POLITICS
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Kazakhstan as a Model for Regulating Interethnic Relations

Abstract: This article studies the development of interethnic accord in Kazakhstan and describes the tools needed to harmonize interethnic relations. The implementation of democratic principles through the development of civil society is considered in the article as a main tool to regulate interethnic relations in the country. Political stability in Kazakhstan is studied as it is assumed to be directly related to the Kazakhstani model of interethnic accord. The main purpose of this research was to analyse the interethnic policy of Kazakhstan aimed at preventing interethnic conflicts which is considered as one of the biggest challenges facing the world today. The paper examines the correlation of civic society and interethnic relations in the country and studies the issues of interethnic accord as a main principle of democracy in the modern world.

Key words: interethnic relations, civil society, Kazakhstan nation, political stability, consensus, social harmony, democracy.

Introduction

After Kazakhstan gained its sovereignty, individual and collective (ethnic, religious and general civil) identity within the formation of civic patterns in a changing multiethnic society became one of the highly discussed issues, not least because Kazakhstan was a part of the Soviet Union, and the ‘We are the Soviet people’ concept had a profound effect on promoting the general civic (collective) identity which put an individual identity on the back burner and dissolved cultural differences and diversity within a ‘melting pot’.

Based on issues of identity in the context of multiethnic society and ethnic diversity, Kazakhstan is now facing the transformation from a ‘traditional society’ into a civil society. Determination of political and cultural identities, which will be the basis for the future of the country, requires the correct assessment of identities and implementation of appropriate strategic solutions.

Democracy and Interethnic Relations

Civil peace and interethnic concordance are critical for the prosperity of the state at the present moment, particularly taking into account the current global economic crisis. Kazakhstan has developed its unique model of interethnic accord which has enabled the consistent implementation of its legal and institutional aspects.
According to the president N.A. Nazarbayev, ‘Kazakhstan is continuing to carry out significant transformations aimed at increasing the efficiency of the political system and the governmental structure of the state’.  

Being the main driving power and the subject of the historical process, we are building a civil society which promotes citizens’ interests and their system of values. The extent to which individuals and society are protected from the pressure of government is defined by the degree of democracy. Therefore, all the processes in civil society are carried out in ‘upward’ rather than ‘downward’ direction, i.e. ‘the state and its competent bodies are formed from members of society and controlled by society as a whole through specific tools’.

A highly developed civil society is the highest form of democracy; it is the firmness and stability of democracy.

So what is democracy? In his ‘On Democracy’, the famous political scientist Robert Dahl writes, ‘Democracy has been discussed off and on for about twenty-five hundred years, enough time to provide a tidy set of ideas about democracy on which everyone, or nearly everyone, could agree. For better or worse, that is not the case’.

Today, there are more than 6 billion people living in the world; they all differ by their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, racial and religious affiliation. Approximately, 3-4 thousand nations exist worldwide. Nations consist of various ethnic groups and nationalities; therefore, it is extremely important to maintain interethnic accord in multicultural countries.

Lately, the term social consensus democracy is often used in the scientific vernacular. Social consensus democracy could be characterized by religious, linguistic, ethnic, ideological or racial integrity and the prevalence of horizontal segmentation during the institutionalization of interactions that happen within the elite level of this integrity and so on.

It is our belief that the specific and proper analyses of modern democratic systems were provided by R. Dahl and Ch. Lindblom. They pulled aside the abstract ideas of democracy and focused on the most important subject as ‘polyarchy’: what type of democratic systems should be in place in the contemporary world, to what extent is democracy developed in so-called modern democratic states.

However, Robert Dahl comes to the conclusion that ‘it is difficult to cover the most recent and authentic information’.

With regard to the philosophy, the democracy is built on the ratio of ‘freedom and equality as social and political values’; these values are reflected in state institutions of democracy, in direct or representative democracy, correspondingly. The latter is now spread as a rule of law in law-governed states with the supreme power.

At the same time, it is essential to keep in mind the importance of the following: each generation discovers democracy in its own way because each historical period builds up its own peculiar system of material, social, political, and human values. Thereby, the conscious and adequate social structure comes into being during that particular period. Needless to say that each new generation is responsible for standards of civilization; this should not be ignored at any time.

The development of legal relations within each historical period means the formation and development of a civil society formed by the state with citizens having supreme social, economic, political, cultural and moral status – ‘this is the unlimited process of development which covers all the spheres of life including the aspirations of the society, power and the mankind for freedom, equality, justice, and other social, political, moral and cultural values’.

