eurasian area, India has previously proposed a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement.
- b India sees Central Asia as a long-term energy and natural resource partner. Central Asia has enormous stretches of arable land, and we believe there is an opportunity for India to collaborate in the production of profitable crops with added value.
- c Another sector with a lot of opportunities for collaboration is the medical field. We are willing to expand our collaboration by establishing civil hospitals and clinics in Central Asia.
- d India’s higher education system provides quality education at a fraction of the cost of Western universities. In light of this, India would like to assist in the establishment of a Central Asian University in Bishkek that may serve as a centre of excellence for world-class education in fields such as information technology, management, philosophy and languages.
- e Our enterprises can demonstrate India’s construction capabilities and build world-class structures at competitive prices. Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan, have nearly endless iron ore and coal supplies, as well as inexpensive power in plenty. India can assist in the establishment of many medium-sized steel rolling mills to meet the country’s specialized product needs.
- f In terms of land connectivity, the International North–South Transport Corridor has been revitalized (INSTC). We must coordinate our efforts to discuss the best approaches to bridge the Corridor’s missing links as soon as possible, as well as work on other connecting spurs along the route.
- g We will work together to strengthen our countries’ air connectivity. India is one of the largest outbound travel markets, with a market value of USD 21 billion in 2011. To entice Indian tourists, many countries have opened tourism offices in India. Central Asian countries could become popular tourist destinations, as well as filming locations for the Indian film industry, which enjoys depicting exotic foreign locations.

Third, India’s increasing engagement in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). India started its negotiation to join the EAEU, however, the negotiation finally

started to take shape from 2020.⁹⁸ In 2020, the EAEU and the Republic of India had a mutual trade turnover of over 12.4 billion dollars, with 8.3 billion dollars in exports and 4.1 billion dollars in imports. The Russian Federation accounts for the majority of the EAEU countries' economic turnover with India (74.6%) (9.26 billion US dollars).⁹⁹ The Republic of Kazakhstan has 19.1% (2.37 billion dollars), Belarus has 4.7% (575.83 million dollars), Armenia has 1.3% (160.74 million dollars), and the Kyrgyz Republic has 0.3% (46.47 million US dollars).¹⁰⁰ Considering the increasing economic interaction between India and the EAEU has increased the possibility for both parties to deepen their partnership. There were various levels of negotiation initiated in 2020 and 2021. Russia has pushed for Delhi's admission to the EAEU, which will allow for third-country collaborations in the Central Asia-Eurasian region. The member states of the EAEU have agreed on a paper outlining the strategic aims for advancing Eurasian integration through 2025. According to the Ministry, they also backed a model for building an EAEU financial single market, with the goal of introducing it in 2025. Thus, India is likely to join the EAEU within this PTA framework, which will increase its trade and commerce interaction with the Central Asia member state of the organization.

Fourth, the signing of the 'Ashgabat Agreement'. The Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Sultanate of Oman, Turkmenistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan signed an agreement on the establishment of an international transport and transit corridor on 25 April 2011 (Ashgabat Agreement). India's accession to the Agreement was approved by all four founding members, and India's admission took effect on 3 February 2018. The Ashgabat Agreement aims to make transit and cargo movement between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf easier. India's accession to the Agreement would broaden India's connectivity choices with Central Asia and improve India's trade and commercial connections with the area. In April 2016, India deposited the Instrument of Accession with Turkmenistan after receiving approval from the Union Cabinet for India's accession to the Ashgabat Agreement.¹⁰¹

In December 2018, India took over operations at the Shahid Beheshti port in Chabahar. Because of its location on the Arabian Sea's Makran Coast and outside the Straits of Hormuz, the Chabahar Port presents a strategic potential for India. Trade and economic activity in Chabahar would be unaffected if the Straits of Hormuz were to be closed. While physically avoiding Pakistan, the Chabahar Port connects India to Afghanistan and energy-rich Central Asia. Given that Pakistan has barred India from entering its territory, the Chabahar Port will provide a strategic alternative for New Delhi to obtain access to Iran, which is a critical gateway for increasing trade with Afghanistan.¹⁰² And it's worth noting that the operation of a multi-purpose terminal at Chabahar, as well as India's ambition to build a 610-kilometre north-south railway from Chabahar to Zahedan, would not have been possible without India's participation in a Central Asian-led transport mechanism.¹⁰³ Thus, India being part of the INSTC has a strategic economic significance.

Fifth, India's approach to Central Asia through SCO. Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, confirmed India's membership in the SCO in June 2017, along with the addition of Pakistan as a new member.¹⁰⁴ While the establishment

of SCO has forwarded the Chinese idea of regionalism to fight so-called three evils, India has approached the organization in a different manner. Geopolitically, China and Pakistan are the major reasons for India to join SCO, however, now India is taking various initiatives within the organization which not only portray leadership capabilities but also interest-based attitude through the organization. India identified the foundational characteristic of Eurasia as being ‘SECURE’ during the 2018 SCO summit, which is expected to influence India’s future involvement with the area and with which Uzbekistan has close ties. SECURE is made up of¹⁰⁵:

- a S: Security of our citizens,
- b E: Economic Development for all,
- c C: Connecting the Region,
- d U: Unite our People,
- e R: Respect for Sovereignty and Integrity, and
- f E: Environment Protection.

Likewise, during the chairmanship of India in SCO in 2020, India brought three new pillars within SCO framework namely, Startups and Innovation, Science and Technology, and Traditional Medicine. The first-ever Consortium of SCO Economic Think Tanks (20–21 August) and the first-ever SCO Startup Forum were also held in India (27 October). The FICCI held the first SCO Business Conclave (23 November) in a B2B format, with a focus on Micro-, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs’) cooperation.¹⁰⁶ India’s activities especially after 2020 signal India’s intention to expand the economic cooperation within SCO.

India’s economic relations with Central Asia have a high potentiality. India, thus, is trying to approach the region through various structures. While trying to classify the structure of India’s trade and economic policy towards Central Asia, three categories can be made.

First, bilateral and multilateral trade and connectivity relations. Since the independence of the Central Asian Republic India has initiated various bilateral engagements with the region. The level of India’s increasing bilateral and multilateral relationship with the region has been discussed thoroughly above.

Second, engagement through development aid. India also appears to be getting more serious about using its development assistance as a tool for economic diplomacy. There also appears to be a continuous focus on recipient countries’ socio-economic infrastructure and capacity building. For example, more than \$6.6 billion of India’s total Lines of Credit outlays went to Africa, while about \$3.4 billion went to the South Asia and Indian Ocean regions.¹⁰⁷ India granted a US\$1 billion line of credit for critical development projects in domains such as connectivity, energy, information technology, healthcare, education, agriculture, and others during the second India–Central Asia Dialogue. India has also offered funding assistance for the implementation of High Impact Community Growth Projects (HICDP) in order to help the region’s governments achieve socio-economic development.¹⁰⁸ For instance, in December 2020, India and Uzbekistan had their first virtual bilateral summit. After 2015, the two presidents have had seven bilateral

meetings. Within the promised line of credit in India–Central Asia Dialogue, Tashkent and New Delhi signed a MoU in which the Indian side reaffirmed the granting of a US\$448 million Line of Credit for road construction and IT sector growth for digital connectivity.¹⁰⁹

Third, India's strategic economic partnership with the region. Due to its geo-strategic factors, Central Asia holds a very vital position in India's global ambition. Thus, to secure its interest in the region India is also using strategic investment as a tool in the region. While signing a bilateral or a multilateral agreement India now also has signed various MoUs related to connectivity or energy. India has also expanded civil nuclear cooperation with the area to protect its energy interests. After their previous agreement expired in 2015, India and Kazakhstan inked a new agreement in 2015 to buy 5,000 tons of Kazakh uranium until the end of 2019.¹¹⁰ Both parties are currently discussing a third agreement, as part of which Kazakhstan intends to raise its shipments to India from 7,500 to 10,000 tons.¹¹¹ In 2019, India and Uzbekistan struck a uranium supply pact. Likewise, Uzbekistan agreed to be part of India's Chabahar project as well. Senior Uzbek authorities have stated that Uzbekistan will move on with a cooperative plan with India and Iran to promote connectivity through the Chabahar port as part of the country's attempts to improve and diversify access to maritime routes for trade.¹¹²

Sixth, transportation corridors. The buzzwords in international relations right now are “connectivity” and “regional integration.” Leaders across Asia appear to be preoccupied with developing fresh strategies to improve interregional connectivity. This is an intriguing change from the past, when conflicts and battles predominated in Asia. Globalization, reforms and increased interdependence, which have brought prosperity to many regions of the continent, are likely to be to blame for this transformation.¹¹³ As one of the least integrated regions in the world, South Asia – where India dominates in terms of geography, culture and economy – needs integration more than any other region.¹¹⁴

The Indian government now places a focus on connectivity initiatives, mostly spearheaded by India, both domestically and internationally. The government's “neighbourhood first” policy, which S. Jaishankar, a former Indian foreign secretary, described as placing a “premium on connectivity, connections, and collaboration,” emphasizes the value of bringing the region closer through connectivity initiatives.¹¹⁵ The Minister of External Affairs, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, emphasized the significance of connectivity for India in her remarks at the inaugural Raisina Dialogue in 2016:

Connectivity today is central to the globalization process. It is, of course, particularly important for Asia's growth and development. Indeed, the last many decades have witnessed connectivity as an integral element of the continent's revival. Where India itself is concerned, connectivity will determine how we meet our promise of growth, employment and prosperity.¹¹⁶

In 2017, Prime Minister Modi stated during the second Raisina Dialogue that India has chosen a course of international engagement that was centred on

“rebuilding connectivity, restoring bridges, and re-joining India with our immediate and extended geographies”.¹¹⁷ Having said that India, especially after Modi’s interest in Central Asia, has sped up the projects which aims to increase the interaction of India with the region. One of the major corridors that India is pushing forward is, the INSTC, which aims to improve connections between India and Iran, Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Northern Europe in the long run, is the most notable of them. The INSTC is the result of an agreement made in 2000 in St. Petersburg by Russia, India and Iran, to which 11 other nations eventually joined. It was conceived before the BRI was publicly revealed. The INSTC is envisioned as a 7,200-km multimodal commerce corridor connecting the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the Caspian Sea. It will extend from India to Russia and Europe.¹¹⁸

The INSTC will convey commodities using ships, railways and roads. When the development of Chabahar is complete, goods may also be transported there by ship from Jawaharlal Nehru and Kandla ports in Western India to Bandar Abbas port in Iran. From Bandar Abbas, goods may then be transported by road and rail through Baku (Azerbaijan) to Moscow and St. Petersburg as well as further into Europe.¹¹⁹ Once fully operational, the INSTC will speed up and lower the cost of shipping commodities from India to Central Asia, Europe and Russia. According to test runs finished in 2014, the INSTC route was 30% less expensive and 40% quicker in terms of time and distance.¹²⁰ Greater collaboration between India, Russia and Iran is essential for the development of the INSTC. The three nations’ decision to restart INSTC negotiations in April 2018 showed improved regional connectivity among them. As the corridor may connect India and Russia in 16–21 days at affordable freight rates, it might also economically bind India and Russia closer together.¹²¹ This would greatly promote bilateral trade, which has traditionally been a weak link in Indo–Russian relations. At a time when there is a lot of uncertainty across the world due to President Trump’s unpredictable foreign policy, this might very well be the next major initiative to reinvigorate and reimagine India–Russia relations. On 11 June 2022, a test cargo departed from the Russian Caspian Sea port zone of Solyanka in Astrakhan. It was then transported to the Iranian port of Anzali, transported by road to Bandar Abbas Port, and finally transported to Nhava Sheva in Navi Mumbai, India’s largest container port, also known as Jawaharlal Nehru Port.¹²²

India is also working on many maritime corridors that ultimately connect with Central Asia. One stance is the India–Japan “freedom corridor,” which aims to establish several infrastructure projects across Africa, Iran, Sri Lanka and South-east Asia through maritime lanes and support the development of Africa, is also in the works. Along with partnerships in northeast India and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure (PQI) of Japan is one of this project’s key components.¹²³ The project will benefit from Japan’s cutting-edge technology and capacity to construct high-quality infrastructure, while India will contribute its experience working in Africa.¹²⁴ The two nations anticipate that the freedom corridor will be more affordable, less harmful to the environment, and executed via a more collaborative approach than the BRI. The “New Silk Road,” which connects Afghanistan with its neighbours, is another option that could be

considered. It was first put up by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011, but neither India nor the United States were particularly interested in it. However, sources indicate that the concept is currently being revitalized with India playing a big role. Similar to this, the Trump Administration has suggested a South-Southeast Asia-to-Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor, in which India will play a crucial role.¹²⁵

Similarly, to strengthen its ties with Eurasia, India is considering joining the EAEU. Through a single tariff, it will be able to sell its goods everywhere in the world. India could use and contribute to the internal rail and road networks that connect the EAEU members if it joined. As the route from Afghanistan to Central Asia can be extended into the area covered by the EAEU, the Chabahar port becomes crucial in this situation. Although Russia has not joined the BRI, the EAEU has expressed interest in participating in some of the regional BRI initiatives.¹²⁶

Seventh, medical tourism. Medical Tourism is a new terminology that India and Central Asia have started to use recently. In the '3rd India-Central Asia Dialogue', the two sides expressed their willingness to expand health-care collaboration between India and Central Asian countries, particularly medical tourism. The Government of India is also working on facilitating medical tourism through official policy from 2021. Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, published 'Draft National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism'¹²⁷ in June 2021. As per the document medical tourism is:

'Medical tourism may be defined as 'activities related to travel and hosting a foreign tourist who stays at least one night at the destination region for the purpose of maintaining, improving or restoring health through medical intervention' Such medical intervention may be broadly classified into following three categories

- i Medical Treatment for curative purposes may include cardiac surgery, organ transplant, hip and knee replacement, etc.
- ii Wellness & Rejuvenation Offerings focused on rejuvenation or for aesthetic reasons such as cosmetic surgery, stress relief, spas, etc.
- iii Alternative Cures Access to alternative systems of medicines such as India's offering of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy).

Medical value travel and wellness tourism are recognized by the Indian government as vital areas with the ability to accelerate the country's growth and achieve the Aatmanirbhar Bharat goal. A comprehensive plan and roadmap have been established to offer impetus to the expansion of Medical Value Travel and wellness tourism in India and sustain India's competitive advantage.¹²⁸

At the India-Central Asia Business Forum held by FICCI, India, Minister of External Affairs Dr. S Jaishankar stated that medical tourism to India from Central Asia is in high demand.¹²⁹ To facilitate easy cooperation between Central Asia and Indian hospitals, the private sector and government have taken various initiatives like increasing interactions between hospitals from both sides. Most importantly, Central Asia and India are actively discussing the possibility of establishing an air corridor between them.¹³⁰

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5 Socio-Cultural Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

5.1 Explanatory Variables

While identifying the pattern of India's policies towards Central Asia, India's socio-cultural relations also have some explanatory variables. India being a late comer in the region has anchored and adjusted its policy depending on some of the external factors which will be discussed below. Based on primary and secondary documents the book has identified two explanatory variables:

- a China's Cultural Expansion in Central Asia;
- b Socio-Cultural Influence of Great and Middle Powers in Central Asia.

5.1.1 *China's Cultural Expansion in Central Asia Region*

Ironically, the idea of "soft power flexibility" has also made it easily applicable to different international contexts. Particularly China has demonstrated unrelenting curiosity and a passion for soft power. When President Hu Jintao stressed the value of bolstering China's cultural soft power (*wenhua ruanshili*) at the 17th Party Congress, the phrase first entered Chinese leadership discourse. Invoking soft power more frequently in his speeches – including at the 19th Party Congress, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee, and the 2018 major talk on propaganda and ideology, among other high-level gatherings – has increased its relevance.

While accessing what are the sources and the pattern of Chinese soft power, the academic discussions are distorted, especially in China. Many Chinese essays on soft power begin by paraphrasing Nye's¹ views before arguing that this idea should be localized or appropriated for the Chinese context. For instance, Professor Pang Zhongying at Nankai University warned against China arbitrarily adopting Nye's notion created for American audiences in a widely regarded media essay released in 2005.² As seen by arguments on the differences between hard (*ying shili*) and soft (*ruan shili*) power as well as in talks about the main sources of soft power, Chinese specialists actively challenge and reinterpret Nye's theories.

Some Chinese texts suggest more adaptable frameworks for separating physical power from soft power. For instance, Li Mingjiang contends that rather than focusing

on the resources used, distinctions should be established about the way power is exercised.³ According to him, even the “soft” use of military resources – that is, when they are utilized for peacekeeping rather than combat – can help develop soft power. Others see power as a continuum, with hard power based on coercion at one end, soft power or voluntary contacts at the other, and bargaining power obtained through discussion in the middle.⁴

Joshua Kurlantzick was one of the first to note that China views soft power in a broader sense in his widely cited book *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*.⁵ The nation has been erasing the distinction between soft power and economic power with the help of international aid and support. John Wong also noted that China is strengthening its economic soft power.⁶ Exemplified by significant regional trade agreements or increased official development assistance (ODA) for collaboration, this also includes deft economic diplomacy. One of the top experts on China, David Shambaugh, asserted that money is Beijing's most effective soft power tool.⁷

Another illustration is China's ambitious plan to link the rest of the globe to the “Middle Kingdom,” known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is touted as being advantageous for all parties involved. Connecting diverse groups and cultures is one of the guiding principles, and in this instance, economic efforts and incentives are used to assist it.⁸ Although the epidemic has hampered a number of ongoing initiatives, China will move on as circumstances permit.⁹ COVID-19 has not reduced the broad need for infrastructure, but some areas should be re-examined, such as hiring locally rather than using Chinese labour. Despite receiving harsh criticism in the West, there is currently no proof that a true “debt trap” exists.¹⁰

While attempting to see Central Asia from the dogma of Chinese soft power Tovar and Lavicka analyse it from the perspective of ‘Folklorization.’¹¹ Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are where the Chinese are most engaged in Central Asian nations that border the People's Republic of China (PRC).¹² Tajikistan likewise borders China, but up until recently, it was too insecure due to a decade-long civil conflict to conduct any business there. As a result, it is intriguing to observe how the dynamics between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang develop. They are the primary players in the ties that the PRC's policy towards Central Asia over the past 20 years has forged between regions.¹³ The PRC political narrative portrays the boundaries between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang not as a threat but as a place for ongoing harmony and brotherhood, which is important to these three examples. This tactic is a component of a larger soft power effort.