Despite the unlimited nature of this development, there is still a basis for measuring the extent of this process – this is the degree of democracy, i.e. the degree of democracy within the power, the politics, and civic initiatives of individuals and collective groups.

Although we attempt to provide a comprehensive, yet brief review to define the nature of democracy and identify the main indicators of the civil society, it is first necessary to find out the followings: firstly, we should define which form of democracy is being implemented in the course of the civil society development in Kazakhstan; secondly, we need to define and prove the main ways for the development of interethnic accord.

As for the first issue, it is our belief that the civil society in Kazakhstan is being developed through social consensus democracy.

This is a base for determining the condition and the future of the civic identity in terms of multiethnic and multi-confessional society.

Many research works show that a collective identity encourages citizens to have a positive attitude towards establishing good relations with individuals of another ethnicity. Thereby, the positive nature and positive aspects of civic identity improves the social interaction and this increases the self-esteem and national pride of the individual, causing them to strive to benefit the future of their homeland and motivating the person. This, in turn, guarantees the stability in the state. The most important thing is that

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the positive nature of civic identity unites the people and is one of the main conditions for stability of the multicultural society of Kazakhstan.

Pursuing the stability of interethnic concordance, Kazakhstan is now successfully implementing a policy focused on developing national-cultural diversity and unity, as well as ensuring the prosperity and preservation of ethnic groups.

National policy founded on a basis of pursuing efficient ways of ensuring interethnic cooperation and fair solutions to national issues is built on grounds like transparency, accountability to ensure social stability, supremacy of law, consolidation of state independence and active policy of integration.

Interethnic relations in Kazakhstan developed in a conflict-free manner in all periods of the state based on the idea of harmonizing interests of all ethnic groups, preserving equal rights of citizens and developing their cultural and linguistic freedom.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan provides for and guarantees the legal equality of all nationalities living in the territory of the country. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan has proved to be the most effective tool contributing to interethnic accord and productive interethnic cooperation. This national political body has undergone a total transformation from a consultative-advisory type of structure to a constitutional body and its activities are regulated by statutory instruments of the government.

Our future strategic goal in the field of interethnic relations is ‘to strengthen the unity of society and develop a unique competitive Kazakhstan nation’\(^\text{10}\). The state has all the conditions that enable the fulfillment of this task. First of all, this is down to the peace-loving and tolerant nature of the people of Kazakhstan; secondly, the active participation of government in developing and strengthening the unique model of interethnic relations in the country.

The ethnopolitical situation in Kazakhstan is now stable and there are no explicit and apparent conflicts between various ethnic groups. Comprehensive studies show that the people of Kazakhstan demonstrate the highest level of confidence in governmental bodies when it comes to regulation of interethnic relations. Nevertheless, the consolidation of interethnic concordance remains one of the urgent issues given the presence of aspects which still need to be solved.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is capable of maintaining peace and accord without being vulnerable to social and economic crisis. The country has developed its unique model of interethnic accord and concordance of diverse cultures and religions.

### Development and Evolution of Civil Society and Democracy in Kazakhstan

Civil society structures and institutions play an important part in harmonizing interethnic relations. Relations between ethnic groups, as well as the extent and peculiarities of interethnic accord mainly depend on how developed civil society is. Thereby, the society and non-governmental structures are responsible and accountable for issues like civility, credibility and reliability.

Today, social organizations have a profound influence on the behaviour of citizens and the development of civil institutions because the interests of the group come first compared to the interests of an individual. In this regard, it is worthwhile noting the importance of autonomous enterprises, political parties and institutions such as the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan.

Parties are assigned a special role in the space between the political system and the civil society. They are formed as independent structures on the base of the civil society but manifest themselves in the political system through governmental structures using political tools.

Similar to interethnic relations, the interaction between civil society organizations leaves a lot to be desired. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan has not yet found the ways to amalgamate and cooperate with other parties except for the Nur Otan party. State structures and social organizations still need to reach an understanding with each other. In this respect, it is deemed necessary to put the established principles away: firstly, we should withdraw from the base-superstructure concept of the political and state system and stop perceiving it as a tool to realize all potentials of the civil society; secondly, we should stop perceiving the civil society as an object of state interaction. Recognizing the equality of the aforesaid, it is essential to find means of them having interaction.

There is also an abundance of certain social and political forces that exacerbate the differences in tendencies in civil society and the political system. They can only be eliminated through close partnership of the society and government.

While assessing the importance public associations play in unifying communities, it is particularly worthwhile mentioning that there are differences in stakeholder groups that act cohesively in a competitive and cooperating manner. They can be distinguished by their ‘social weight’ and ‘authority’ given the scales of their economic, informational and other capabilities.

Lobbying, being a form of authority, may give rise to certain controversies in ethnic relations based on the special interests of affiliated business structures. Therefore, it is critical to develop control mechanisms or other tools to eliminate similar potential risks and reduce the possibilities to influence public officers. This function could be carried out by the Public Chamber under the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan in common with the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. However, the main condition for its implementation should be the open and unveiled discussion of urgent issues.

The Concept of Civil Society Development was adopted by the order of the President of Kazakhstan in 2006. The executive bodies were assigned the role of implementing the goals of the Concept and promoting interplay and synergy within ‘the civil society – the state – the business’ tripod.

Nevertheless, civil society has not yet been fully developed in the country. In most part, the responsibility for regulating interethnic relations and interethnic accord lies with state institutions. Consequently, the main strategic task should be the redistribution of functions in favour of civil society institutions. By doing so, it would be possible to reach a higher degree of stability, civil peace and interethnic concordance.
State institutions and public associations must effectively assist in conducting measures designed to strengthen interethnic accord. At the same time, it is necessary to take into consideration peculiarities, ethnic compositions and structures by regions.

Currently, non-governmental organizations demonstrate positive trends in contributing to interethnic accord. Non-governmental organizations cover various aspects of ethnic factors in certain issues. They have started delivering different social services aimed at analysing interethnic relations and their harmonization.

Nevertheless, the activities of non-governmental organizations focused on improving interethnic relations are still at an early stage of formation and need to be transformed to function in a more efficient manner.

Regulation of Interethnic Relations in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has successfully avoided the negative impacts of the social-economic crisis and preserved peace and unity in the country. The country has developed its own model of concordance between ethnic groups, cultures and religious faiths.

The stability and solidity of both interethnic accord and social harmony are ensured by the state policy in this field. The state has developed a legal framework which protects the rights and freedom of all its citizens regardless of their ethnic and religious affiliation. The state excludes any legal provisions which discriminate against citizens on religious or ethnic grounds. The state has developed the national principle of equality through harmonizing traditional and liberal values in terms of civil affiliation.

Taking into consideration the global practice and main values of democracy, this approach has ensured the highest level of interethnic concordance.

The contribution of political parties to civil peace and interethnic relations is paramount. First of all, this could be attributed to the Nur Otan party which supports the democratic principles of interethnic relations.

 Nonetheless, interethnic concordance strongly depends on civil society structures such as religious faiths, non-governmental organizations and trade unions. Social harmony can be established in the course of civil society development.

Evaluating the extreme importance of concordance in a society, it can be considered critical to control certain issues that emerge in daily perception and ideology. It is natural that different ethnic groups have different values and principles.

To what extent are state bodies and civil society structures efficient in resolving social, economic, political, historical and cultural issues? To what extent is the party political system developed?

The effective social and economic state policy contributes to social concord, especially in the context of the global financial and economic crisis. Sociological surveys indicated that President’s anti-crisis initiatives were applauded by the majority of the population regardless of their ethnic origin. This
demonstrates that relations between ethnic groups aren’t deteriorating; on the contrary, interethnic relations are shown to be strengthening more than ever.

However, there are controversial viewpoints on fundamental values in a society, namely those concerning economic and social development trends.

Thus, the critical attitude of oppositional forces towards the course the government is taking can be fully justified and deemed appropriate despite the fact that the opposition does not offer a unified opinion on social and economic development.

In this respect, the executive power must introduce certain changes to the economic and social development strategy. Improvements in the executive system will lead to the consolidation of unity and interethnic accord in society.

The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, the largest civil society institution, helps to promote the culture of interethnic relations and interconnect various ethnic interests. The Assembly has wider opportunities to preserve peace and concord in a society in the context of the global financial and economic recession.

Analyzing the State-of-the-Nation Address by the President, the Secretariat of The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan has published a document entitled ‘Unite for Future’. Uniting citizens regardless of their ethnic origin is one of the main goals of the Assembly. It is our belief that an influential institution of a civil society must review and accept a specific plan of actions that facilitate to elimination of crises in a society11.

At the same time, interethnic relations in the country must not be eulogized. Relations between ethnic groups are one of the complex issues in the affairs of any state. Despite the established model of interethnic relations in Kazakhstan, there are still certain issues that need to be carefully studied and covered by the state policy.