In the early 2000s, Beijing initiated a number of soft power initiatives in an effort to enhance China's international reputation. The Confucius institutes are China's primary soft power instruments in Central Asia as well as other areas. Confucius, the figurehead of ancient Chinese knowledge, has enormous potential to draw audiences abroad and enjoy widespread acclaim on a global scale, according to Chinese policy.¹⁴

Only 6,739 of the 22,270 students enrolled in Confucius Institutes in Central Asia in the early 2000s took the Chinese Language Qualification Exam (HSK). Students study the Chinese language, Chinese history and Chinese spiritual and

cultural values at each Confucius Institute.¹⁵ Chinese language instruction in Confucius Institutes and classes was expected to be a useful tool for China's soft power in Central Asian nations and to alter negative opinions of China. Beijing aims to boost China's appeal and get rid of the prejudice, animosity and danger notions that were purportedly fostered during the Soviet era by disseminating culture and language through the Confucius Institute. China also arranges cultural and humanitarian events, informational tours for journalists and media representatives, and offers reasonably priced treatment using Chinese traditional medicine, according to a Sinopsis assessment on China's soft power operations in Kazakhstan. Through routinely held bilateral meetings and seminars between specialists from the two nations, China actively promotes cooperation between Kazakh and Chinese experts. Similar types of collaboration between China and other Central Asian nations have also been formed.¹⁶

In 158 countries around the world, there were 1,134 Confucius Classrooms and 535 Confucius Institutes in 2019. There are 13 Confucius Institutes operating in Central Asia, including 5 in Kazakhstan, 4 in Kyrgyzstan, 2 in Uzbekistan and 2 in Tajikistan, according to the Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters, a public organization associated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. Although China hasn't yet created a viable idea for cultural diplomacy, recent efforts to promote the Chinese language have had noticeable results. Young people in Central Asia are becoming more and more interested in studying Chinese, which is seen as a way to improve job prospects and competitiveness.¹⁷

However, Chinese soft power in the region has a limitation. Kazakhstan's ambassador to China from 1992 to 1995, Murat Auezov, has emphasized China's lack of land and suggested that the flow of people to the Xinjiang region as part of programmes to develop China's western regions serves as a prelude to China's expansion into Central Asia. According to Auezov, "China in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries are three different countries."¹⁸

They all share the ambition to increase the size of their lands. Additionally, he argues that it is unwise to trust Chinese politics. He lists the three main issues that affect China and its neighbours as population, land and water since, in his view, these issues are strategically important for China's demographic issues.¹⁹ Such opinions are a reflection of the "Chinese Threat" as it is seen in intellectual circles.

If comparing India and China in Central Asia both are relatively new players from soft power dynamics. On the one hand, due to their financial superiority, China has expanded its soft power intervention in the region. Likewise, due to the Chinese characteristic of soft power, it is generating much scepticism in the region. As discussed by the author with the senior fellow of Vivekananda International Foundation, India's soft power policy is guided by utilizing the decreasing popularity of Chinese soft power in the region.²⁰

5.1.2 Socio-Cultural Influence of Great and Middle Powers in Central Asia Region

While Central Asia is majorly subjected to the great power competition in terms of geopolitics, security and economy, soft power is also one of the factors that draw

the great power engagement in the region. Contrary to the geopolitical competition soft power has more actors and complications to comprehend. Thus, to find a space on the sphere of socio-cultural arena, India's soft power strategy is anchored by great power's soft power strategies towards Central Asia.

For the most part after the Cold War, there was mainly competition between Russia and the United States in Central Asia. The public diplomacy that foreign actors use in the region is strong evidence of the extremely competitive nature of the international political climate in Central Asia.²¹ The political elite in Russia views Central Asia as a historic zone of influence and views American efforts to establish a foothold there as a direct threat to Russian interests. According to Maxim Starchak, "American information and propaganda hurt Russia's interests in the region more than anything else," which is why there are issues with the Russian language in the Central Asian nations.²² Americans accuse Russia of having imperialist intentions and never fail to mention that Russian diplomats and political strategists are accustomed to adopting "soft power" tactics in Central Asia.

Since the middle of the 2000s, Russia has made an effort to create its own definition of soft power and a means of putting it into practice. Top Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin, have stated that soft power tools are the most crucial ones in Moscow's foreign policy toolbox since the concept was formally integrated into Russian foreign policy doctrine in 2013. Moscow has, however, frequently employed coercive measures in the post-Soviet region over the past ten years, most recently in the situations of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014–2015. Such acts run counter to Russia's publicly stated dedication to non-violent foreign policy techniques.²³

In Central Asia, all non-Russians took Russian as a second language in school throughout the Soviet era. Russian is still widely understood in the former Soviet states today as a result of this programme. Undoubtedly, there is a clear age difference in the degree of fluency. For instance, young people who are not Russian, primarily Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, frequently speak Russian poorly or not at all.²⁴ Following the country's declaration of independence, the administration deemphasized the study of Russian as part of a larger effort to promote the use of Uzbek in public discourse. English has also been a popular study option for many as a result of the influence of globalization and the opening up of society to more interaction with the worldwide economy. English fluency is still very rare, nevertheless.

There are several dynamics which roam around Russia's language superiority. The first might be characterized as institutional and include political theatre, including the use of presidential announcements, meetings between Russian and Central Asian officials, vows of cooperation, and so on. Another factor is the outreach efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church, a mainstay of the current administration. The second component would be Russia's function as a global news and information hub. All of the major Central Asian markets are reached by Russian media, especially television. Russian news shows typically have better production values than domestically produced programmes, which could help them gain a sizable audience. Additionally, Russian news broadcasts frequently cover a wider range of subjects that highlight news items that aren't covered by other local media sources.

Third, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian entertainment programming, which was previously derided in the West, has advanced significantly. Again, in Central Asia, relative superiority to domestically produced television invariably generates a sizable audience. The most well-known television networks in Russia are well funded and have worked out what keeps viewers interested and engaged thanks to advertising earnings.²⁵

Despite its remaining isolated for a long time, the post-soviet central Asian state's fascination regarding American social and political culture is growing. People of the region are interested in learning English and many English medium schools and universities are being opened in the region. The United States also has to accommodate the soft power dynamics in its strategy related to Central Asia.

US strategy towards Central Asia between 2019 and 2025 accommodates the soft power dynamics where the United States aims to promote democracy and human rights, contrary to Russian agendas.

The Central Asian states will increase their stability by providing for meaningful citizen input, inclusive political systems through elections, transparent policy formulation, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

The United States provides technical expertise to the countries of Central Asia in developing and implementing justice sector reforms that are essential for protecting human rights, as well as improving the investment climate and retaining highly skilled human capital. The United States supports strengthening civil society organizations so that citizens can provide meaningful input on key public policy issues, enhancing governments' responsiveness to their citizens. U.S. Embassy programs provide hundreds of journalists with skills and networks necessary to help keep governments accountable to their citizens and highlight new government efforts to improve the lives of everyday people.²⁶

Likewise, there are comparatively small players such as Turkey and Iran who also have their soft power grip in Central Asia due to their historical and cultural connection. Since 1991, Turkey has sought to forge historical, cultural, linguistic and religious links with the newly independent Central Asian governments.²⁷ The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) stated in 2013 foreign policy towards this region is consistent with that of the earlier Turkey. "Since 1991, our ambition for a stable, autonomous, and prosperous Central Asia after the end of the Cold War has led our policy priorities in the region towards creating free market economies and functional democracies," the MFA stated. He also added that

Given our shared linguistic, cultural, and historical ties, we have worked to deepen our interaction with this region on a wide range of problems. In this regard, the frameworks for High Level Strategic Cooperation Councils that we have set up with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as the Cooperation Council with Tajikistan, offer a helpful foundation for strengthening our cooperation.²⁸

The 21st century will be Turkey's Century and the "union of the Turkic republics from the Adriatic to the Chinese Wall" are just a few of the phrases Turkey has used to promote herself as a nation that will "provide stability" to the area and declare itself a "regional force."²⁹ These discourses and practices demonstrate Turkey's pursuit of soft power strategies towards the emerging Central Asian nations. However, they were probably unaware that those policies were known as "soft power" because at the time, neither Turkish policymakers nor perhaps the rest of the world were familiar with the term.

Similarly, Iran has changed its posture to encourage involvement with the region, while being unable to compete with any other regional force in Central Asia on practically all fronts. Tehran has exploited a more-than-cordial level of rapport with the countries of Central Asia by combining its considerable religious and ethnic affinity with various sections of the region, its access to crucial seaports, and its security interests in Afghanistan. In order to achieve this goal, Iran has implemented a new "Look East" policy to engage Central Asian nations on a selective, bilateral basis, in contrast to China's hegemonic approach of pumping billions into the region in the belief that the region is a crucial component of its global infrastructure and soft power agenda.³⁰

Given the cultural and linguistic imprint that vast Persian dynasties left on Central Asia, Iran is a country with strong historical ties to a significant portion of the continent. Tajikistan continues to be primarily an ethnically and linguistically Persian country, while Uzbek cities like Samarkand and Bukhara still have significant Persian-speaking populations.³¹ However, Tehran has only recently prioritized Central Asia on its policy agenda as it now views the region as a potential "bridge" between Iran and the East. An important component of Iran's foreign policy is its "Look East" initiative, which has led to bilateral interaction with several countries in the region, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Likewise, soft power dynamics of some of the players like Pakistan is guided by ambition to lead the Islamic bloc and is related to its desire to increase its influence. Although it hasn't fully developed, this idea has always dominated Pakistan's leadership's thought, notably Prime Minister Bhutto in the 1970s and Gen. Zia in the 1980s. The discussion is still relevant to Pakistan's geostrategic planning. Islamist organizations and political parties saw Central Asia as laying the groundwork for an Islamic bloc and a chance to bring Muslims in the Central Asian Republics (CARs), Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan together.³² It was believed that such a strategic bloc would play a crucial part in ensuring strategic interests in relation to either India or even the threat posed by Christians and Jews. The development of the CARs was seen as a chance to create a significant regional alliance based on the shared religious identity of Islam that would extend from the Arabian Sea in the south to the Black Sea in the west. Importantly, it was considered to provide Pakistan with enormous political and economic benefits.³³

Similarly, some scholars argued that the European Union does not intend to become a dominant force in Central Asia but the image of the union in the region has been excessively positive.³⁴ Being (seen as) a major power can create scepticism and concern towards the EU's goals, according to one European ambassador

in Central Asia who made this observation once. In fact, the EU's favourable reputation and perceived goodwill are its most visible comparative advantages when compared to larger and more forceful entities in Central Asia (such as China, the United States and even Russia). Particularly clear examples of this are Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

For instance, it is commonly known that opinions against the United States are mostly hostile in Central Asian nations. Since the early 2000s, the level of anti-Americanism in the region has risen as a result of US military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as perceptions of US involvement in a number of "colour revolutions" in the former Soviet Union.³⁵ As a result, the United States is currently far from being viewed favourably and as a reliable actor. Similar to this, nearly all of the Central Asian nations still have significant levels of Sinophobia. China is frequently labelled and mythologized in a negative light, and this negativity is steadily growing as China's power in the region rises. The 2016 protests in Kazakhstan for land reform are only one example of the rising anti-Chinese sentiment in Central Asia.³⁶ Regarding Russia, despite the fact that the majority of Central Asians have favourable opinions of the Russian capital, one can claim that this perception is deteriorating due to the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which sparked phobias and fears of Russia in some Central Asian societies.³⁷

Nevertheless, regarding the great powers and their soft power strategies, there are shortcomings, which make India's presence in the region relevant. Indian culture and the practices are not controversial in comparison to Russian and Chinese imposition of soft power in the region.

5.2 Intervening Variables

Due to the historical interaction between people, culture and religion, there are many internal factors that still shape India's socio-cultural perspective towards Central Asia. The footprint of Buddhism in Central Asia or the Muslim population in India, both have cultural proximity to each other. Similarly, a pattern has been found that the government with the right-wing tilt has put more stress on civilization, culture and history. There are two intervening variables that the book has identified based on the assessment of the resources:

- a Historical Ties and Legacies in India's Mainstream Political Thoughts;
- b Socio-political Relations between Populations of India and Central Asia.

5.2.1 *Historical Ties and Legacies in India's Mainstream Political Thoughts*

Buddhism in Central Asia spread from India that connected the two regions for a very long time. Buddhism, which dates back to the 6th century BC, became India's dominant religion under Mauryan monarch Ashoka (273–232 BC) and extended over his kingdom from Bengal to Afghanistan. Following the collapse of the Mauryan empire, Buddhism finally reached the Hellenized neighbour, the Kushana/Bactria kingdom, which governed the provinces of Hindukush into

Kabul, Gandhara, northern Pakistan and north-western India under the Kushanas.³⁸ Buddhism flourished and spread under the great Kushana king Kanishka (144–172 AD), and Gandhara, now in Pakistan, became not only a famous Buddhist settlement but also a cradle for a distinct Graeco-Buddhist art form. Buddhism flourished down the Silk Road to Hadda, Bamiyan and Kondukistan over the next few centuries. Because of its strategic location at the crossroads of highways leading to Persia, India, Tarim Basin and China, Bamiyan, now in Afghanistan, became one of the most important Buddhist centres by the 4th century AD.³⁹

The first stages of Buddhist globalization began in the Greek period, when the religion had spread beyond northern India to Gandhara and Central Asia. The earliest contact between Western Greek philosophy and Indian philosophy occurred during Alexander the Great's reign (250–125 BC). During the Indo-Greek Kingdom (180–10 BC), which gave rise to Greco-Buddhism, Buddhism flourished. Gandhara and Bactria (the territory that currently spans Afghanistan and Tajikistan) were the epicentres of Buddhism at the time.⁴⁰

Other Eurasian tribes, such as the Sakas and proto-Turkic Yuezhi-Kushan – to which Kanishka belonged – became protectors of *Dharma* and contributed to the development of the northern school of Buddhism between the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, alongside the Greeks. The Sakas, who conquered western India in the 1st century, spread Buddhism over the Hindu Kush and Tarim Basin. Buddhism travelled from Kashmir to Khotan-Cherchen and Kashgar to Gilgit at the same time.⁴¹ It reached the kingdom of Kroriana at Niya at the southern fringe of the Tarim Basin. It passed through Sindh, Balochistan and eastern Iran on its way to Parthia in the west.

The Yuezhi-Kushans, who succeeded the Sakas and Palahavas (Partian), established a large Greco-Bactrian kingdom in Gandhara and Takshashila. By the 2nd century, the Kushans had successfully disseminated Buddhism across Central Asia, up to the Amu and Syr Darya, covering the regions of Termez, Bamiyan (Afghanistan), Panjakent, Adzina-tepe (Tajikistan), Varaksa, Balalyk-tepe, Karatepe, Fayaz-epe, Zar-tepe, Afrasiab, Airtam, Dalver (Uzbekistan). These centres included Central Asia's largest Buddhist complexes. Other major Buddhist archaeological sites in Turkmenistan include Gyaur-Kala, Merv, and other locations.

However, following the Arab conquest of Sogdia and the seizure of Bukhara from the Western Turks, Buddhism in Central Asia came under threat. Other Buddhist territories of the Ferghana Valley and Kashgar were progressively overrun by the Umayyads. Buddhism had begun to fade in Bactria, Sogdiana, and other parts of Central Asia by the 9th and 10th centuries. Al-Biruni, a Muslim historian, noted in the 11th century that Buddhism had formerly ruled up to Syria before being destroyed by the Sassanids.⁴² On the one hand, due to the Muslim invasion in the region, the Buddhists saw a massive decline and on the other hand, the other variants of Buddhism started to emerge around Central Asia. While Buddhism was dying in Central Asia, a kind of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism expanded west of the Tian Shan Mountains (modern-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) under the influence of the Kalmyk Mongols, led by Zaya Pandita, a Mongol Buddhist schooled in Tibet. In actuality, Buddhism was travelling westward across the Chu and Ili

valleys, through the Zungar desert (Kayilik), and across the Tian Shan range's Torgot pass in the post-13th century, from Mongolia, China and Xinjiang. The Oirat tribes (Torgut-Kalmyk) went further west in 1617, bringing Buddhism to the Volga and Black Sea banks.⁴³

During this time the migration of Buddhist believers and monks to India also happened. In 711 AD, the Umayyads conquered Sindh and Balochistan from the Turki Shahis in the west. Sindh was populated at the time by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Sindh had about 400 Buddhist monasteries with over 26,000 monks, according to Xuanzang. Saurashtra, too, was a prominent Buddhist centre, with over a hundred monasteries and 6,000 monks. Valabhi, for example, was one of the most active Buddhist centres in Western India at the time. It took in monks who had been forced to flee Sindh due to Arab persecution. Many new monasteries were probably built at Valabhi subsequently to accommodate the influx. From Kutch to Saurashtra and up to Bharuch, the entire coastal strip was littered with exquisite Buddhist caves – possibly erected for the fleeing monks. While Buddhism had survived in the rest of Asia due to the localization factor, monastic dissolution was accompanied by monk massacre and beheading in places like Central Asia, Bactria, Sindh, Kutch and Saurashtra.⁴⁴ The demolition of these monasteries inevitably resulted in India's isolation from the rest of the world.⁴⁵

However, Buddhism revived in the region. The Semirech'e region (modern-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) was covered by the second wave of Buddhist dissemination in the post-6th- to 7th-century AD, along the Syr Darya, Talas River Valley and Chu Valley (Suyab and Navaket). The archaeological evidence suggests that Buddhism peaked in the Semirech'e region between the 7th and 8th centuries AD, and that it flourished in various forms until the 18th century (Table 5.1).

In India's opinion, Buddhism's exodus from the large Central Asian region was fatal to the country's ties with the region. Several well-known researchers, however, believe that Central Asia still has a number of Buddhist characteristics that need to be completely realized. At the academic and archaeological levels, several aspects of India–Central Asia ties need to be reviewed. A brief profile of Central

Table 5.1 List of Major Buddhist Heritage Sites in Central Asia

<i>SN</i>	<i>Site Name</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Place</i>
1	Ak-Beshim	Monastery and Temple	Western Turkmenistan
4	Buddhist monuments	Monastery and Temple	Ak-Beshim
5	Krasnaya Rechka	Buddha's Sculpture	40 km north from Bishkek
6	Novopakrovka	Monastery	10 km south from Bishkek
7	Novopavlovka	Monastery	10 km West from Bishkek
8	Sairam	Underground Buddhist Complex	South Kazakhstan
9	Antonovka	Temple	500 km from Almaty
10	Ili Buddhas	Various sites	Kazakhstan
11	Issyk-Ata (Chu Valley)	Rock Craving	70 km East from Bishkek

Source: Compiled from P. Stobdan's book titled 'India and Central Asia: The Strategic Dimension' (New Delhi: IDSA Publication 2020).

Asia's Buddhist past could provide useful insight into how India should approach this region, at the very least to establish a layer of connectedness with the region's scholarly community. To maintain its leadership role in regulating Asia's cultural landscape, New Delhi must take a number of steps.⁴⁶

To begin, it should draw on its knowledge of the past while highlighting its relevance to the future, particularly in the context of an Asian renaissance aimed at revitalizing Asia's cultural, socioeconomic and intellectual components. Second, while pursuing connectivity initiatives such as the Chabahar transport projects to establish direct physical links with Eurasia, India should also consider the need to strengthen its soft power ties with Central Asian countries. Third, Western India, encompassing Kutch and Saurashtra, may have the potential to emerge as a new focal point for promoting India's historic ties with Central Asia. Gujarat, for example, could become focal points of emphasis for India's future spiritual connectivity to Eurasia, especially with the discovery of Dev né Mori and Vadanagar.⁴⁷

Under the programme of the Indian government to instrumentalize Buddhism the government is forwarding many initiatives:

Initiatives include, inter alia, awards for promotion of Buddhist Studies and Indology; a new programme "Global GenNext Buddhist Leaders Network Programme"; Indian Chairs in foreign countries for Buddhism studies; visits of foreign visitors under Distinguished Visitors Programme to prominent Buddhist sites; hosting foreign Buddhist delegates under Buddhist scholars programme; translation of easy-to-read books on Buddhism into foreign languages etc.⁴⁸

Islamic Conquest of India and Islamization: there had been extensive religious ties with India before the emergence of Islam in Central Asia, particularly with regard to Buddhism, which took on a new shape in Central Asia and affected both Chinese Buddhism and Islam.⁴⁹ These exchanges came into the sphere of Islam with the introduction of Islam in India, first with the incursions of Mahmud Ghaznavi (r. 997–1030) and conquest by the Ghaznavids (975–1187), and subsequently with conquest by the Ghurids (1148–1215), especially under Muizz al-Din Muhammad (r. 1173–1206).⁵⁰ During the Delhi sultanates (1206–1526), these exchanges became more intense. The arrival in India of a Central Asian dynasty, the Mughals (1526–1858), increased these linkages even more. Many Central Asians followed the Mughal prince Babur to India, whether for personal, religious or political reasons, establishing a tradition of relatively large-scale personal travel between the two regions. This resulted in cross-influences and mutual fertilization in the fields of literature, miniature painting, music, astronomy and architecture.⁵¹ When the political-religious situation in Central Asia was difficult, many mystics and ordinary believers sought sanctuary in India, where there was greater religious freedom.⁵² More importantly, beginning with Babur (r. 1526–1530), the Mughal rulers were devotees of key Naqshbandi sheikhs and had personal ties with various Islamic leaders in Central Asia.