Imperialism and ethnocentrism which emerge both at the level of everyday consciousness and ideology are factors that run in contradiction with the concepts of unity and interethnic accord. It may be impossible to notice them at the first sight, though they can be clearly distinguished afterwards. Advocates of these two different directions need to conduct theoretic analyses to prove their viewpoints.

It is important to provide a correct and timely assessment of ethnocentrism (regardless of ethnic origin). It usually occurs on an everyday level and may lead to wider interethnic conflicts. Therefore, it is necessary to assess the situation and find its solution using the various institutions of a civil society. Ethnocentrism should be resolved publicly without being considered a low-profile issue.

Many analysts consider that ethnic identity prevails over civic identity; and fractioning by ethnic affiliation is more evident. In this respect, it is worthwhile to provide some clarifications.

Firstly, the ethnic identity sometimes is understood as generic identity. Secondly, fractioning by ethnic characteristics is not prevalent over social-economic fractioning. Thus, 28.9% of migrants

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indicated the deterioration of social and economic situation as a main reason for their departure and only 18.7% of respondents mentioned the deterioration of interethnic relations.

Despite the fact that many processes within interethnic relations go low profile, ethnic competition, namely in the field of culture and languages, is evident. This is obviously seen in the attempts of the Russian elite to secure the state language rank for the Russian language, whereas the Kazakh elite try to prevent this from happening. The dispute flowing in a peaceful and cultivated manner shows that the Russians are striving to promote their position, meanwhile the Kazakhs, being an indigenous ethnic group strive to preserve the Kazakh monopoly. The Russian-speaking population, as well as the Kazakh urbanized part of the native population, support the aspirations of the Russian elite.

The official status of the Russian language provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan seems the most appropriate solution. Furthermore, there are additional language issues that require similar solutions. One of them is the use of the state language in the official correspondence.

The representativeness of ethnic groups in the state system needs its appropriate regulation too. Not all representatives of ethnic groups are present in state government bodies; the prevalence of one ethnic group is evident in this field. The Russian political scientist A. Kurtov says, ‘Although there are 130 ethnic groups in the country, the largest portion of them remain outside state and political affairs’

Only 64 ethnic groups are represented in governmental bodies whereas there are 130 nationalities in the country.

Some changes have been observed lately in the representativeness of ethnic groups in state bodies. Principally, in relation to the introduction of a quota for deputies proposed by the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan to Mazhilis. This is a wise step to increase the representativeness of ethnic groups in the Parliament. However, the majority of survey respondents believe that the general picture remains the same with no obvious changes.

The results of sociological research show that 65.1% of respondents noted the representatives of certain nations (ethnic groups) highlighting the prevalence and authority of the Kazakhs; at the same time, the highest level of representativeness is attributed to Russians – 48.9%. As for other nationalities, respondents believe that their representativeness is at the lower level; this is mostly relevant to Chechens (the lowest representativeness in state bodies 25.3%).

According to M.I. Kozybayev, this lop-sidedness in human resources management should be first eliminated in regions with a high concentration of different ethnic groups; in practice, as well as while forming the human reserve, it is necessary to take into account the employment of various ethnic representatives that are well-versed with the state language. M.I. Kozybayev believes that similar works should be carried out with political parties too. According to the analyst, ‘it is necessary to develop mechanisms to implement the above suggestions taking into account the highest degree of reliability’.

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Conclusion

Scholars believe that successful consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan into a single social structure despite diversities in religion, languages and ethnicities is determined by the choice and development of the effective values and trends of the worldview.

Kazakhstan is now practicing a stable and appropriate policy to resolve ethnic conflicts. Moreover, the formation of the ‘Kazakhstani people’, a historical community consolidated by a single system of values, is now being observed in the country. Some political scientists associate the notion of the ‘Kazakhstani people’ with the collapsed concept of the ‘Soviet people’. It should be noted that the notion of the ‘Kazakhstani people’ is built on completely different theoretical concept. The concept ‘Soviet people’ is built on the prevalence of commonness over individuality; suppression, oppression and assimilation of the outstanding by ordinariness, whereas ‘Kazakhstani people’ is built on unity and solidarity based on development and prosperity of individual cultures and national images of the world…”\(^\text{13}\). These words confirm the importance of unity and interethnic accord in the modern social situation of the country. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the concept ‘Kazakhstan nation’ is inappropriate in this respect; there is only one indigenous nation in Kazakhstan – the Kazakh nation. The rest of the nationalities (whether large or small in number of their representatives) are ethnic groups; in other words, they are considered as ethnic diasporas. They have limited opportunities to become full historical subjects in the unitary state. Historically, they are authorized to deal with the issues of ethnic identity, ethnic self-awareness, ethnic and cultural relics. This could explain the urge of the Kazakh people to govern social processes, i.e. their aspirations for power.