The dynamism of the Islamic connections between Central Asia and India is exemplified by the history of the Naqshbandiyya, which arose in Central Asia. The proto-Naqshbandiyya, which began with Khwaja Ghijduvani (d.1220), and the Naqshbandiyya proper, which was called after Baha al-Din Naqshband (1318–1389), were both loosely organized from the start.⁵³ Khwaja Ahrar (1404–1490), the brotherhood's third major person in history, centralized the movement, allowing it to react to the population's spiritual demands and achieving control in Mughal India. Khwaja Ahrar, one of the most politically active sheikhs in the brotherhood's history, did not shy away from flirting with power and getting involved in state and corporate issues.⁵⁴ He was able to establish his dominance and negotiate with the rulers, who needed Sufi support to legitimize their power, from a position of strength, thanks to the numerous waqfs he held. The Mughals would continue the pattern of tight links between political rulers and Sufi sheikhs.

The Naqshbandiyya spread across India in a number of stages and ways, but there are numerous distinct phases. The first was marked by Babur's association with Sheikh Baqi Billah (1563–1603), arguably the most significant Naqshbandi master and successor of Khwaja Ahrar. Baqi Billah, like Babur in the political and social spheres, was a spiritual and physical link between Central Asia and Mughal India; he and his family lived in both countries. Other Sufi teachers and others followed, frequently without coordinating their movements.⁵⁵ Their motivations ranged from avoiding the Shaybanids' political pressures, to being enticed by Mughal India's political and economic potential, to a spiritual search, to a trip to Mecca via the port of Surat (in the present-day state of Gujarat). Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (1564–1624), known to his followers as Mujaddid-i Alf-i Thani, was the next significant Naqshbandi sheik in India, arguably second only to Baha al-Din Naqshband himself (the reviver of the second [Islamic] millennium). On his route to Mecca in 1599, he stopped in Delhi and got an ijaza (certificate to propagate the tariqa), following which he instituted radical changes and founded the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya branch of the brotherhood.⁵⁶ The Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya became the first Islamic organization from India to influence Central Asia in the 17th century. Habibullah, Sirhindi's descendant, dispatched his khalifas (deputies) from India to Central Asia, reinvigorating the Naqshbandiyya. Sheikhs from Bukhara travelled to India to get an ijaza and then returned to their homeland to promote the new branch of the brotherhood as a consequence of his efforts.

The decline of the Uzbek Empire's successor kingdoms – the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand, as well as the Emirate of Bukhara – and the advent of Russia on the Central Asian stage, as well as its dominance of the region, did not sever the spiritual linkages between India and Central Asia. Faced with Russian hegemony and new connections to Muslim groups within and beyond the Russian Empire, Central Asian nations developed a reform movement known as 'Jadidism' in Russian and Western literature. Rather than intellectuals from the Indian subcontinent who wrote in Persian and Arabic, this movement was influenced by and linked to Turkic-language intellectuals from Russia and the Ottoman Empire. Indian reformist ideology, which was split between secular reformism centred in Aligarh and the more traditional Deobandi school, remained influential. This is particularly true in the case of the latter. Surprisingly, this occurred during the Soviet period, when

religion was actively persecuted. Major religious authorities did certainly function in Central Asia during the Soviet period, shaping many Islamist leaders who later developed into diverse branches of Islamism, from the quietest to the most political and violent. Damullah Hindustani, also known as Muhammad Rustamov, was born in Kokand in 1892 and died in 1989 (present-day Uzbekistan). He extensively travelled in Afghanistan and India, learning Hindi and Urdu, which he later taught at the Tajik Academy of Sciences' Oriental Institute in Dushanbe. Hindustani was influenced by the Deobandi school, even though he could not be called a Deobandi. Hindustani formed his own hujra ('cell' in Arabic; an informal and underground study group) during the height of religious persecution, and its influence can still be felt throughout Central Asia. Many visitors from all over Central Asia visit his burial at the grand mosque of Dushanbe, which is located adjacent to that of Mowlana Saheb Yaqub-e Charkhi, another major figure of the Naqshbandiyya.⁵⁷

Thus having the strong historical legacies both factors, Buddhism and Islam, play a role of internal conductor for India when shaping a perception towards Central Asia. While India launched yoga and other spiritual initiatives in many Central Asian countries, it has been or will be perceived as something they know historically. The author discussed this while he was in Kazakhstan between 15 October 2022 and 15 November 2022. At the same time while Central Asia students, prominent scholars, civil servants and professionals visit India they will not face major cultural shock due to the Muslim population in India.

5.2.2 *Socio-Political Relations between Populations of India and Central Asia Region*

The relationship between religion and politics in India is strong. Often neglected, but the role of the Indian Muslim population in shaping Indian politics is very crucial. This section will trace the role played by Indian Muslims to shape India politics and how that is still a major factor on India's foreign policy-making towards the Muslim world including Central Asia.

Religion influences political and non-political processes, as well as the functioning of the State's institutional structure, in both the West and the East. The role of 'Muslim' in Indian politics can be divided into two parts. **First** part includes the role played by Muslim until the freedom movement. In 1947, India became independent. Most of the literature that is written about the freedom movement in India has majorly excluded the role played by Muslim. However, the sum of the contributions that Muslim made in the overall development of Indian politics until independence is huge.

In reality, Muslim's account for about a third of the total martyrs listed in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2019 'Dictionary of Martyrs of India's Freedom Struggle (1857–1947)'.⁵⁸ Also, the martyrs who died in considerable numbers prior to 1857 are not included in the lexicon. Although there are numerous evidences of Muslim contribution to the freedom movement, few are

- a Imdadullah Muhajir Makki led a popular movement in Muzaffarnagar that liberated Shamli and Thana Bhawan with the support of Qasim Nanautvi, Rashid

- Gangohi, and others. A national government has been established. As the British recovered the region, the revolutionaries were vanquished. The British also hanged Abdur Rehman, the Nawab of Jhajjar. The list goes on and on. Several Muslims fought against the British in 1857, according to British records. In Delhi, for example, an unnamed Muslim woman wearing a burqa killed five English soldiers before being apprehended.⁵⁹
- b Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was an independence warrior that the British feared. He is frequently considered as a token Muslim in a mostly Hindu-dominated Congress. His name was mentioned in several Chief Investigation Department (CID) papers as someone who was preparing armed revolutions. At least 1700 freedom warriors pledged to die for the cause of liberty. They were all members of Hizbullah, Azad's revolutionary movement. *Al-Hilal*, his newspaper, was shut down for spreading revolutionary nationalist views.⁶⁰
 - c During World War II, the *Silk Letter Movement*⁶¹ was not the sole form of resistance.
 - d Another event in which numerous Muslims participated and were martyred was the *Ghadar Movement*. Rehmat Ali was executed at Lahore for attempting to incite soldiers to revolt. The efforts paid off in February 1915, when the 5th Light Infantry, primarily made up of Muslims from Punjab, revolted in Singapore. For a few days, the soldiers held Singapore. The revolutionaries were eventually defeated, apprehended and killed.⁶²
 - e Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose eluded home arrest in 1941. Mian Akbar Shah, a key figure in the escape, was instrumental in the operation. Netaji arrived in Berlin and established the Free India Legion. Here, Abid Hasan became his confidante and secretary. Abid was his only companion throughout a well-known submarine journey from Germany to Japan. Netaji founded Azad Hind Sarkar and Azad Hind Fauj in 1943. Several Muslims were appointed as ministers with major portfolios, including Lt. Col. Aziz Ahmad, Lt. Col. M. K. Kiani, Lt. Col. Ehsan Qadir, Lt. Col. Shah Nawaz, Karim Ghani and D. M. Khan. In the conflict, Azad Hind Fauj suffered setbacks, and its troops were captured by the British. When Hindus and Muslims of all political stripes gathered on Kolkata Road in 1946 to seek the release of Rashid Ali and other Azad Hind Fauj troops, it became a symbol of Hindu–Muslim harmony.⁶³

Most importantly the torch bearer of the independent movement in India was the Indian National Congress (INC) Party. The INC was founded in 1885 to represent the concerns of the newly educated middle class. Two of the first members and presidents of Congress were Badruddin Tayyabji and Rahmatullah Siani. M.A. Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Hasrat Mohani, Abul Kalam Azad, and others afterwards stayed linked with India's most powerful political party.⁶⁴

India got independence in August 1947. The independence ended British control but within the new nation-states, fault lines have arisen between communities, most notably between Hindus and Sikhs in India and Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in Pakistan. Since 1941, the Muslim League has advocated for the construction of a separate nation for Indian Muslims known as 'Pakistan.' This was founded on the

'Two-Country Theory,' which holds that Muslims historically formed a separate nation within India and should be recognized in terms of territory and constitutional representation.⁶⁵ Despite the fact that partition was based on religion and people were given a chance to choose a country they wanted to live in, a large number of Muslim populations stayed in India.

Second, the post-independence Muslim population has a vast role in shaping the decision-making of Indian politics. Post-independence political role of Muslim can be divided and seen from three angles:

- a **Secularism:** The newly formed sovereign state declared itself a "secular" democracy after gaining independence in 1947. As Nehru declared in 1945, the underlying concept was that the state would not "identify itself with any specific faith but would grant freedom to all religious functions." Secularism in Nehru's view did not mean a complete rejection of religion's ultimate values. The strategy was based on the dictum *Sarva Dharma Sambhav* (literally meaning: all religions are true and equal).⁶⁶ Thus, a conclusion can be made that since independence Muslim have been the driving factor of India's secular character. And Indian central or state governments in the level of policy-making have brought many policies that accommodate Muslim within the political and social process.

Unlike the Western definition, India's idea of 'secularism' is little distinct in nature which can be exemplary and contribute to establish the people-to-people relations with Central Asian Muslim community.⁶⁷ The Indian Constitution makes clear measures for the protection of socio-religious groups, which were intended to address inequalities and make equal citizenship a reality (see Galanter, 1998). 'All minorities, whether based on religion or language, must have the freedom to create or run educational institutions of their choice,' says Article 30(1). This is supported even further by Article 30(2), which recognizes the importance of state cooperation in bringing this provision to fruition. The state also invests heavily in other aspects of religious life, such as administering religious trusts, declaring religious festivals as holidays, preserving the system of different personal laws for different communities, reforming religious law and having secular courts interpret religious laws.⁶⁸

Similarly, the appointment of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad as the first education minister of India has a greater significance on the Congress party's intention to secularize Indian society through education reform. According to Maulana Azad, 'If a country is to be corruption free and become a nation of beautiful minds, I strongly feel three key societal members, who can make a difference. They are the father, the mother, and the Teacher.' Abul Kalam was the one who initially brought up the idea of the National System of Education, which became the cornerstone of the 1986 National Policy on Education, which advocated for equal and high-quality education for all children, regardless of caste, creed, locality or gender. His early efforts were essential in shaping an all-inclusive educational strategy, the results of which are still being realized today.⁶⁹

- b **Electoral participation:** Having approximately 15% of the population, Muslim have been the deciding vote in state or central politics. Some of the

states like Lakshadweep and Jammu & Kashmir have a majority of Muslim population. Likewise, some South Indian states like Kerala also have a good electoral representation in state politics. But after the dissolution of ‘Muslim League’ and its minor representation in India as a ‘Muslim League of India,’ there are no national-level forefront parties of Muslims. After increasing from 4.3% in 1952 to 9.3% in 1977, the number of Muslim MPs in the Lok Sabha fell back to levels last seen in the 1950s and 1960s. Following the 2019 elections, 5% of Indian MPs will be Muslim, with the religious minority accounting for about 15% of the country’s population. In comparison, the present Lok Sabha is over 90% Hindu, whereas Hindu’s account for just under 80% of India’s population.⁷⁰

The rise of Muslim representation in 1977 has to do with the internal political scenario of India. Rise of Janata Party⁷¹ (JP) as a force which replaced the long-running congress party of India. The famous coalition called ‘MY (acronyms of ‘Muslim’ and ‘Yadav’) coalition⁷² ‘specially in northern states, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh’ have given new political leaders like Mulayam Yadav and Lalu Prasad Yadav. The rise of these parties and the coalition between Muslim and majority Yadav population of these states still exist after 30 years as well. After their victory in these states, some of the initiatives taken have had a vast impact on Indian policy making. For instance, Uttar Pradesh had a ‘Hajj Ministry’ which helped the Muslim population administratively to arrange heritage and pilgrimage trips abroad. Out of this action, now most of the states of India have the ‘Hajj Commission Office.’ Likewise, the establishment of a ‘Maulana Azad National Urdu University⁷³ ‘in honor of the first education minister of India is also another remarkable establishment that gives rise to the “symbolize politics” in India. Although all the efforts made during this era have now been challenged by the rise of ‘Hindu Nationalism,’ the political attachment of Muslim population in Indian society has a larger impact on decision and policy making.

- c **Political movements:** Islamist organizations in modern India have begun to support India’s secular democracy, ally with secular or low-caste Hindu groups and form their own political parties.⁷⁴ In truth, the bulk of Islamist organizations have moved away from the idea of an Islamic state, or have never been convinced by it, and have instead embraced the market and democratic space as the primary means of achieving social and political change and organizing collective action.⁷⁵ As a result, it may be claimed that the secular state became the principal focus and political reference point for collective activity for Islamic organizations in post-colonial India. For example, in the past, public protests were mostly in response to anti-Islam policies in which the state failed to fulfil its role as patron of minority rights, cultural heritage, personal law, Islamic schools and protector against communal violence.

With the rise of Islamism, ethnic nationalism and Hindu fundamentalism beginning in the 1980s, the secularization theory began to lose credibility. Evidence reveals that religion has not disappeared from the public domain, but rather is on the rise in both industrialized and developing countries; this is

interpreted as a reaction to attempts to relegate religion to the private sector and thus a rejection of political and top-down secularism.⁷⁶

However, since the 1980s, India's secularism has been under increasing pressure. As a result of the Congress Party's opportunistic pandering to one religious community after another, India's secularism was severely harmed. In light of this speech, the beginning of the Ayodhya movement must be understood. The Rashtriya Swayam-sevak Sangh (RSS) depended on the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in the 1980s to rally the majority of society around Lord Ram's potent emblem. Affiliates of the Sangh asked that the temple that previously stood over Ram's reputed birthplace in Ayodhya be reconstructed in place of the mosque known as the Babri Masjid, which had subsequently taken its place.⁷⁷ In 1989, a campaign to build a Ram mandir (temple) sparked a wave of riots that alienated people along religious lines. Such division helped the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) win the Uttar Pradesh state elections in 1991, where activists tore down the Babri Masjid in 1992 to make space for a Ram temple. The BJP briefly came to power in New Delhi in 1998, a few years after the Ayodhya movement, then won elections again in 1999. However, on both times, the party was leading a wider coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), whose members did not all support a Hindu nationalist agenda. The BJP obtained an absolute majority in the lower chamber of the Indian parliament, the Lok Sabha, for the first time in 2014. After regaining electoral power on the national stage for the first time in a decade, the party chose not to resurrect the three contentious topics described above, but it did undertake unofficial acts aimed at marginalizing Muslims. For example, with the approval of the state apparatus, Hindu vigilantes attempted to discipline minorities (Muslims and Christians) employing a sort of cultural policing that had previously been limited to BJP-ruled states.⁷⁸ There is much research made that supports the claim that after the BJP rise in power, the whole idea of secularism has been attacked through unofficial channels.⁷⁹

Likewise, among the minorities and marginalized groups of the population in India, Muslim population are considered victims of inequality. Even in comparison to the so-called backward castes (scheduled castes [SCs] and scheduled tribes [STs]), a high-level parliamentary committee chaired by Chief Justice Rajinder Sachar concluded in 2006 that India's Muslims were victims of pervasive and persistent patterns of marginalization in almost every aspect of their daily lives.

5.3 Goals and Assumptions

Regarding India's goals and assumptions towards Central Asia in the sphere of social and cultural policy, there are only two things that can be identified. This identification was made based on the interviews conducted in Delhi in 2022. Most of the scholars that the author has discussed have pointed out two goals and assumptions that India has regarding its socio-cultural policy towards the region. First, India is aiming to re-connect the region based on the historical legacy, and second, India hopes to utilize the soft power dynamics to gain influence in the security and economic sphere. These two dynamics are discussed below.

5.3.1 *Increasing Perception Regarding India's Great Power Aspiration*

India and Central Asia share a civilizational history, which has been discussed in many instances throughout the book before. While India's academic discussions have put cultural aspects as one of the strong suits of India in terms of reaching Central Asia, it's almost impossible to categorize what really India wishes to achieve by forwarding the two thousand old connections they have. However, analysing Indian leaders and internal political environment, it is evident that India hopes to use historical legacy as one of the instruments to reach out to the region and project its great power aspiration.⁸⁰

Foreign strategy is forever influenced by history. Government officials intentionally or unintentionally draw on their knowledge of the past to address the issues that are present; they do this to make new and complex problems more understandable. Additionally, this is not always a bad thing because, when correctly applied, historical knowledge can significantly improve policy.

While addressing the Nazarbayev University in 2015 Prime Minister Modi mentioned extensively how the existing historical legacy can play a vital role in India–Central Asia Relations.

The confluence of Indian and Islamic civilisations took place in Central Asia. We enriched each other not only in spiritual thought, but also in medicine, science, mathematics and astronomy. The Islamic heritage of both India and Central Asia is defined by the highest ideals of Islam – knowledge, piety, compassion and welfare. This is a heritage founded on the principle of love and devotion. And, it has always rejected the forces of extremism. Today, this is an important source of strength that brings India and Central Asia together. The richness of our ties is written into the contours of our cities and our daily lives. We see this in architecture and art, handicraft and textile and in most popular food. The dargahs of Delhi resonate with Sufi music that draws people from all faiths. The cities of Central Asia have become centres of yoga and Hindi, long before the world came together to celebrate the International Day of Yoga on 21st June. Uzbekistan has recently completed fifty years of radio broadcast in Hindi. Our epics Ramayana and Mahabharata were popular on Uzbek TV as they were in India. Many of you wait for the release of the latest Bollywood film with the same excitement as people in India. This is the source of goodwill between our people. It is the foundation of a relationship of hearts and emotions. And, it cannot be measured only by the scale of trade or the demands of States.⁸¹

On the other hand, while India's great power aspiration is growing, India is required to project its great power aspiration and the increasing materialistic capability. India started working towards this goal in the early 1990s after deciding to adopt a liberal market economy model and start implementing economic reforms in response to a severe economic crisis. India started economic liberalization in 1991 and has been able to sustain a strong growth rate ever since. Between 1991

and 2000, the size of the Indian economy more than doubled.⁸² By 2023, India's economy ranked fifth in the world.

India has not only made significant economic advancements over the previous few decades, but also significant military advancements. The Indian armed forces today number over a million soldiers and are equipped with nuclear weapons as well as efficient delivery systems. India is building the capacity to ascend through the international order and become a major power.⁸³ It is not just how the foreign policy and security community thinks; many ordinary Indians also hold this view. States that aspire to become great powers first work to establish regional hegemony. Prior to being involved in international politics as a major power, the United States had been a regional hegemon since the 19th century.⁸⁴ All burgeoning superpowers, including Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and the former Soviet Union during the Cold War, have attempted to first establish regional hegemony from the time of Napoleonic France. So, Central Asia became very vital from the perspective of India's growing posture in international order. Thus, the historical and cultural lineage helps India to advance its great power aspiration in Central Asia.

5.3.2 *Instrumentalizing Soft Power to Boost Security and Economic Approach to the Central Asia Region*

As per the ministry of external affairs of the Government of India,

Although soft power may be necessary for success, it is insufficient on its own. This is true since foreign policy decisions are not decided in a unilateral manner. Their prosperity depends on other nations. Their preferences are crucial to our success. Even though they are admirers of our culture and civilization, they would not follow our example if our goals went against what was best for their country. This is the circumstance where the use of some types of "hard power" may be pertinent. That doesn't necessarily include applying physical force. There are other approaches to persuade. But it cannot be helped that soft power "lubricates" other diplomatic tools. It is evident that even if a nation respects our culture and principles, it could be more likely to refrain from taking a hostile posture. As a result, if it is not acting against its own national interests, it may tend to make wise choices when making decisions.⁸⁵

Power has traditionally been emphasized in traditional approaches to security studies in international relations. At its most basic level, power is the capability to influence behaviour in order to obtain one's desired results. It is the ability to accomplish one's purposes or goals.⁸⁶ There are several strategies for changing other people's behaviour. One can use coercion with threats, inducement with rewards or attraction with co-optation to get what one wants from others. The ability to survive and a government's capacity to foster economic progress are both included in the concept of power. Possession of particular resources, such as population, territory, natural

resources, economic strength, military force and political stability, is frequently linked to one's ability to achieve desired results.⁸⁷

The international standing of the State and the exchange of information between States have a significant impact on the effectiveness of soft power. As a result, the rise of globalization and soft power are frequently linked. Popular culture and the media, as well as the dissemination of a national language or specific set of normative norms, are frequently cited as sources of soft power. A country with a lot of soft power and the goodwill it has gained can influence other nations to acculturate, avoiding the need for costly hard power investments.⁸⁸

As can be seen from the fact that, unlike China's rise, India's "rising" is not being seen with apprehension and worry in many countries, India has always been a country with immense "soft power." Due to their shared history and civilization, Southeast Asian nations have a very high level of India's soft power and are now referred to as their "civilizational neighbours."⁸⁹ India has a distinct edge in these nations over other developing Asian powers like China and Japan because it has no boundary conflicts with any of them. South Asia, India's nearest neighbour, values Indian culture. India has long had an impact on nations in both its near neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood, including Persia (now known as Iran). Because of its rich culture and connections to other civilizations, India still has a lot of potential for soft power. Its sizable diaspora, as well as its historical and cultural ties to many other nations, add to its soft power.⁹⁰ India through its institutions, embassies and civil cooperation is trying to reach Central Asia as much as possible. By doing so India aims to establish a relationship of goodwill with each country in the region that can be translated into security and economic cooperation.

While announcing 'Connect Central Asia Policy' in 2012 Minister of External Affairs E. Ahmed explain that

Connection between our peoples are the most vital linkages to sustain our deep engagement. I would particularly like to emphasize exchange between youth and the future leaders of India and Central Asia. India already has a robust exchange of students. India will encourage regular exchanges of scholars, academics, civil society and youth delegations to gain deeper insights into each other's cultures.⁹¹

This statement signals that despite the deep root of Indian soft power in history and civilization, India is working hard in terms of diversifying and modernizing it. Keeping in mind the deep-rooted historical and cultural connection India aims to establish a positive image in the region as a provider, investor and trustworthy partner.

5.4 Instruments

The thousands of years of civilizational interactions between India and Central Asia remain the most important factor in forging close ties with the five countries. Central Asia has long been a fruitful site for the development of Indian culture.

Buddhism was the driving force, flourishing throughout Central Asia and spreading to East Asia. The monasteries that dot the Silk Route served as Indian cultural and commercial outposts until the Arab conquest in the 7th century.⁹² Even in Central Asia, India benefits from a variety of cultural qualities, esteem and popularity. Many parts of India–Central Asia ties appear to be either unknown or ignored.

However, both sides recognize that cultural and humanitarian cooperation will help to accelerate the modernization of the cultural realm and the growth of our countries' cultural diplomacy. Political, economic and humanitarian relations have existed between the peoples of Central Asia and India for millennia. This has aided mutual cultural enrichment, intellectual and spiritual advancement, and the spread of ideas, faiths and philosophies.⁹³

Since the end of the Cold War, India's engagement with Central Asia has had many socio-cultural components. In each bilateral and multilateral meeting and forum, both sides put stress on the historical, cultural and societal linkage they have. The socio-cultural engagement of India is reflected through various initiatives that India has adopted since 1991, and the instrumentalization of those initiatives are discussed below.

5.4.1 Institutional Framework

India has an institutional setup to carry on its socio-political approach towards the countries which are strategically important to them. Having said that, this section is divided into two parts (based on two main institutional approaches that India have).

5.4.1.1 Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's first Education Minister, formed the ICCR in 1950. Its goals are to actively participate in the development and implementation of policies and programmes relating to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people; and to develop relations with nations.⁹⁴ ICCR is the body under the External Affairs Ministry of India.

The ICCR offers cultural programmes such as dance, music, drama, performing arts, fine arts, painting, yoga, and Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil and Bengali language instruction. The ICCR's programmes/activities fall into two categories: (i) academic exchange and intellectual programmes and (ii) visual and performing arts interchange and promotion. The academic programmes are aimed at promoting India's intellectual and academic activity as well as enabling cross-national exchanges in this field. Every year, the ICCR awards over 3,500 scholarships and hosts a number of conferences, seminars and intellectual debates. The ICCR offers a diverse range of visual and performing arts exchange programmes, sending more than 150 cultural troupes overseas each year. The ICCR's activities include a mix of ongoing and regular activities, as well as a number of new initiatives and unique events.⁹⁵

In 36 nations, the ICCR has 38 cultural centres. ICCR also operates cultural centres in Valladolid, Spain and Busan, South Korea, on the public–private partnership (PPP) model. The ICCR collaborates with the Ministry of Culture to carry out the activities outlined in the Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) agreements made with various nations. In order to promote Indian culture and undertake cultural exchange initiatives, the ICCR interacts with a variety of foreign organizations.⁹⁶

Within the various scholarship schemes under ICCR cooperation, students from the Central Asian region have actively participated in long-term courses in Indian Universities. Central Asian students are mainly interested in pursuing degrees in Information Technology (IT) and Agricultural Advancement. Besides the India-funded scholarship schemes, many Central Asian students travel to India for higher education since India offers higher education at a fraction of the cost of European and American colleges (Table 5.2).⁹⁷

Over 300 Turkmen students are currently pursuing higher education in India at several prestigious institutes. Tajik citizens are offered roughly 25 ICCR scholarships each year. Tajik individuals have applied for about 360 ICCR scholarships so far. In the fiscal year 2017–2018, the Eurasia Division funded 60 additional seats for specialized remote sensing training for Tajik experts.

Similarly, numerous Central Asian educational institutions have inked bilateral agreements to send students to India. Various postgraduate courses are now open for admission to Uzbek students, as well as training of Uzbek officials in various forensic sciences, thanks to a Memorandum of Understanding between Gujarat Forensic Sciences University in Gandhinagar and the Ministry of Innovation Development of Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan has been given 15 places under the ICCR's General Scholarship Scheme. The programme is open to all Kazakhstani citizens who meet the eligibility requirements. On the other hand, the number of Indian medical students studying in Central Asia has increased dramatically in recent years. As of 2018, embassies in the region estimated that Tajikistan had 900 students and Kyrgyzstan had 4,500.⁹⁸

The Indian government is preparing to focus on spreading the word about Indian spirituality around the world. The ICCR has begun to make concerted efforts in this regard. Dinesh K Patnaik, the new director general of the ICCR, has begun to improve engagement with spiritual organizations around the country. Talking with one of the news portals in India, Mr. Patnaik said,

Spirituality has not been used by the government in cultural cooperation with other countries. A lot of spiritual organizations in India have centers abroad. The idea is to work with organizations, which are already in the field and government organizations like the ministry of Ayush, ICCR, MEA, Ministry of health, etc. to work together to share the great treasure we have with the rest of the world.⁹⁹

Considering the historical relations between India and Central Asia, both Islam and Buddhism can contribute to shaping the new initiative of ICCR.

Table 5.2 ICCR Scholarship Scheme and Central Asian Eligibility

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Scholarship Name</i>	<i>Central Asia's Eligibility</i>	<i>Number of Slots</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>
1	General Scholarship Scheme	All CARs	580	UG, PG, M.Phil, PhD
2	CEP/EEP Scholarship Scheme	Only Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan	152	UG, PG, M.Phil, PhD
3	Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	26	UG, PG, M.Phil, PhD
4	ICCR Scholarship Scheme for Indian Culture	All CARs	100	Dance, Music, Indian Theatre, Cuisine, Yoga/ Art
5	Bangladesh Scholarship Scheme for Bangladeshi Nationals	Not eligible	100	UG, PG, PhD/ Post Doc
6	Nehru Memorial Scholarship Scheme for Sri Lankan Nationals	Not eligible	60	UG
7	Africa Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	908	UG, PG, M.Phil, PhD
8	Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	50	UG, PG, M.Phil, PhD
9	Scholarship Scheme for Children/Dependents of Afghan National Defence and Security Forces	Not eligible	361	UG, PG
10	Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals	Not eligible	1000	PG, M.Phil, PhD
11	Silver Jubilee Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	64	UG, PG, PhD
12	Aid to Mongolia Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	20	UG
13	Aid to Bhutan Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	20	UG
14	Aid to Maldives Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	20	UG, PG, PhD
15	India Scholarship (Bangladesh) scheme	Not eligible	100	UG, PG, PhD (excluding Engineering)
16	Scholarship to Wards of Border Guard Bangladesh	Not eligible	20	UG
17	Nehru Memorial Scholarship Scheme	All CARs	60	UG

(Continued)

Table 5.2 (Continued)

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Scholarship Name</i>	<i>Central Asia's Eligibility</i>	<i>Number of Slots</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>
18	Maulana Azad Scholarship Scheme	Not eligible	50	Masters in Agriculture Science & English Courses
19	Rajiv Gandhi Scholarship Scheme	All CARs	25	For study in the field of IT
20	AYUSH Scholarship Scheme for BIMSTEC Countries	Not eligible	54	UG, PG, PhD courses in Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Yoga
21	AYUSH Scholarship Scheme for Non-BIMSTEC Countries	All CARs	27	UG, PG, PhD courses in Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Yoga
22	AYUSH Scholarship Scheme for Malaysian	Not eligible	5	UG, PG, PhD courses in Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Yoga
23	AYUSH Scholarship Scheme for South East Asian Region (SEAR) Countries	Not eligible	23	UG, PG, PhD courses in Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Yoga
Total			3825	

Source: ICCR, <https://iccr.gov.in/iccr-scholarship/indian-council-cultural-relations-scholarship>.

5.4.1.2 *Indian Technical and Education Cooperation (ITEC)*

Since its inception in 1964, the ITEC programme has grown to include about 160 partner countries from Asia, Africa, East Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Small Island Developing States. The ITEC programme consists mostly of short-term training courses for government officials and working professionals that are held annually across Indian public institutions in several streams. The programme has evolved organically from roughly 4,000 training slots in 2006–2007 to around 14,000 slots in 2019–2020 (including defence training). ITEC offered civilian training spaces in over 383 courses across 98 institutions in 2019–2020, covering a wide range of topics. India's soft influence among developing countries has been greatly enhanced because of the ITEC initiative. Closely associated

Indian public sector companies such as Hindustan Machine Tools, Water and Power Consultancy Services (WAPCOS) and Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES) have been able to establish themselves and become well known in developing countries, where they have gone on to bid for various projects independently. It has also aided in the development of relationships between Indian entrepreneurs and decision-makers in other emerging nations.

As per the new report published by the Ministry of External Affairs, the ITEC programme has trained people from all around the world in various categories. In another, the ITEC programme has been called a civilian training programme as well. Since 2018 ITEC has been diversifying, which allows India to accommodate the larger numbers of participants.¹⁰⁰

First, within ITEC, India has 'e-ITEC.' e-ITEC is a type of ITEC programme in which Indian Institutes provide training in partner nations via the internet in real time. For trainees from four partner countries (Myanmar, Laos PDR, Morocco and Vietnam), the inaugural e-ITEC course on "Big Data analytics using Apache Spark in Python" was held. IIT Madras hosted the course as part of the e-ITEC project. From 2022, this programme is available to all the ITEC partner countries. Second, *ITEC provides customized on-site* capacity-building programmes to partner countries by relocating training to the country and deputing trainers for a limited time. Fertilizer technology, Fisheries technology, Agriculture and associated sectors, Teachers' Training and Research, Open Education Resources, Securities Markets, Wind Energy, Rural Electrification and South-South Cooperation are some of the areas where training has been highlighted. In addition, the Indian Mission has been advised to continue looking for partner countries' capacity-building needs. Third, *ITEC Executive* is an exclusive programme for policymakers, senior-level officials and professionals from partner countries that includes conferences, workshops, study/exposure visits and other activities aimed at providing a better understanding of best practices/systems in India, among other things. This programme also seeks to provide a higher degree of education in cutting-edge technological and policy fields.

Fourth, ITEC provides various ranges of defence training. Security and strategic studies, defence management, electronics, mechanical engineering, marine hydrography, counterinsurgency and jungle warfare, Maritime Law and Ops course by Coast Guard Headquarters, and foundation courses for young officers in three services were among the courses offered. Courses at prestigious institutions such as the National Defence College in New Delhi and the Defence Services Staff College (DSSC) in Wellington remained in high demand, attracting officers from industrialized countries on a self-financing basis. Fifth, under the 'deputation of ITEC experts' program,' experts have been dispatched to partner nations based on their needs, which has played a critical role in sharing Indian expertise with the developing world. Various Ministries of the Indian Government have been consulted to prepare an Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and map their knowledge with various countries/regions, which will be shared with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) so that the Indian Mission can be suitably informed, in order to create a conveniently available pool of domain experts (Table 5.3).¹⁰¹

Table 5.3 Courses Offered under ITEC Programme (Year 2021/2022)

<i>SN</i>	<i>Course Name</i>
1	Agriculture, food and fertilizer
2	Banking, insurance, finance, accounts and audit
3	Cyber technologies, AI and emergent technologies
4	Education
5	Engineering and technology
6	Environment and climate change
7	Government function
8	Health and yoga
9	Human resource development and planning
10	Irrigation and water resources
11	IT and telecommunication
12	Management and leadership
13	Media and journalism
14	Petroleum and hydrocarbon
15	Power, renewable and alternative energy
16	Project management
17	Quality management
18	Rural development and poverty alleviation
19	SMEs and entrepreneurship
20	Specialized courses
21	Sustainable development and South–South cooperation
22	Trade and international market
23	Urban planning
24	Women empowerment

Source: ITEC Website. <https://www.itecgoi.in/streamlist?salt3=ZjU2NjkyMTA2MzlwMjEtMjAyMg==>

The courses offered under the programmes are run through many public–private institutions. Fifty-six different institutes, organizations and universities are involved in the process, which not only increase the visibility of India’s external socio-cultural capabilities but also help to establish the people-to-people relations between India and citizens from around the world.

Being a participant country of India’s ITEC programme, central Asian countries utilized these opportunities actively. Central Asian Republics in India’s ITEC programmes:

- a Since 1992, Kazakhstan has been India’s ITEC partner. Since then, almost 1290 Kazakhstani scholars have benefitted from the initiative until 2019.¹⁰²
- b The India–Kyrgyzstan partnership has been deep and long-standing for three decades. The enthusiasm of Kyrgyz participants in various ITEC programmes attests to its importance. From two in 1992–1993 to over 70 in 2018–2019, the number of civilian course participants has increased dramatically. From 1992 to March 2019, over 1325 Kyrgyz professionals obtained training in India.¹⁰³
- c Since 1996, Tajikistan has been India’s ITEC partner. Since then, almost 1,400 Tajikistani scholars have attended the training programme in India.¹⁰⁴

- d Over 400 Turkmen people have been trained in various courses since the programme began in 1994 for Turkmenistan. In 2010, India funded a Hindi Chair at the Azadi Institute of World Languages in Ashgabat, where Hindi is taught to university students, as part of this curriculum.¹⁰⁵
- e Since 1993, Uzbekistan has been sending candidates to the ITEC programme. So far, more than 2,400 Uzbek professionals have received ITEC training in India's top institutes. In 2019, 164 spots in normal and specialist courses were filled.¹⁰⁶

5.4.2 Public Diplomacy

Over the last two decades, India's relationship with the region has changed. India focused on rekindling old civilizational linkages with the region in the early years to lay the framework for creating confidence and goodwill. This was followed by a policy of projecting India's "soft power," in which India helped with capacity building, human resource development, information technology, pharmaceuticals and healthcare, among other things. The goal was to build goodwill and demonstrate India's sincerity in its involvement with the area in order to expand trade ties.¹⁰⁷ For instance, Hamid Karzai's schooling in India, for example, is credited with being one of the main reasons why Afghanistan has warmed up to India since the Taliban leadership was deposed in 2001.¹⁰⁸

Besides India's approach to Central Asia through ICCR and ITEC, India also has long-existing instruments which have helped to maintain India's image in Central Asia. Ayurveda (traditional medicine), Bollywood, a global cuisine, fashion, music and dance, gurus, mediation and yoga are among India's soft power assets, as are political pluralism, a history of peaceful coexistence and religious diversity.¹⁰⁹

India's soft power, or its capacity to persuade other governments and non-state entities to seek the outcomes it wants without threatening or bribing them¹¹⁰; is growing. India has been making a determined effort to seduce and influence its region and the world by appropriating and marketing culture in a way that supports and promotes the country's favourable image – most recently through the adoption of yoga.

Yoga: Although 'Yoga' has been practiced around the world for a long time, the Modi government has tried to instrumentalize it as a tool of foreign policy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized the physical and spiritual advantages of yoga in his 69th Independence Day (2015) Address to the Nation.¹¹¹ Same year in December, the United Nations declared 1st June as the 'International Yoga Day' and the Indian Prime Minister played a vital role to make that happen. Modi's use of yoga as a visible element of his cultural diplomacy strategy aims to portray India as inclusive to the rest of the world, while also promoting a more general and 'deeply felt spiritual and philosophical worldview that promotes India's civilizational and cultural characteristics as unique contributions to the world.'¹¹²

Yoga has the advantage of already being a global and globalized cultural export that is perceived as distinctly Indian and has become big business both in India and around the world in terms of reach. The global yoga industry is projected to be

valued up to US\$80 billion per year.¹¹³ According to a survey conducted by Yoga Journal and Yoga Alliance, the yoga sector in the United States is worth \$16 billion per year, with more than 36 million yoga practitioners in the country.¹¹⁴ According to Make in India, the yoga and other traditional health and spirituality practices industry in India has an annual revenue of INR 120 billion.

In other parts of the world, Yoga is a popular tradition in Central Asian countries as well. In the region, yoga has been practiced in two different models. Cultural wings of Indian embassies in each Central Asian country regularly organize yoga events. During the 6th International Yoga Day, the Embassy of India in Uzbekistan organized six different programmes to popularize yoga.¹¹⁵ Likewise, nearly 400 yoga aficionados attended the event organized by the Embassy of India in Kyrgyzstan and did yoga under the instruction of Professor Prashant Ayir, an Indian yoga expert who had been specifically invited.¹¹⁶ The Swami Vivekananda Culture Centre in Nur-Sultan has been offering free online yoga lessons with great success. In addition, from 10 June to 20 June 2020, Yoga Charcha (Discourse on Yoga) – A Series of 11 Online Lectures by Eminent Yoga Experts will be held. The Ministry of AYUSH, (entails to *Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homoeopathy*) the Government of India and the ICCR have collaborated to create an international video blogging event called ‘My Life, My Yoga.’¹¹⁷

Similarly, there are hundreds of private yoga institutes that offer various kinds of yoga classes. For instance, approximately 10% of the population from Astana, Kazakhstan, regularly practices yoga. People in Kazakhstan are becoming more interested in this ancient Indian physical, mental and spiritual activity, particularly in the country’s largest cities.¹¹⁸

Bollywood: Although it has not always been obvious, the State and the entertainment sector have had a tight association throughout history. The entertainment sector has rarely been devoid of governmental aim, from Roman politicians employing amphitheatres for self-glorification¹¹⁹ to Shakespeare’s Richard III’s obvious adulation of the ruling dynasty.¹²⁰ Even though the Indian Film Industry has been around for the majority of the last century, it wasn’t until the 1990s that these productions were made specifically available on a global scale.¹²¹ But interestingly due to the close relationship of India with the Soviet Union, Bollywood movies were well consumed in soviet space including in Central Asia.

In terms of soft power, *Bollywood* (Hindi Cinema Industry) is more effective in other countries of the global South.¹²² The Bollywood brand has come to define a creative and confident India, having been co-opted by India’s business and governmental elite and celebrated by its diaspora. India has been using Bollywood as an instrument on various occasions. For instance, the ‘charms’ of Bollywood have also been utilized to promote military weapons, as seen by a short movie produced by Rafael Advanced Defence Systems, a renowned Israeli weapon maker, in 2009 to coincide with the defence trade exhibition in India. The ad featured a Bollywood-style dance sequence about Indo–Israeli defence cooperation, with Israeli actors dressed in Indian clothes singing and dancing around mock-ups of Rafael’s goods.¹²³ WikiLeaks disclosed US government files that said Bollywood may play a role in combating extremism around the world and supporting peace

in Afghanistan. High-profile Bollywood performers could play a crucial role in Afghanistan, according to a US cable from March 2007. "We believe Bollywood movies are extremely popular in Afghanistan, therefore willing Indian celebrities may be asked to visit the country to help raise awareness about social issues," it said.¹²⁴

Bollywood provides a lot of the heavy lifting for people's opinions of India around the world, including in Central Asia. Indian films first gained popularity in the Soviet Union in the 1950s, and fans of classics like *Shri 420* and *Disco Dancer* fondly recall the plots and lyrics. Fans continue to flock to contemporary Indian films and soap operas. Every morning, satellites broadcast dramas such as *Zhenskaya Dolya* (Kumkum Bhagya) and *Lyubimyi Zyat'* (Jamai Raja). *Kelin* (Balika Vadhu), a soap opera depicting the lives of two generations of child brides, was dubbed in Kazakh and Kyrgyz and shown on local TV stations, allowing even families without access to Russian or Indian networks to see it. Every year, over 600 Indian films are dubbed in Tajik, a Persian-like language. Due to the close relationship shared by India and the Soviet Union, Bollywood became a successful mechanism to connect India with Central Asia. However, Indian cinema also got influenced by the socialism of the Soviet Union during this era. In the 1940s, India's intellectual philosophy was significantly influenced by Soviet socialism, which was reflected in its literature and movies. Leftists including Balraj Sahni, Kaifi Azmi and Sardar Jafri, as well as Abbas, were drawn to the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), which drew heavily on traditional Soviet literature and ideals. Abbas authored *Neecha Nagar* (1946), a Chetan Anand-directed adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths*. And, later, for his own business *Navketan*, he directed *Afsar*; the film, an Indianized version of Nikolai Gogol's *Inspector General*, was a big disappointment, nearly collapsing the company.¹²⁵ Thus, Bollywood has a decade of legacy in the Central Asian diaspora. And it is playing a major role in India's image building in the region.

Notes

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6 Dimensions of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region after the Cold War

6.1 Security Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

Central Asia is a crucial region with substantial security issues. The five Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have recently seen violent labour unrest, political revolutions, border disputes and interethnic fighting. There are worries about the expansion of international extremist networks that connect Afghanistan and Central Asia. The regional security structure appears frail and unpredictable as the NATO-led international coalition departs Afghanistan. The former Bush Administration developed bases and other military access in the area to support American-led coalition operations in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, against the United States. The interests of the United States in maintaining such access as well as the long-term security and stability of the region have been emphasized by the Obama Administration. Along with assistance in the development of oil and other resources, the United States has interests in Central Asia that include battling terrorism, drug manufacturing and trafficking, as well as promoting democracy, human rights, free markets and trade. The United Government also works to counter Iranian threats to regional independence and to stop challenges to its security posed by the unauthorized transfer of strategic missile, nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons technologies, materials and knowledge to terrorist states or groups.¹ Thus, within this external security environment and internal changing interest, India's security behaviour towards Central Asia has evolved.

6.1.1 *Achievements of India's Goals in Security Dimension in the Central Asia Region*

After the analysis, the security posture and the achievements of India towards Central Asia can be divided into three phases. The first phase after the Cold War for one decade, can be characterized as India's attempt to establish a relationship with Central Asia. As India was motivated by rapprochement of the relations with five Central Asian Republics (CARs), it is hard to detect the particular interest and the behaviours that India has towards the region during this phase. During the first decade after the Cold War, India was engaged with more pressing security issues. In broader spectrum,

the Indian security environment after the Cold War faced a critical challenge to reform its security and defence policy. Despite the 'Non-Aligned' approach to world politics, India and the Soviet Union's defence cooperation rather made India dependent on the USSR. Generally speaking, second-hand weapons were what the Soviet Union exported to the Third World; "India is the only country in the Third World that has been given the right to produce Soviet state-of-the-art weapons under licence."² Senior defense officials thought that India and the USSR had enough interests for India to request the transfer of defense technologies rather than just military systems, backed by suitable finance arrangements.³ India's own armaments industry was able to grow to the point of around two-thirds self-sufficiency thanks to licenced production. The Soviet Union's willingness to give cutting-edge defense technology to India was a sign of their faith in their military alliance. Despite that, India's focus right after the Cold War was on adjusting itself into the new unipolar world order. From 1991 to 1995, the state relations were merely scrutinized to establish diplomatic relations.

Second phase, from 2000 to 2014. This phase and India's behaviour are anchored by; new emerging dynamics of Energy Security; Post 9/11 Afghanistan; rising threat of Terrorism and Extremism; and the Kashmir Conflict. Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, three CARs, share a porous, 2,500-kilometer border with Afghanistan, leaving the area vulnerable to the developing crisis in Kabul.⁴ About two years after the 1999 hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight, India devised the Ayni Project to establish its first air base outside of the nation. It's in Tajikistan, which is close to Afghanistan. Under the previous Taliban government, the Pakistani militants had taken control of the aircraft and flown it to safety. The Ayni Project started in 2002 as a joint venture between the security-intelligence apparatus and the ministry of external affairs. Gissar Military Aerodrome (GMA), a base for the Indian Air Force (IAF), is what it eventually became. It is situated not far from Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, near the village of Ayni. It is managed jointly by Tajikistan and India.⁵ This move signals India's changing behaviours towards the region. The combined threat of changing dynamics in Afghanistan, increasing tension with Pakistan and the rising threat of terrorism.

On the energy security end, India has realized after 9/11 and the instability of the Middle East (from where their most of the hydrocarbons comes from) that they need to diversify the energy. So India started to behave accordingly with Central Asia region after 2000 AD and it can be verified by the statement and the behaviours that India has shown:

- a According to the revised scenario, Asia and Africa currently house the majority of the world's energy resources. In addition to the already established West Asian Oil, new territories in Africa, Central Asia and nations in Southeast Asia are developing as new centres of natural gas and oil.⁶
- b The Caspian Sea's proximity to oil has elevated Central Asia to the centre of international oil diplomacy. Due to the availability of natural resources in the form of oil and gas, competitive influence-building attempts of power had started in the CARs. Italian, British, American and Russian multinational corporations as well as Gazprom began competing for influence.⁷

- c India also proposed to use pipelines to import natural gas and oil from West Asia and Central Asia. However, the majority of the pipelines must travel via the unstable nations of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The work has become more challenging because of the prevalence of terrorism in these states. So, here also one can identify how the terrorism and energy security have overlapped with each other.
- d In Kazakhstan, OVL has made a bid for a minority stake in the jointly owned by Kazakhstan and Russia Kurmangazy oil field. India will probably have access to recoverable reserves thanks to this project. It is also thinking of buying a 15% stake in the discovered field Alibekmola, which is now owned by the Canadian company Nelson Resources. India has already stationed troops in Tajikistan, given it a \$40 million aid package and agreed to renovate an air base close to the Tajik capital Dushanbe in order to support Central Asian countries' interests in energy security.⁸
- e In 2008, Kazakhstan assisted India in obtaining a waiver for India-specific civil nuclear cooperation with NSG members. The next year, India and Kazakhstan reached an agreement for India to receive 2,100 tonnes of uranium until 2014. In 2011, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Kazakhstan and signed an agreement for "Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy" between the two nations.⁹

The entire military cooperation in the region is mostly limited to infrastructure, training, military exercises and education. A defense attaché has been stationed in each of India's Central Asian embassies as part of an increase in defense cooperation in the region. India and Kyrgyzstan conducted their first military exercise together in 2011.¹⁰

The third phase of India's security posture towards Central Asia started in 2014. Due to few conducting factors, India's behaviours in security cooperation towards the region spiked. There were some pre-existing conductors of India's behaviours towards the region like energy security, rise of terrorism and extremism. But after 2014, the Chinese approach towards its neighbouring countries in South and Central Asia complicated India's position in the regions. Likewise, the US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan also alerted India about the stability of the region as well as the concerns related to possible amounts of terrorism and extremism. As a result, India's Central Asia strategy was revitalized with PM Modi's trip to five Central Asian nations in July 2015. This was the first simultaneous visit by an Indian Prime Minister to the area. The trip was both a symbol of Indian diplomacy's success and a shrewd strategic move that paved the way for overcoming obstacles that had previously prevented India from reaching out to a significant area in its strategic vicinity.¹¹

India and the CARs are compelled to strive towards enhancing their defense cooperation because of the threats to both countries' security posed by the shifting domestic and global environments. Initial exchanges focused on similar dangers such religious extremism, terrorism, violence fuelled by drugs and international criminality in the defense sector. Although important, India's military cooperation

with Central Asian nations is by no means complete. The total military cooperation in the region is mostly limited to infrastructure, training, exercises and education for the armed forces.¹² The region is facing new challenges in the security sphere such as heating geopolitical game, Russia's changing behaviours regarding post-soviet space, rise of China and changing scenario in Afghanistan. Most of these issues concern India as well.

As a result of that, both sides of the defence budget in India and Central Asia have gone up. From US\$1,548 million in 2020 to US\$1,618 million in 2021, Kazakhstan's military spending grew by 4.50%.¹³ In 2021, Kyrgyzstan had a 125-million-dollar defense budget. Military spending in Kyrgyzstan increased from US\$26 million in 2002 to US\$125 million in 2021 at a 9.0% yearly rate.¹⁴ In 2021, Tajikistan spent 82 million dollars on its armed forces. Tajikistan's military budget increased steadily from 1998 to 2021, reaching US\$82 million, despite notable swings in recent years.¹⁵ Between 2003 and 2018, Uzbekistan's military spending climbed by 2,560.79%, from US\$54 million to US\$1,440 million.¹⁶ On the other hand, India became the fourth largest country in terms of defence expenditure. The number of joint trainings and the embedment of security concerns in multilateral foras have also increased during this period. Thus, the third phase shows the progress and proactive engagement of India in the region in comparison to the first and second phases.

6.1.2 *Limitations on Achieving India's Security Goals in Central Asia Region*

Although India is a rising power, its development is being overshadowed by China's even more impressive rise. Beijing's influence has already disturbed Asia's geopolitical balance and is almost definitely only going to increase. India is keenly interested in counterbalancing China. It is obvious that India has suffered as a result of the shifting of the power equilibrium. China's economy has developed much more quickly, which has also enabled it to increase its investment in its military might and political alliances in the region surrounding India.¹⁷ In order to respond to the strategic environment in Asia, Indian decision-makers have at least six options: non-alignment, hedging, internal balancing (i.e., developing domestic defense capabilities), regional balancing, alignment with China and tighter alignment with the United States. As India moved to strategic autonomy from non-alignment and there are very less possibilities to align its policy with China, the only option that India is left out with is regional balancing or tighter alignment with the United States. From the military dynamics, India is not the only nation that avoids geopolitical entanglement or alignment. Its resistance to joining forces with the United States is comparable to the foreign policy stance of nations like Vietnam and Indonesia. So, in case of India's approach towards Central Asia in the security sphere, regional balancing is a viable option.

India's bilateral and multilateral security engagement primarily focused on managing and mitigating national security threats. But considering India's heating face-off with China in the border region and ongoing competition in South Asia, Indian Ocean Region and Indo-Pacific, India's increasing interaction with Central

Asia also has a significance on India's intention to balance China in the region. On the other hand, the CAR itself is seeking out fresh allies like India to counterbalance China. These "suspicions" about China are not brand-new. A political advisor to Abulai Khan of Kazakhstan in the 18th century, Buhar-Jiru, described China using the analogy of a rider and a horse: "Russian yoke is made of leather that can gradually wear out, while Chinese yoke is made of iron and one can't free oneself from it."¹⁸ The CARs countries acknowledge that China's increased involvement in the area offers a variety of opportunities, but at the same time, their civil societies are less trusting of China as a result of its hegemonic push.¹⁹ In these circumstances, given that the majority of Central Asian regimes have authoritarian structures and weak governmental organizations, they are likely to align themselves with China.²⁰ However, considering the regional security complexities in Central Asia India has two biggest concerns regarding the security sphere of Central Asia.

Great Power Competition and Space of India: Until the first quarter of the 21st century, Central Asia remains as one of the geopolitical contested regions. Due to its strategic geographic location Central Asia in great powers politics remain vital which has been discussed in previous chapters extensively. Thus, this section aims to assess how the great power competition in the region posed a challenge for India. By accessing such dynamics, it will provide some kind of outlook for Indian policy making to adjust itself within the environment. The great power competition of the region can be analysed in four broader sections.

First, the so-called 'New Great Game.' Since the early 1990s, the phrase "New Great Game" has been used to describe the competition between great powers for control of areas like the Caspian Sea, the Arctic Sea, the Black Sea and the South China Sea as well as for religious influence, military might, geopolitical hegemony and economic gain (such as the oil and gas industries and transportation).²¹ The intricacy of the current strategic and economic connections in Central Asia as a component of the World island cannot be isolated from the complexity of those relations. In terms of the geostrategic approach to the Eurasian plateau, Mackinder's²² The concept of the "Heartland" still holds true given the significance of the area for the world's energy supply and the rekindled competition between the superpowers. Thus, despite the different vocabulary used to describe the region, Central Asia remains a vital geography for existing powers and emerging powers such as India and China.

Second, the post 9/11 'war on terror'²³ has increased the significance of the region in the sphere of security. After the Cold War, US strategy in Central Asia has mostly focused on promoting democracy, security and energy. However, following September 11, US priorities changed, and mainstream security started to dominate the country's foreign policy in the area.²⁴ The long-term political and economic reform programme from the previous decade was still being pursued, to be sure, but military and security concerns began to dominate American activity in Central Asia. Priority was given to the logistical needs of sustaining extensive US military operations in Afghanistan and the accompanying need for access to local military installations. This was done at the expense of the backing of human rights, political and economic reforms. The United States emphasized the value of

security cooperation with host nations as well as America's overall political stance in the region. Although Central Asia's relevance was mostly dependent on its function as an auxiliary to efforts to stabilize Afghanistan rather than as a priority in and of itself, the region went from being of tangential concern to one that commanded a considerably greater priority in America's strategy.²⁵ The presence of the United States in the region has several implications. First, the security presence of the United States in the region automatically undermines the possibility for other external players in the region in the security sphere. Second, it increased the tension between existing players, new players and the player with an intention to enter Central Asia. Thus, this period scrutinized India's possibility to engage actively in a security sphere in the region.

Third, the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. The longest war in US history came to an end on 30 August 2021, when all US forces were finally withdrawn from Afghanistan. The United States was active in Afghanistan fighting against the Taliban and several global terrorist organizations there with its European allies.²⁶ After 20 years of war in Afghanistan, the Taliban's resurgence and takeover of power, along with the US hasty withdrawal, raised concerns about the efficacy of US and Western efforts there as well as the broader paradigm of liberal internationalism and the sustainability of its promotion of democracy.²⁷ At the same time, it created a sense of chaos for regional actors including India. Now India at the same time is presented with an opportunity to be a regional security provider and also left with the unstable Afghanistan and possible extremist resurgence in Central Asia. Both of these events have a vast implication on India's national security.

Fourth, the rise of China has posed a direct threat to possible India's involvement in the security sphere in the region. In terms of trade, economics, security, diplomacy, religion and culture, China has long had a strong interest in Central Asia.²⁸ In actuality, before the old maritime route was constructed, Central Asia served as China's gateway to the rest of the world. For a very long time, the Chinese dynasties have established diplomatic missions and military outposts in the region. Therefore, it is not surprising that China continues to pay attention to the political, security and economic development of the CARs.²⁹ In Central Asia, China has typically been the economic partner while Russia has usually provided security. However, Beijing became aware of the necessity to safeguard the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) initiatives following a string of assaults on Chinese people and infrastructure in Central and South Asia. In addition to increased security dangers following the US exit from Afghanistan and Russia's attention being diverted by the conflict in Ukraine, China is making progress in Central Asia's security through both multilateral and bilateral channels.³⁰

The membership and agenda of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a multilateral Eurasian political, economic and security organization founded in 2001 by China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have grown. A reaction to the US C5+1 (the United States plus five Central Asian nations) arrangement, China likewise started the C+C5 (China plus five Central Asian countries) discussions in 2020. China has grown significantly as a bilateral supplier of military hardware and technology to Central Asia. According to reports,

China has established a paramilitary facility close to the Wakhan Corridor at the Tajik–Afghan border, and joint border patrols and anti-terror exercises have been held between China and Tajikistan.³¹ Thus, China's security posture in the region also challenges India's national security as they are in competition in every front possible in the Asia and the Pacific region.

Traditional Security Threat and India inward Engagement: Despite India's willingness and attempt to increase its security relation with Central Asian countries, India's existing challenges and the new focus areas consume ample resources. Those challenges or focus areas can be divided into four parts.

First is India's existing Pakistan issue. Two of the three major Indo–Pakistani wars – in 1947 and 1965 – as well as a smaller conflict in 1999 – were ignited by territorial disputes in the Kashmir area. Although there has been a tenuous cease-fire between the two nations since 2003, they still frequently exchange shots across the Line of Control, the disputed border. Both sides assert that they are shooting in retaliation for attacks while each side accuses the other of breaking the cease-fire. Numerous civilians were murdered and others were displaced due to an increase in border clashes that started in late 2016 and lasted into 2018.³² This was true on both sides of the Line of Control. India and Pakistan's geopolitical rivalry dates back to the subcontinent's 1947 racial division. Kashmir is a contested territory for Pakistan, although it is an essential part of India's union. According to the two-nation theory, Pakistan should have acceded to Kashmir because it had a Muslim-majority state. It states that Kashmir is part of the "unfinished agenda of partition" of the subcontinent in 1947, which was for the neighbouring Muslim-majority regions to form Pakistan. India, on the other hand, is opposed to the partition's underlying tenet – separation based on religion.³³

Majority of India's defense and security policy are the outcome of the India–Pakistan's position in the region. However, Professor Harsh Pant argues that, 'It took India about seven decades to formulate the ideal Pakistan policy. Following Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's early overtures to Pakistan, a policy mix of marginalization, mobilization and militarization arose. This combination has had impressive results.'³⁴ He argued that India's policy under Narendra Modi has finally formulated a way of dealing with Pakistan. He added that

The release of India from Pakistan's burden has been a tremendous accomplishment in recent years. It has long been believed that India cannot move forward unless it resolves the Pakistan issue, both domestically and internationally. Thus, by advising India on how to cope with a recalcitrant neighbor structurally predisposed to confronting New Delhi from its origin, tomes were produced and careers were created.³⁵

No doubt that Indian decision-makers, for decades, invested their limited diplomatic capital and scarce resources in comprehending a country whose domestic dysfunction rendered it long impervious to any imaginable remedy, instead of dealing with Pakistan with strategic acumen. But New Delhi persisted, in part because it believed it could persuade Islamabad and Rawalpindi to see reason and in part

because it was forced to believe that Pakistan was the key to its redemption by the rest of the world. It is hard to adequately deal with Pakistani malice or recognize the approaching storm brought on by China's growth during this period.³⁶

Since the 1990s India and Pakistan have switched roles in terms of feeling uneasy and exposed: like the two halves of a teeter-totter, when one is down, it worries that any concessions will tip the balance, and when it is up, it anticipates the weaker side to submit. India is currently "up," but no deal that would complete the process started by Atal Bihari Vajpayee in the 1990s is being seriously considered. It's interesting that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) seems more eager to redefine Pakistan so that India and it may coexist together. L.K. Advani and Jaswant Singh have both discussed "Jinnah's Pakistan." Professor Robert Cohen termed India–Pakistan relationship as never ending paired-minority complex.³⁷ This paired-minority problem has Kashmir as its source and its impact; it cannot be "fixed" as long as current mindsets are in place because there is no such thing as a solution. So unlike the argument made by professor Harsh Pant, India's security sphere is still heavily engaged in managing the Pakistan threat³⁸ which limits India's resources to reach Central Asia.

The second challenge is the rising tension with China in the northern region of India. In the early 1950s, India and China had "flowering ties," which were based on peaceful coexistence.³⁹ However, in the hostile environment that followed the 1962 war between the two nations, these wilted and disappeared. With Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988, which led to the formation of a Joint Working Group to reduce tension and assure peace and tranquillity on the borders, a new chapter of improved relations began. India–China ties have not only consistently been better since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, but they have also gotten stronger in a variety of areas of shared interest. As it went through many ups and downs, India–China relations saw some positivity when Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014. A rapprochement of the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, understanding of China, Modi levelled the relationship between India–China and Xi Jinping as a personal relationship. The visit of Xi-Xinping to India's Southern State in 2019 and walk on the beach suggested that the relationship between India and China is heading towards repair.⁴⁰ But right after several months of this visit, the entire northern region saw a revival of India–China dispute.

China and India disagree on the entire border. The two nations dispute the location of the border and each claims portions of the other's territory. China claims 90,000 square kilometres (sq km) of territory in north-eastern India, which roughly corresponds to the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which it refers to as "southern Tibet."⁴¹ India claims an additional 5,300 sq km in the Shaksgam Valley of Jammu and Kashmir, which Pakistan captured in 1947–1948 and ceded to China in 1963, in addition to the 38,000 sq km of Aksai Chin that it lost to China in the 1962 conflict.⁴²

The post-2020 stalemate in Ladakh along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) is unparalleled in terms of its length, the number of casualties from fighting, the gathering of troops and military equipment and the size of the area China has taken

over. The crisis started in April and May 2020 at the locations of Galwan Valley, Pangong Tso, Gogra-Hot Springs, Depsang and Demchok when tens of thousands of People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers, supported by tanks and armoured personnel carriers, crossed into the Indian side of the LAC, set up camp and prevented Indian patrolling teams from entering the region.⁴³ Even while fighting between Indian and Chinese soldiers started in early May of 2020, it wasn't until a bloody skirmish broke out in the Galwan Valley on 14–15 June that the severity of the situation became apparent.⁴⁴ Soldiers from both sides engaged in hand-to-hand fighting during the conflict in Galwan Valley, which resulted in several casualties and the first deaths along the LAC in 45 years. "A game changer in India's national security and foreign policy strategy," according to one assessment of the incident.⁴⁵

The India and China relations after 2020 can be summed up in 10 point:

- a traditional legacies;
- b territorial sovereignty;
- c Tibet's past, present and future;
- d temporary knee-jerk initiatives;
- e technology transfers to Pakistan;
- f three border skirmishes;
- g three treaties for tranquillity in border regions;
- h Taiwan syndrome about unification;
- i trade as an emerging new link; and
- j India and China's tryst-with-destiny approach towards competing for an Asian and larger leadership profile.

After the increasing border tension between India and China in 2020, in three separate locations along its border with China, India has deployed at least 50,000 extra soldiers and fighter aircraft squadrons. This is an increase of more than 40% from 2019.⁴⁶ There are now roughly 200,000 soldiers stationed near the border. India observed that the PLA shifted extra forces from Tibet to the Xinjiang Military Command, installed new airfields, bomb-proof bunkers to store fighter jets, and long-range artillery, tanks, rocket units, and twin-engine fighters.⁴⁷ This only signals that the resources of India have massively engaged within the Chinese border. The operation cost of the Indian military in the highland is more expensive than in normal circumstances.

Third, India's engagement in the Indian Ocean region also constraints India's security relations with Central Asia. The role of India in the Indian Ocean region has often been termed as 'net security provider' or 'responsible stakeholder'.⁴⁸ India's position in the region has internal and external facets. India, the nation with the world's fastest-growing economy, the most populated nation in the region, and a vital player in geopolitics, places a special emphasis on the Indian Ocean basin. There are rising expectations that India should assume its regional duties as a stabilizing power given its expanding economic and strategic significance.

The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which is becoming more prevalent, as well as the Pakistan Navy's (PN) encouragement to increase their

submarine capability, are traditional threats to Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Both of these difficulties have the potential to negatively impact India's current participation in IOR. The difficulties are made even more difficult by the US current leadership's 'America First' policy shift. The ongoing unorthodox problems like piracy, human trafficking, illegal fishing, etc. only serve to increase the concerns. India must develop a cogent IOR strategy if it wants to become a region-wide provider of net security after taking note of the threat landscape.⁴⁹

India has a coastline that is over 7,500 km long, over 1200 islands overall, and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that is around two million square kilometres.⁵⁰ Nearly 80% of India's crude oil needs are met by imports, most of which are transported by sea.⁵¹ When total oil imports by water, offshore oil production and petroleum exports are taken into consideration, the nation's overall "sea dependence" on oil is estimated to be over 93%.⁵² Currently, the Indian Ocean serves as the conduit for 68% of the value and over 95% of the volume of trade between India and the world.⁵³ Any obstruction to the flow of commercial traffic would be bad for her economic goals. Second, India is significantly dependent on the resources of the Indian Ocean.⁵⁴ Her fisheries and aquaculture industries are a significant source of export and employ more than 14 million people. India's extensive coastline exposes it to potential maritime threats from a military perspective. Terrorists who arrived by water carried out the 2008 Mumbai attack, one of the greatest terrorist strikes on India in recent memory. A safe Indian Ocean is essential to protecting India's national interests because non-traditional dangers including piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing and human trafficking also pose significant difficulties.

On the broader spectrum, the changing power contestation in the region also concerns India's overall regional position. China has established itself as a potent ally for the Indian Ocean's islands and littoral nations by expanding on its anti-piracy activities. Under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, the Maritime Silk Road has offered an additional forum for cooperation on commercial and security matters. Beijing established its first overseas military station in Djibouti, a country bordering the Indian Ocean, in 2017. The Chinese station solidifies its status as a new player in the region, whereas France, Japan and the United States already have bases in Djibouti.⁵⁵

Fourth India's energetic participation in the Indo-Pacific domain. The Indo-Pacific is becoming a new region of significance as a result of three developing geostrategic and geo-economic transformations, which are being driven by the shared interests and convergences of numerous strategic powers, each with their own set of influences and goals.⁵⁶ First, the marine and blue economy will dominate strategic rivalry over the coming decades. Second, the Indo-Pacific region encompasses a vast and diverse area that includes South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral states. Third, China's rise, its globalization, and the escalating US-China competition. As nations competed to find partners for long-term strategic and economic collaboration to move beyond unipolar or bipolar dynamics (the United States and China) of uncertainty, instability, and supply chain hazards, the rivalry reached its climax during the pandemic.⁵⁷

Although 'Indo-Pacific' itself is a very contested concept, according to India, the Indo-Pacific area encompasses everything from the eastern borders of Africa to the western coast of North America. More than 64% of the world's population lives in the huge Indo-Pacific region, which has at least 38 countries and accounts for 62% of the world's GDP with more than 50% of all trade passing through its waterways. It also occupies 44% of the world's surface area.⁵⁸ The region is very diverse, with nations at various stages of development bound together by "the ocean."⁵⁹ Besides that while India attempted to redefine its foreign policy posture from 'non-alignment' towards 'strategic autonomy,' the Indo-Pacific plays a vital role in it. India's relationship with the United States in the region not only has been seen as a team up against the increasing 'China' threat but also India's openness to choose its partner as suited to them.

The 'Indo-Pacific' strategy of India is guided by minimizing the rise of China, securing the supply chain and sustaining its 'Act East Policy.'⁶⁰ The Indo-Pacific has a security arrangement such as 'QUAD' (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue). The Indian Ocean Tsunami, one of the greatest natural disasters in history, killed more than 200,000 people in 14 different nations in 2004, which led to the creation of the Quad framework. The shocking death toll prompted several nations to band together to offer immediate humanitarian aid. In order to help the tsunami-affected nations, India, Japan, the United States and Australia created a "core group" and sent nearly 40,000 troops, humanitarian aid workers, helicopters, cargo ships and planes. The world was surprised by India's entire capabilities, displaying India's power, leadership skills and dedication to the Indo-Pacific, according to the former foreign secretary Shyam Saran.⁶¹ Later, when the United States shifted its focus to Asia, the QUAD was revived as a subsidiary grouping in the Indo-Pacific region that has a slight orientation towards the security domain.

6.2 Economic Dimension of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

After the assessment in chapter four on the economic dimension of India's economic policy towards Central Asia, it can be strongly argued that India's economic interaction with the region has increased in the last decade. While Central Asian nations have modest economies and depend heavily on foreign trade for many of their needs, India is an emerging market economy. Therefore, there is tremendous potential for trade between India and Central Asia.⁶²

6.2.1 Achievement of India's Goals in Economic Dimension in Central Asia Region

In terms of increasing economic interdependence between South and Central Asia, India for more the first decade after the end of the cold war remained vacuum. India's Connect Central Asia Policy (2012), the Ashgabat Agreement (2018), the pursuit of the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) pipeline and the operationalization of the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

are some examples of the country's actions in the region.⁶³ While discussing what India achieved in terms of economic cooperation with Central Asia, it has increased the business interaction by adding more and more goods and services. For instance, precious stones, chemicals, iron, steel, machinery, mineral oil, copper products, plastic items, wool and leather are all imported into India. India mainly exports coffee, tea, spices, clothing, drugs and electrical and mechanical machinery. If one analyses the export and the import dynamism of India and Central Asia it has some value that India mainly exports unique materials to the region. But looking at the trade there are all poor value items. There is a lot of room for expensive goods and trade expansion. Less than 1% of Central Asia's total shipments to India are accounted for by imports. Less than 1% of the overall imports into the region are from India. However, India has demonstrated that it can compete with China's BRI in South Asia,⁶⁴ making it a possible ally in Central Asia. In the areas of space, aviation, satellite technology, artificial intelligence (AI), nanotechnology, data analytics, renewable energy, water conservation, pharmaceuticals, defence manufacturing, military technology and counterterrorism, multilateral alliances with Central Asian States can be established. In order to guarantee the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour among member states, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was established in 2015. India is in line to be a member of this agreement. A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is required between India and the EEU, which has the ability to boost trade from its current level of 10 billion US dollars.⁶⁵ Similarly, during his speech to the Central Asian Business Forum in February 2020, the Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM) proposed an aviation corridor between India and the nations of Central Asia.⁶⁶ Such a passage would be extremely beneficial, particularly for "high value-low volume" goods traded between the nations.

As two significant nations in the context of corridors in Central Asia, particularly in South Asia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan stick out. In reality, the development of a new corridor along the Uzbekistan–Turkmenistan–Iran (Chabahar)–India (Mumbai) route has become one of the most hotly debated topics in recent times. The officials from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan met on 20 September 2022, to discuss this.⁶⁷ The line's main goal is to ensure the uninterrupted flow of the 3.2 billion dollars in commerce between India and Central Asia. This number is anticipated to increase significantly as a consequence of the corridor. The objective is for trade between India and Uzbekistan to reach \$1 billion as quickly as possible.⁶⁸

Despite the halt on the long going TAPI project, considerable progress has been made in the cooperation on energy between India and Kazakhstan. An agreement was reached in January 2009 between KazMunaiGaz [KMG] and India's ONGC Mittal Energy Limited [OMEL] to investigate the Satpayev oil block in the Caspian Sea. On 7 July 2015, drilling operations got underway. In addition, uranium supply to India is governed by a civil nuclear cooperation agreement between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited and the National Company KazAtomProm.⁶⁹ Likewise, India has signed various agreements directly related to energy, which are in phases of implementation. In January 2022, the inaugural India–Central Asia

Summit featured a Round-Table discussion on Energy and Connectivity, which reflected India's primary interests in the region, in addition to security.⁷⁰

While comparing India's position with China, companies like Dong Ying Heli Investment and Development, Huawei, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the China General Nuclear Power Group have begun operating in the CARs since 2001 with assistance from the government. They have developed into strong rivals to American and Russian businesses over time. According to some media accounts, Chinese-made products are overrunning the markets in Central Asia.⁷¹ China is now Tajikistan's third-biggest trading partner, the second-largest trading partner of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and the largest trading partner of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This has given Beijing significant economic power over time, which it has used to advance its strategic interests in commodities, energy and advancing infrastructure projects like "One Belt One Road." For instance, after initially agreeing to sell, Kazakhstan had in 2013 prevented India's OVL from acquiring a stake in the Kashagan oilfield, mainly because Delhi took so long to actually complete the purchase. The CNPC ultimately purchased the stake.⁷² So, in terms of balancing China economically, India is in need to work in a more smooth and organized manner.

6.2.2 *Limitations on Achieving India's Economic Goals in Central Asia Region*

The book has identified two major challenges to India's economic approach towards Central Asia.

Issue of Connectivity: Due to a lack of direct connectivity, India and the Central Asian nations were unable to infuse their relations, especially in the economic sphere, while sharing comparable security concerns stemming from Afghanistan and sharing deep cultural links as a result of geographic proximity. In order to connect with Central Asia, India unveiled its Connect Central Asia strategy in 2012 at Bishkek. This policy aims to adopt different forms of connectivity such as physical, air, person-to-person and digital to overcome the existing issues. However, the challenge stands firm. India's challenges can be divided into three parts.

First the Pakistan challenges. The Pakistan challenge not only has an implication on India's security dogma but also has a vast implication on economic interaction with Central Asia. The fact that India does not physically border any of the Central Asian nations is another important factor in the lacklustre state of bilateral relations. This is a major roadblock to developing and promoting economic, commercial, energy, tourism and other linkages with them. Since Pakistan forbids the passage of persons, products, or cargo across its territory to Afghanistan, let alone to Central Asia beyond it, there is no direct route from India to these nations. As a result, China has served as the intermediary for trade with Central Asia. This takes a lot of time and money. An alternative is to ship the goods by water to Northern Europe, where it is then delivered by road and train to neighbouring nations like Russia.⁷³ Thus, to revive the pre-independence physical connection between India and Central Asia, India has to resolve its bilateral tension with Pakistan and it

seems unlikely. Thus, India's alternative to reaching Central Asia relies on other external factors such as the stability of Afghanistan.⁷⁴

Thus, the second challenge India has to reach Central Asia is the instability of Afghanistan. India views Afghanistan as a prospective entry point for a regional trade and transportation hub as well as a potential route to Central Asia. India has worked towards achieving this goal. But before Afghanistan can be a practical transit route to Central Asia, there are a number of challenges that must be cleared, just as there are restrictions on India's interaction with the CARs in that country. Before the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in 2021, India had taken steps to build infrastructure there that may serve as a "bridge" to Central Asia. India has been a strong proponent of the "New Silk Road Initiative,"⁷⁵ seeing it as a "building brick" of its vision for Afghanistan as a hub connecting Central and South Asia through pipelines, trade and transit routes for the welfare of people in our area and around the world. According to India, this might persuade the surrounding nations to see Afghanistan as a potential source of cooperation rather than competition.⁷⁶ The project and India's plan to overrule Pakistan remained logical until Taliban took over Afghanistan. India and the Taliban have a bitter relationship.

In the years following 9/11, India became the biggest regional aid donor to Afghanistan. Up till the end of 2021, India had invested close to \$3 billion in a number of Afghan development and rehabilitation projects. In an effort to establish itself in the "new" Afghanistan, New Delhi avoided becoming engaged in military affairs and instead focused on winning hearts and minds. Both the Karzai-led and the Ashraf Ghani-led civilian governments in Afghanistan enjoyed cordial diplomatic relations with India. India established for itself a special position in terms of being viewed by common Afghans as a friendly neighbour dedicated to Afghanistan's peace and prosperity as a result of its civilian-centric policies.⁷⁷ Invariably, India faced its 1996 Afghan moment again as the Afghan state began to fall apart as a result of the Taliban's nationwide conquering campaign that was initiated in May–July 2021. This was because India had not engaged with the Taliban throughout the previous ten years. India had to close its consulates throughout the nation as well as its embassy in Kabul due to the Taliban's rise to power.⁷⁸

Due to Pakistan's consistent obstruction in the strategic, economic and cultural interests of India and the Central Asia by preventing any connectivity across its borders,⁷⁹ New Delhi has looked into further avenues to develop connectivity with Central Asia. The Chabahar port in the province of Sistan-Baluchistan will be developed thanks to a memorandum of understanding that New Delhi and Tehran signed in 2015. In 2018, the port started to function in part. Notably, India obtained a special dispensation from the United States to continue development on the Chabahar port project amid rising tensions between Iran and the West. Budgetary allocations increased from INR 450 million in 2019–2020 to INR 1,000 million in 2020–2021.⁸⁰

However, the Chabahar port and its functionality remained as third challenges that India had in the region. The Chabahar port project, which India and the CARs see as a game changer for physical connectivity, includes Afghanistan in a significant way. The 218-km Zaranj-Delaram Highway, which connects Afghanistan

to the Chabahar port via Milak in Iran, has received a \$150 million investment from New Delhi. The Zaranj-Delaram important route connects 16 provinces, including Herat, Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Ghazni and Kandahar, to Tajikistan along 2,000 kilometres of the Afghanistan Ring Road. A 650-km railway proposal linking the Afghan cities of Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif, which are about 80 km from the Uzbek border, was proposed by Uzbekistan in 2018. About \$500 million has already been committed in the project by Tashkent, which has repeatedly urged India to get involved.⁸¹ The 628-kilometer Chabahar–Zahedan rail line near the Iran–Afghanistan border was the intended connection point for the railway line. India and Iran were supposed to work together to build the Chabahar–Zahedan railway track, but Tehran claimed that New Delhi was holding up finance. Iran then started laying the tracks independently, with 70% of the railway's baseline already constructed (as of March 2022) and a predicted completion date of 2024 at an estimated cost of US\$463 million.⁸²

A trilateral working group on the combined use of the Chabahar port and other connectivity projects was also established in 2020 by India, Iran and Uzbekistan. The Shahid Behesti Terminal at the Chabahar port was highlighted during the second trilateral working group conference in December 2021, and the continued construction of a transportation corridor connecting South Asia and Central Asia was considered.⁸³

But the good functionality with Chabahar port has subsidiary conditions. First, the stability of Afghanistan, which has been discussed above already, and second the increasing Chinese involvement in Iran. The March 27, 2021, signing of a 25-year economic cooperation agreement between China and Iran alters the Middle East and Persian Gulf's geopolitical landscape. The deal is known as the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and covers a wide range of economic activities, including mining, promoting industrial activity in Iran, collaborating on agriculture and transportation. The agreement is anticipated to open the door for the expansion of tourism and cross-border cultural interactions between the two states.⁸⁴ China supposedly wants to spend 400 billion in Iran in every sector that includes port development, highways and railways. Considering the money that China has in its disposal, India's engagement in Iran is likely to get shadowed by it.

Competition with China: Due to the rise of both China and India at the same period of time, the competition between these has spillover impacts on every region and in every sector. Within the economic sphere China's challenges can be seen in two dynamics.

First, China's geo-economics. The use of "economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to achieve favourable geopolitical effects" as well as other variables point to a shift towards a new geo-economics world order.⁸⁵ There has been a lot written on China's use of the Belt and Road Initiative as a tool for economic policy with clear strategic implications and probably intentionality in this context.

China approaches national security with a broad perspective. China defined national security as "the relative absence of external or internal threats to the state's power to govern, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity, the welfare of

the people, sustainable economic and social development, and other major national interests, and the ability to ensure a continued state of security” in Article 2 of its National Security Law from 2015.⁸⁶ In order to be comprehensive (Article 3), this definition includes “political security” and “economic security.” The importance of political, economic, territorial, social and cyber security is emphasized in China’s entire national security outlook, as President Xi Jinping has made clear. China has made several efforts to develop into a more technologically advanced and economically sustainable nation as a fundamental component of its economic and national security policy.⁸⁷ One of those is massive investment in Central Asia.

The early 2000s saw the beginning of China’s foreign trade and collaboration with its neighbours as a means of strengthening political engagement. This is evident in the way that international trade, investments and infrastructure projects serve geo-economics objectives. Securing access to energy resources, boosting trans-regional border routes and border trade, expanding the market for Chinese infrastructure enterprises and preserving national security were the tasks at hand.⁸⁸

Experts are concerned about China’s massive loan initiatives in Central Asia. The loans are typically related to infrastructure projects outlined in bilateral agreements, with the hiring of Chinese firms in the projects frequently serving as one of the prerequisites.⁸⁹ The majority of loans in Central Asia are used for the development of highways, power plants and improved energy transmission lines. China employs similar methods in other areas, such as Southeast Asia.⁹⁰ It is frequently asserted that China, unlike OECD nations and Western-led institutions like the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), does not place conditions on its loans and help.⁹¹ But evidence has emerged that this is a false and oversimplified perspective. For instance, Chinese conditions have frequently been included in project funding agreements in exchange for mining permits, rights to extract natural resources, or permission to export natural gas.⁹²

The most significant political requirement that China places on loans and investments is unquestionably recognition of China’s territorial integrity, and this requirement is reflected in all cooperative accords. States in Central Asia implicitly reject separatist movements in China’s Xinjiang province because they strongly support the concepts of sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁹³ What’s more, the loans given to Central Asian countries run the risk of becoming dependent on China for debt. For instance, Chinese institutions owe around 40% and 50% of the public debts of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, respectively.⁹⁴ The geo-economics of China in the region have secured China’s territorial integrity and increased the dependency of Central Asia on China. As a result, China not only gained political influence but also control most of the strategic businesses and the resources such as oil field, gas field and mining rights.

Second are the challenges to state capacity and the strategic investment that China has in Central Asia. In comparison with India’s multi-level bureaucratic process and limitations of fund allocation and foreign engagement, China’s nature of governance allows them to dispatch the state capacity in one go. For instance, the Iranian government has chosen to carry out the construction independently, blaming delays from the Indian side in funding and starting the project, four years

after India and Iran signed an agreement to build a rail line from Chabahar port to Zahedan, along the border with Afghanistan.⁹⁵ With the exception of a small number of nations that continue to recognize Taiwan diplomatically, China in the past one decade has established solid bilateral connections with the majority of countries in the globe. Chinese diplomats have been quite active internationally, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) saw a budget increase of 15% in 2018 to support the expansion of Chinese soft power and diplomacy globally. The MFA budget increased from 30 billion RMB in 2011 to 60 billion RMB (\$9.5 billion) over the course of President Xi's six-year tenure.⁹⁶ On the other hand, India's diplomatic budget remains under scrutiny as it has redirected the resources to defense modernization. Thus, the nature of government and the limitation of funding are visible in India's approach to Central Asia.

6.3 Socio-Cultural Dynamics of India's Foreign Policy towards Central Asia Region

India's foreign policy towards Central Asia has a big space for socio-cultural dynamics. India was one of the influential external powers in Central Asia during Soviet Union time, in terms of soft power. After the end of the Cold War India continued to anchor its overall policy towards Central Asia via soft power perspective. This section sums up the achievements and the challenges that India has in the region in the socio-cultural sphere.

6.3.1 *Achievement of India's Goals in Socio-Cultural Dimension in Central Asia Region*

Based on the assessment, India's achievements in the region can be divided into three broader categories. First, increasing soft power foothold in the region. According to a 2020 Pew Research Center poll, 70% of Central Asians had a favourable view of India. This was the highest rate of any major power.⁹⁷ Central Asian countries value India's pledge to refrain from meddling in their domestic matters and its support for their sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also appreciate India's contribution to regional peace and security. Similarly, India is mentioned as a promoter of peace and the development partner in many speeches of the leader of Central Asia in current politics. Likewise, India have increased its physical presence in the region. For instance, during the first decade of the 21st century, India created 'Indian Cultural Centers' in Central Asia, which was eventually renamed the 'Lal Bahadur Shastri Centre for Indian Culture.'⁹⁸ Yoga classes are held on a regular basis at the facility. Yoga is a more popular activity among Central Asians. Along with yoga, these institutions offer regular language classes and lessons on Indian musical instruments.

Second, image as a neutral external power in the region. As extensively explained in the various occasions in previous chapters that there is a great power competition in Central Asia. Due to its geographic and strategic salient, Central Asia has attracted great power throughout its history. The rise of China and other

regional powers have made the environment of the region more complicated. The announcement of BRI has increased the intensity of the great power politics. The BRI is a gigantic infrastructure umbrella that covers much of the world and includes projects in Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, which is the most visible example of these measures.⁹⁹ In this scenario, while all the great powers have an extensive interest to increase the sphere of influence in the region, India remains as an external power which has a less selfish approach towards the region. One can argue that due to not having enough materialistic capabilities and the connectivity, India cannot be an assertive power in the region even if they want to. However, in terms of India's soft power context in the region, it has features such as education cooperation and technical support with no strings attached which presents them as a neutral power.¹⁰⁰

Third, alternative to the Chinese as a power in the region. In Central Asia, India is increasingly considered as a credible option to China. Central Asian countries are seeking to diversify their economic partners in order to lessen their dependence on China. India provides several benefits, including a rising economy with a big consumer market; a diverse industrial base; a commitment to non-interference in internal matters; and a good track record of development cooperation. India is also substantially investing in Central Asian infrastructure and connectivity projects. This includes Iran's Chabahar Port, which connects Central Asian countries to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.¹⁰¹

6.3.2 *India's Challenges in Central Asia Region in Socio-Cultural Realm*

General Challenges of Indian Soft Power: The Chapter 5 of the book also presents the soft power instruments of India. This section hopes to analyse the challenges that India's soft power has. While doing so, the section sees it through three dimensions.

First, the problem with the ownership of yoga. Although yoga was a part of India's larger foreign policy after independence, PM Modi was the one in 2014 who instrumentalized yoga as the integral part of Indian foreign policy. Since 2014, yoga has played a significant role in India's soft power diplomacy.¹⁰² Despite having its roots in ancient India, yoga has recently gained popularity in Western nations as a secularized health and wellbeing practice. In light of this, India has since 2015 used the International Day of Yoga to promote yoga as a cultural resource that India can share with the rest of the world. However, the use of yoga as a representation of India's tranquil and harmonious nature has come under fire. Critics believe that yoga is a type of propaganda used to support and celebrate the increasing home climate of Hindu nationalism under Modi because of its ancient connections to religions like Hinduism.

Yoga was initiated by India but now it has become a global phenomenon.¹⁰³ International Yoga Day was declared by the UN on 11 December 2014. The resolution has 177 countries in total as cosponsors, which is the most ever for a resolution of this kind approved by the UNGA.¹⁰⁴ Since then, each yoga day has seen incredible yoga demonstrations that continually break world records. Yoga is, in

a sense, a powerful force that unites people from different cultures and religions since it draws individuals from all over the world during the day. Yoga may be the only cultural movement that is currently slowly taking on a secular character. Since that year, the day has featured timely themes including yoga and diabetes, yoga and sustainability, yoga for the heart, etc. With a CAGR of 9.6% from 2021 to 2027, the Yoga market is anticipated to grow from \$37,462.5 million in 2019 to \$66,226.4 million by 2027. The Asia-Pacific region is anticipated to grow at the quickest CAGR over the course of the forecast period, despite North America having the greatest share of the global yoga market.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, Modi came up with the idea to appoint 'yoga masters' in diplomatic missions. The appointed yoga instructors in Indian embassies abroad also have been tasked with the responsibility for leading workshops on the history, philosophies and traditions of Indian art and culture. They will also need to impart knowledge in related subjects, such as naturopathy, panic healing and Reiki, among others.¹⁰⁶ But within two years these people's tenure were completed and the initiation stopped.

Second, the Bollywood factor of Indian soft power is losing its value in Central Asia. The popularity of Bollywood in the region was the outcome of two factors. On one hand, Soviet socialism was a major influence on Indian intellectual thought in the 1940s, and this permeated into its literature and movies. Leftists like Balraj Sahni, Kaifi Azmi, Sardar Jafri, and of course Abbas were drawn to the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), and they heavily drew on traditional Soviet literature and ideals. An adaptation of Maxim Gorky's *Lower Depths* by Abbas, Neecha Nagar (1946), was helmed by Chetan Anand. Additionally, he directed *Afsar* for his own firm, Navketan; the film, an Indianized adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *Inspector General*, was a colossal failure that nearly brought the business to ruin. The influence of Soviet literature was hardly universal.¹⁰⁷ *Changez Khan* (1957), a more commercial endeavour, starred Prem Nath as the legendary warrior Genghis Khan. Here, dancing girls try to demonstrate the goods they have brought while singing about the pleasures of fabled Samarkand, Yarkand and Tashkent for the amusement of a pouting Tatar princess named Azra (Bina Rai). The director's ideas portrayed that region with valiant warriors, opulent palaces and gardens teeming with chirping bulbuls, much to how innumerable "Arab" films were structured.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, due to its no connection with the western world, Bollywood was mainly popular in the region during soviet time. In the 1950s, Bollywood movies became accessible throughout the Soviet Union as an alternative to western cinema. Bollywood films started to be either dubbed for a Soviet audience or subtitled shortly after India's independence in 1947, when, after much consideration, the then-Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru opted to align with the USSR. These films ran to full houses for weeks at best, or to pretty full houses at their worst, as sheer escapism, a function that commercial movies continue to resolutely perform. The Russian cinema market was believed to benefit from Indian films, usually in Hindi, as they were considered as a hedge against Hollywood productions.¹⁰⁹ But after the end of the Cold War, Hollywood and the overall American pop culture gained momentum in the region.

Thirdly, India also has economic constraints in its engagement with the region from the socio-political dynamics. The study has already discussed how the resources have been consumed by the security and economy sphere which is proximate to Indian territory. Anti-intellectualism and sectarianism are distinct features of the Indian republic that put the democratic character of the nation in peril. Even worse, the dominant mindset gives these patterns prominence. Government support for yoga and Ayurveda is not intended to capitalize on India's cultural treasure; rather, it is part of an effort to project Hinduism into history and portray ancient India as the cradle of modern science and technology.¹¹⁰ The next section talks about how India's changing attitude towards the Muslims have the implication on India's soft power approach towards Central Asia.

Rise of Hindu Nationalism and the contradiction of Hindu vs Muslim: In the socio-political section of the book the role of Muslim in Indian socio-politics has been extensively discussed. But the changing internal political scenario of India is polarizing and that implicates India's approach to Central Asia. The ruling party of India since 2014 has an association with some of the radical Hindu nationalist organizations who have an antagonism against the Muslims in India. One of those organizations is Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization that was established in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar. The RSS had about 57,000 branches, or sakhas, and nearly 585,000 members as of the year 2020. These branches included the economic wing, Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the women's wing, Rashtriya Sevika Samiti, and the trade union wing, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (Swadeshi Jagaran Manch).¹¹¹ According to The Print, an Indian news organization, three out of every four ministers in the BJP, which is in power, are RSS members, including the current prime minister, Narendra Modi.¹¹²

The Sangh is accused of encouraging violence against India's Dalit-Bahujan minority,¹¹³ including hate crimes against Muslims,¹¹⁴ lynchings¹¹⁵ of Dalits, and pogroms against religious minorities. In recent years, the RSS has been at the forefront of pushing Hindu nationalists in India.¹¹⁶ The RSS had pushed for the Babri Masjid's demolition in Ayodhya in 1992,¹¹⁷ claiming the Mughal-era building had been erected over the birthplace of the Hindu god Ram. Mohan Bhagwat underlined the Sangh's dedication to the Masjid-Mandir¹¹⁸ (mosque-temple) issue during an RSS education camp after the BJP's resounding political victory in May 2019, declaring, "Ram's mission will be done."¹¹⁹ Three RSS leaders were charged with "committing a deliberate and malicious act intended to outrage religious feelings and uttering words with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of a person" in Karnataka, India, in December 2019, following the Supreme Court of India's decision in favour of the demolition in November 2019. This was due to their role-playing the mosque's demolition.¹²⁰

The RSS launched a new project in April 2019 to introduce the "real nationalist narrative" to Indian universities, according to The Caravan.¹²¹ Since the BJP took office in 2014, well-known historians like Romila Thapar have argued that the Sangh is "attempting to foreground revisionist histories with a glorified view of a Hindu past" by revising textbooks, establishing "RSS-model schools," and pressuring streaming

services to remove “anti-nationalist” material. The RSS’s historical research wing leader, Balmukund Pandey, has stated publicly that “the moment is now to restore India’s past greatness by showing that ancient Hindu writings are fact, not myth.”¹²² The RSS has a long history of affiliations with white nationalist groups in North America and Europe.¹²³ The websites of the BJP, the RSS, the National Volunteers’ Organization, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad were listed as resources by the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik in 2011. He praised India’s Hindu nationalist movement as a “key ally in a global struggle to bring down democratic regimes across the world.”¹²⁴

The RSS of today strives to separate itself from its past. Arundhati Roy, however, claims that “its underlying ideology, in which Muslims are represented as dangerous permanent ‘outsiders,’ is a regular repetition in the public statements of BJP officials, and finds utterance in scary slogans yelled by raging mobs. For instance, “Mussalman ka ek hi sthan – Kabristan ya Pakistan” (The graveyard or Pakistan is the only place for the Muslim). The chief leader of the RSS, Mohan Bhagwat, declared that India is a Hindu Rashtra – a Hindu country – in October of this year. “This is not up for discussion.”¹²⁵

The association of the BJP with these radical organizations have some spillover impact on India’s foreign policy conduct. The RSS is where Modi and many of his party members are affiliated (RSS). The majority of the cabinet members’ deep ideological commitments should have been expected to influence India’s foreign policy. However, this has not happened frequently, and India’s foreign policy has remained largely consistent and has gradually changed. Through the administrations of numerous ruling coalitions, the ship’s course was maintained, and Modi did not deviate from it either.

For instance, in the second part of its term (2016–2019), Modi’s cabinet has shown itself to be more daring in its dealings with Pakistan than the two prior Congress-led administrations (from 2004 to 2014). One may suppose that a key component of this view was Hindu nationalism, whose proponents have always demanded that New Delhi deal with Pakistan by taking drastic steps. And yet, during the start of his administration, Modi was also considerably more tolerant of Islamabad (2014–2015).¹²⁶ The BJP also failed to keep its pledge to make it easier for Kashmiri Pandits – a group of Hindu priests who were forced to leave the Kashmir valley because they were being persecuted by extreme Muslims – to return. This action will strongly signal Islamabad and precisely align with the objectives of Hindu nationalism.

Hindu nationalism was most pronounced in the government of Modi’s government’s refugee policy, which openly declared that it is unwilling to accept Muslim refugees or to grant citizenship to Muslims of foreign origins. According to the BJP’s 2014 election platform, “India should remain a natural home for persecuted Hindus and they shall be welcome to seek asylum here” under its control.¹²⁷

The crisis with the Gulf states in 2021 is one of the impacts of Hindu Nationalism in India’s foreign policy. The controversy started when Nupur Sharma, the BJP’s national spokeswoman, insulted Muhammad during a debate that was broadcast on television.¹²⁸ Then Naveen Jindal, a different BJP leader, came to Twitter

to support her remarks and add insults. A number of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations were incensed and filed strong concerns with the Indian government for failing to address the disrespectful actions of important officials. During Vice President Venkaiah Naidu's trade mission to Qatar, Qatar took a harsh stance and requested an apology from the Indian government. The Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi, stated that "these offensive words will lead to instigation of religious hate, and anger of more than two billion Muslims worldwide."¹²⁹ Thus, India's intention to bridge Central Asia using Buddhism and Islam, under the leadership of Narendra Modi came into scrutiny.

From Chapters 2 to 5, the book has mainly done two things. First, it has identified the internal and external determinants of India's security, economic and socio-cultural policy towards Central Asia and has explained the dynamics of those determinants. Second, it has made an assessment of how India is engaging based on its goals and assumptions regarding the Central Asian region. Nevertheless, due to the dynamics of 'new great game,' Central Asia is on the verge of experiencing significant and deep strategic changes. These upcoming changes result from the following external factors: the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, well-known overlapping and concurrent regional and global transformative processes like the rise of China and India, decline of Europe, centrality of energy and rivalries for access to it, Islamic self-assertion that manifests in multiple national or religious and frequently violent forms, most notably in Afghanistan, Indo-Pakistan rivalry, Russia's unenviable position in the Middle East and the rise of China and India.¹³⁰ Having said that, this chapter aims to make an assessment of India's position in Central Asia. To assess India's role in the regional order, the chapter has been divided into three parts; security, economic and socio-cultural.

6.4 Perception of India in Central Asia Region

Surveys and public opinion polls indicate that Central Asians' perceptions of India are usually favourable. According to a Pew Research Center survey from 2019, 52% of Kazakhs, 51% of Kyrgyz, 47% of Tajiks, and 45% of Uzbeks indicated they had a positive opinion of India.¹³¹ Similarly, India was listed as one of the top five Central Asian countries with the best perceptions in a 2021 World Economic Forum study.

At the first India-Central Asia summit in 2022, the president of Kazakhstan stressed that

It is symbolic that this summit is held in the year of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Central Asia and India. Over these years we have established a constructive political dialogue, we are constantly expanding multifaceted economic and humanitarian ties. Our vast Asian region has enormous resources and huge intellectual potential. Important transport corridors and fast-growing markets are concentrated here. The role of Asia in the world economy has increased significantly, it is becoming a new global center of attraction of investments and capital.¹³²

There is general consensus among Central Asian states about the strategic value of India. Especially after the complexity of the new great game has increased, India has been treated as a neutral partner by the Central Asia states. India is generally regarded as a neutral, non-threatening force in the region. This view is supported by India's historical non-alignment, its dedication to multilateralism, and its emphasis on collaboration and economic growth. The main reason behind such perception is that India does not share the border with the region which automatically discards the expansionist factor from the relations. On top of that, India became the likable partner because of three main reasons;

- a Image of non-alignment;
- b Commitment to multilateralism;
- c Focus on economic development and cooperation.

The non-alignment movement was initiated by newly independent states to stay away from the bloc politics that started after the second world war. Among others, India is one of the front runners of the non-alignment movement. After the Cold War, the strategic culture of being non-aligned with the great power politics continued in India's foreign policy conduct. Due to this region, India has been treated as the partner rather than a geopolitical actor. This is the matter of goodwill.

Although the previous ideology has not completely vanished. In a white paper dubbed "Nonalignment 2.0," published ten years ago, a few of India's preeminent policy intellectuals made the outlandish prediction that the country's achievement as a thriving, multiethnic democracy would "define future possibilities for human kind."¹³³ The birthplace of non-alignment theory is still India, albeit without the lofty goals that went along with its multiethnic democracy. The India Way, written by India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar in 2020, presented a frank and realistic argument that, in a world where "everyone is against everyone," India must look out for its own interests by "leveraging" other big powers' competition to get the greatest possible benefit.¹³⁴

Second, India's commitment to multilateralism is also an appealing factor to CARs. During the Cold War, India's Foreign Policy displayed a clear preference for bilateral rather than multilateral measures.¹³⁵ But after the Cold War India became one of the front runners of multilateralism. India has been a steadfast supporter of the UN and its many agencies and has been instrumental in the creation of international law and standards.¹³⁶ India has always pushed for a multipolar global order and is a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).¹³⁷ India has demonstrated its dedication to multilateralism in recent times by actively participating in several significant international forums, such as the IMF, the BRICS group and the G20. India has also been a vocal opponent of climate change and was instrumental in the creation of the Paris Agreement.¹³⁸

NAM's continued relevance was called into question after bipolar politics ended. India was compelled to look for new allies in international affairs. With the exception of a brief period of mingling with China and Russia in the late 1990s, New Delhi leaned heavily in the direction of the United States. Economic expansion

made a web of multilateral networks necessary as it spread throughout the world. India, unable to advance its multilateralist model at this time, adopted a policy of allying with other states, as evidenced by its participation in the SCO, the G20 (Group of 20 nations), the QUAD and Brazil. It openly welcomed a wide range of organizations.¹³⁹ It has become a member of four significant organizations in the past 20 years: two non-Western (the BRICS and the SCO) and two Western-led (the G20 and the QUAD). India's standing may have improved as a result of their participation, but they also highlight multilateral conflicts in its foreign policy.

And third, India's approach to international relations has put more focus on development partnership and economic cooperation. At the India–Central Asia Dialogue meeting, held electronically with the participation of Afghanistan, India announced an additional \$ 1 billion Line of Credit for Central Asian countries in 2020 to expand connectivity and energy partnerships, among other sectors.¹⁴⁰ While the geo-economics have occupied the strategic posture of China where 'debt trap'¹⁴¹ and the instrumentalization of the credit or aid¹⁴² are general terminology used to describe China in Central Asia, India has a positive image. The Indian assistance is always nonreciprocal and comes with no strings attached.¹⁴³ So, when there is a partner in Central Asia such as China with the controversial approach, India has goodwill as a responsible development partner.

Notes

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Conclusion

Summary of the Research Results

First, there is an extensive economic integration between India and Central Asia. The trade relations between India and Central Asia have expanded from merely 10 million dollars annually in 1991 to 3 billion dollars annually in 2020. The economic interaction with the region has emerged based on India's economic growth in general. India now is the fifth largest economy with \$3.5 trillion GDP. This signals that India's economic disposal to support its region as a regional leader has also increased with its economic capabilities. Similarly, India's defence capabilities are by far superior in the region. India's defence expenditure has plummeted massively in the last few years. Similarly, India's investment in Central Asia has evolved from a consumer goods supplier to a strategic investor in the energy and IT sectors.

Second, interconnected between India's global power aspiration and regional approach. It has been identified that India's global power aspiration and the regional approach to its neighbourhood are going hand in hand. Especially after the second decade of the 21st century, when India's economy and defence saw a stiff upward trend, India's great power aspiration started to get traction. This is the time when India started to reach Central Asia in a more assertive way. The 2012s connect central Asia policy, rapprochement to Chabahar port and the post-2015 energetic engagement with the region is the testament of India's changing global and regional approach.

Third, the book has confirmed that there is a correlation between India's internal development and the need for market and energy resources. India is a populous country with a high energy consumption rate in terms of global consumption. Energy usage and economic growth have a direct relationship. When any study attempts to link energy consumption to economic growth, it addresses the question of whether economic expansion causes energy consumption or the causality runs the other way. Four fuels meet more than 80% of India's energy needs: coal, gas, oil and solid biomass. Coal has fuelled the growth of electricity generation and industry, and it remains the most important single fuel in the energy mix.

In 2019, the region's total proven reserves were 31.4 billion barrels of oil and 825.8 trillion cubic feet of gas. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have somewhat more than 95% of the region's oil reserves and 83% of its gas reserves, respectively. In addition to security, the first India-Central Asia Summit in January 2022 included

a Round-Table on Energy and Connectivity, highlighting India's main goals in the region. ONGC Mittal Energy Limited [OMEL] of India and KazMunaiGaz [KMG] of Kazakhstan have inked an agreement to explore the Satpayev oil block in the Caspian Sea. On 7 July 2015, drilling operations commenced.

Fourth, increasing competition with China. China's economic, political and military efforts in India's neighborhood and among Indian Ocean Island states have raised concerns in New Delhi about Beijing's expanding regional influence. Along with South Asia, China has exponentially grown in Central Asia as well. This book has confirmed that India is in head-to-head competition with China in Central Asia in economic, security and socio-economic spheres. Additionally, China and India are effectively competing to determine the Global South's consensus agenda. The G20 summit in Delhi and the third Belt and Road Forum in China in 2023 is an example of both of them trying to appeal to developing countries from the Global South. Thus, India's policy evolution towards Central Asia is also an outcome of confrontation between India and China in the regional sphere.

Having said that the hypothesis is confirmed positive, however, if there is a unit-level assessment of India's foreign policy goals and achievement, there is an ambivalence result. The economic approach to Central Asia is strong among other instruments such as security and socio-cultural aspects. Due to the amalgamation between India's economic growth and the market and investment opportunities that Central Asia offers, India's economic ties with Central Asia saw an exponential growth. Despite the challenges such as not having direct connectivity, India has found alternative mechanisms like air corridor, and land corridor via Iran to Central Asia.

When particularly observing India's security cooperation with the region, it is one of the weakest points. After the assessment, the book has confirmed that this is due to two major factors. First, India's security concern does not have an appealing factor like the other major powers such as Russia and China. Russia and China share a direct border with Central Asia. As a result, India's security concerns in the region are more preventive in terms of minimizing the threat of extremism and establishing a strategic depth. Second, the existing security order of Central Asia does not have a space for India. Russia has a strong security order in the region due to its soviet past and the strong security interest in the region. Similarly, China has direct security concerns in the region because of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Nonetheless, India's security interaction with the region has grown in comparison with 1991.

The book has confirmed that India's socio-cultural approach towards Central Asia has a positive perception, however, it has met with the stalemate situation. There is no room for improvement, either there is any creative approach. And the existing tools that India have are getting stuck rather than progressing. As book makes an assessment that the existing socio-cultural tools such as yoga and Bollywood are losing their appeal. As this book has identified that the appeal of Bollywood is losing its charm. Bollywood was highly popular during the Cold War due to the Soviet's strategy to promote Bollywood to counter the possible Western cultural influx in the region. So, the disintegration of the Soviet Union

exposed Central Asia with other pop cultures which automatically reduced the popularity of Bollywood. Similarly, the Yoga, lately, has become a global phenomenon. The political economy of yoga has shifted from India to Western world as well as the ownership of yoga as an Indian soft power instrument also has a decreasing relevancy.

But on the other hand, India's education and training programme is highly popular among Central Asian government officials and civilians. India have introduced more than 40 full-time and short-term courses in which Central Asian youth can participate in. The programmes are fully funded and becoming more popular among Central Asia youth. Likewise, the short-term programmes are designed for civil servants and security forces such as English language courses and IT engineering.

Overall, India's image among Central Asian academic and strategic circles is positive. The assessment made in the sixth chapter is confirmed through the author's study visit to Kazakhstan in 2022. The study visit confirmed two things regarding India's interest and the approach towards Central Asia.

First, all the scholars mentioned and stressed about India's socio-cultural interest in the region. Due to its historical connection, whether Muslim or Buddhist interaction, India considered Central Asia an integral part of their historical development. Second, India is guided by increasing its presence in the region. Take it economic, socio-cultural or security, India is guided by increasing its presence in the region. And, third, all the scholars agreed that being one of the emerging economies, India's energy demands are growing and Central Asia can be a potential partner for India. Having said that, all of the scholars pointed out the constraints that India has regarding not having a proper connectivity.

Similarly, while discussing the expectation of Central Asia towards India, first and foremost all the scholars mentioned India's positive perception of Central Asia in general. Central Asia has basically two expectations from India. First, more proactive engagement. Although all have agreed that India's engagement with the region has heightened and we can see it in most of the cooperation sectors, Central Asia wants more intense cooperation with India. Scholars believe that India has a lot to offer, especially in Information Technology (IT) sectors and pharmaceuticals. Secondly, the Central Asian mind-set aims to use India as a counterweight to growing Chinese influence in the region. Most of the scholars compare and contrast the interest and the position of both India and China. And they agreed that they face a huge threat from the growing assertiveness of China in the region. On the other hand, due to not having direct connectivity, Central Asia is assured of India's movement in the region. Thus, for the region the more intense Indian engagement the better.

The conformations above were based on the pattern the book have found in India's policy evolution towards Central Asia. The neoclassical realism worked as a tool to identify why India's approach towards the region has changed during the course of time. As along with India's approach to the international system, there were various internal aspects which played a role in India's such behaviours. The evolution of India's policy towards Central Asia can be broadly categorized into three phases.

In the first phase, India was incepting the region between 1991 and 1998. During the first decade after the end of the Cold War, India and Central Asia established formal diplomatic relations, and there were many bilateral visits during that time. Additionally, all the meeting, speech and the formal communique suggest that the time was spent to identify the area of cooperation. From 1991 to 1993 India established diplomatic relations with the region. And from 1993 to 1998 there were many visits of the decision-making government officials from both sides. The list includes Indian Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh and External Affairs Minister I. K. Gujral. And all of the Central Asia presidents visited India between 1992 and 1996. This is also a phase where India articulated its Look North Policy.

The second phase was when India started to include Central Asia as their 'extended neighbourhood' circle. The region in Indian policy making started to be treated as a strategic region from the 21st century. Due to the increasing relevance of the region in India's security and economic sphere, the second phase saw many agreements signed in the area of defence cooperation and the economic corridors. During this phase, India also signed an ambitious energy project called TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India), to transfer the gas from Turkmenistan to India. During this time India also started to explore alternative routes to reach Central Asia. The renovation of the Chabahar Port of Iran was then perceived as India's gateway to Central Asia and beyond. 'Connect Central Asia Policy' was articulated to have more precise policy orientation towards the region. The Connect Central Asia Policy was the more concentrated version of India's Look North policy.

Third phase started when Narendra Modi became Prime Minister in 2014. India, under PM Modi, started to pursue an active engagement policy. They actively engaged the diplomatic community, civil society and economic and defence community. Prime Minister Modi made a historical visit to all of Central Asian countries in 2015. This was a declaration of the priority that India has put regarding their Central Asian policy. During this visit, India has signed many strategic treaties. India's signed energy, investment, security cooperation and civil-to-civil related agreements. Since Modi came into power there have been new mechanisms established such as India–Central Asia dialogue, C5+1 and India–Central Asia initiation about the issue of Afghanistan. In July 2022, the first shipment from the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) arrived at Mumbai's Jawaharlal Nehru Port. The consignment began in Russia's Astrakhan Port and proceeded through the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, Iran and Azerbaijan before arriving in India.

The identification of the phases and India's policy evolution towards Central Asia are based on India's approach towards the international system, as well as on the internal socio-political scenario of India. The argument made by neoclassical realism allowed the book to analyse India's increasing materialistic capabilities, changed the viewpoint of their great power aspiration and existing strategic discourse of China and Pakistan as the threat. Additionally, neoclassical realism accommodates the internal socio-political variables as the conductor of India's policy towards Central Asia.

India certainly has a vast economic interest and non-traditional security threat associated with Central Asia, but India's approach towards Central Asia is not only anchored by these two factors and not necessarily fully reciprocated with the assumption made by classical or neo-realist which believe in 'State as a Primary Actor.' The book has verified that there is a unit-level factor involved which has shaped India's approach towards Central Asia. Application of the assumptions made by neoclassical realism in the book has helped to study India's behaviour towards the region with unit-level analysis. Based on these units India's behaviour towards the region has seen changes. American scholar Dr. Gideon Rose first came up with neoclassical realism model of foreign policy analysis where he accommodated 'policy maker's perception' and 'state-capacity' as two anchoring variables and picking from there Ripsman and Taliaferro added state-society relations, domestic institution, strategic culture and leader's image as well.

One important set of intervening variables concerns the beliefs or images of individual state decision makers. In the case of India, the leaders' image has played a vast role in shaping the perception and the policy towards the Central Asian region. During the Cold War India's leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, have influenced Central Asia in a socio-political way. Until today many Central Asian girls are named 'Indira' as she managed to leave such an impression. Talking about how a leader's image can influence the policy and decision-making process after the Cold War, there can be few examples. Right after the Cold War, the whole government decision makers were concentrating on economic reforms and market liberalization, so speeding the relations between India and Central Asia for them became a secondary priority.

Despite some visits and establishment of official diplomatic relations, India-Central Asia relations merely existed, as the leader's priority was economic reform. By the end of the 90s, India tested the nuclear weapon so leaders at that time were concentrating on justifying the test and fixing the relationship with the United States. So, despite 'Look North' and 'Extended Neighborhood' concepts, leader's prioritized East Asia and the United States. And leaders like Manmohan Singh, who was an economist by profession so their priority was to boost the economy rather than fostering or enhancing the relations. When Modi became prime minister in 2014 the diplomatic activities of India started to take a pace. Modi is a born diplomatic actor, so he has tried to reach and increase the engagement with the region as much as possible. Thus, the relations with Central Asia also started to be visible and proactive due to the diplomatic nature of Modi.

Similarly, strategic culture has been used as a defence/security terminology; however, in context of India strategic culture can tell what kind of mind-set that India as a state has in general. The foreign policy of India is based on *Panchsheel* which combines the Buddhist philosophy and Gandhian ideology of non-intervention and forging a relationship based on common values. India and Central Asia share many common values such as Buddhism and Islam, same fear of extremism and eagerness to improve their economic status. So, India has found that commonality regarding establishing the relationship with the region.

Additionally, the degree of harmony between the state and society, the degree to which society defers to state leaders on foreign policy issues in the event of disagreements, distributional competition among societal coalitions to capture the state and its associated spoils, the level of political and social cohesion within the state, and public support for general foreign policy and national security objectives are all important questions. These factors can influence whether state leaders have the ability to extract, mobilize and harness the power of the nation.

In terms of India's political structure and domestic political institutions, which frequently crystallize state–society relations, despite many challenges and the hurdles, there are some institutions within the country which played a vital role to keep India–Central Asia relations moving ahead. Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) is one of those. Right after the end of the Cold War, ICCR started its education and cultural cooperation with all five Central Asian countries. Likewise, democratic countries like India have a top-rated institutional setup, thus despite the political changes within the governance system the institutional structure makes sure that the business should be as usual. As a result, the high commissions in Central Asia, Indira Gandhi Cultural Institute, Vivekananda Foundation and ICCR keep engaging with Central Asian countries. So, whenever a leader like Modi rises into power, he can carry on with his proactiveness.

Nevertheless, India's foreign policy towards Central Asia has evolved from an outsider to an active participant in the changing landscape of new great games in the region. India has used the economic, security and the socio-culture as the instruments. The book has confirmed that India engagement in each of the spheres has increased in the region. Using such instruments India is trying to be a regional power in Central Asia. India has challenges such as not having physical connectivity, China's rise in the region and existing Pakistan and Afghanistan. But, despite the challenges, India's profile in the region has increased.



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Annex 1 List of Study Visits

Study Visit 1

Delhi and Calcutta, India

Trip Span: 15 April 2022–15 June 2022

Visited Institutions

- a Jawaharlal Nehru University
- b Delhi University
- c Jamia Millia University
- d Calcutta University
- e Jadavpur University
- f Manohar Parrikar Institute of Indian Defense Studies and Analysis (IDSA)
- g Observer Research Foundation (ORF)
- h Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF)
- i Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA)

Number of Interviewees

24

Questionnaire

- a How do you access the India's relations with Central Asia?
- b Why do you think it is important for India to increase its engagement with Central Asia?
- c What is core interest of India in Central Asia?
- d What are the engagement instruments that India have used or can used to interact with Central Asia?
- e Does India's engagement with Central Asia is a part of its larger Asia and the Pacific strategy or it is independent/ ad hoc?
- f Anything you want to add to make my dissertation more comprehensive to add Indian perspective toward Central Asia?

Study Visit 2

Astana and Almaty, Kazakhstan

Trip Span: 15 September to 15 October 2022

Visited Institutions

- a Eurasian National University
- b Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

Number of Interviewees

10

Questionnaire

- 1 Why 'Central Asia' should matter to world politics?
- 2 Who are the key players of so-called 'New Great Games'?
- 3 What kind of partner you think India is to Central Asia?
- 4 What is the primary interest of India in Central Asia?
- 5 What Central Asia expects from India?

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