Based on results of her sociological research works, the humanities researcher V.D. Kurganskaya pointed out that development of interethnic relations requires the engagement of various ethnic group representatives in the state government. The superiority of the Kazakhs in governmental bodies and the expansion of the use of Kazakh as a state language directly influence the rates of migration and cause the departure of the Russians to their historical homeland\(^\text{14}\). In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the civil rights of Russian-speaking citizens are not discriminated against in any way. Various sources of mass media prove that neither educational institutions nor consumer services sector impose restrictions on a person recognizing himself as a Russian-speaking individual; on the contrary, citizens of the country are provided with all the opportunities to do this.


MISHRA, Manoj Kumar

Changing Role of Russia in Afghanistan after Soviet Disintegration

Russia’s role became more defensive in relation to Afghanistan after the Soviet Union disintegrated. On the other hand, it became offensive in relation to Central Asia — the newly independent but vulnerable states. Russia became more wary as to how to keep the divided heartland under its control. Russia is neither interested nor capable in securing a pro-Russian regime in Afghanistan as was the case during the Cold War. Russia’s primary objective in Afghanistan has been to prevent the flow of terrorism and drugs from Afghanistan. However, Russia has shown an increased interest in Afghanistan after 9/11 due to greater American role in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia found in Iran a strategic partner with which it worked to counter the American strategy in the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and Afghanistan. They also developed strategies together in Afghanistan by arming and aiding the Northern Alliance forces against the Taliban.

Afghan War and the Soviet Disintegration

According to Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, the extant explanations on the Soviet breakdown surprisingly underemphasise the impact of the Afghanistan war (Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, 1999: 696-697). They are of the view that though the Afghanistan war initially was visualised by Soviet leaders as a small-scale intervention, it grew into a decade-long war involving nearly one million Soviet soldiers, killing and injuring some tens of thousands of them. According to Fred Halliday, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan of 1979-89 occupies an important place in the history of the last phase of the Cold War, and in the account of the collapse of the USSR itself (Fred Halliday, 1999: 675).

The Soviet Union was seriously overstretched by trying to wage a war in Afghanistan while maintaining its far-flung military commitments in Africa and the Middle East and propping up the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. The US President Carter might have thought it a propitious moment to step up arms supply to Afghan insurgents to bog down the Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

There was a tide of Islamic revivalism that began to sweep the Muslim world in 1970s. Though in the beginning, Afghan nationalism and Islamic resistance against communism in Afghanistan did not fuse into a broader movement, later the Afghan resistance to the Soviet presence was propelled by Islamism and as well as by nationalism. The strength of the Afghan resistance was well-known since the days of the Great Game between the British Empire and Czarist Russia. Therefore, the US role in arming and financially assisting the Islamic forces went a long way in incurring huge military and economic losses for the USSR.
Reuveny and Prakash argue that Mujahideen being armed with US-supplied surface-to-air missiles, rockets, mortars, and communication equipment won many confrontations with the Soviet army. The casualties mounted and the number of disabled soldiers seen in Soviet cities grew substantially, and the war veterans (Afgantsy) increasingly became part of the Soviet urban landscape. Since many Afgantsy belonged to the non-Russian nationalities, opposition to the war from citizens in non-Russian Soviet Republics increased. Since their presence was not acknowledged by the authorities, who wished to play down Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, these Afgantsy became bitter and openly critical of the Soviet leaders (Rafael Reuveny and Aseem Prakash, 1999: 696-697). Therefore, the US’s increasing supply of arms and aid to the Mujahideen and resolve to continue the war also brought internal divisions in the multinational Soviet army to the fore which later on became instrumental in the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Ahmet Davutoglu provides a geo-strategic explanation to the end of Soviet hegemony and its eventual disintegration. According to him, the end of the Cold War strategic balance based on bipolarity has created a huge geopolitical and geo-economic vacuum in the zone where the North-South passes intersect with the East-West belt of the Rimland (Ahmet Davutoglu, 1997-98: 8). The passes and corridors from the Central Asian Heartland to the surrounding Rimland have been the lines of demarcation for the global struggle for domination, starting with the nineteenth century Anglo-Russian struggle for hegemony over this significant geopolitical belt. Afghanistan with its passes such as Khojak, Gomal and Khyber etc, and corridors like the Wakhan corridor from Central Asia to the Indus lowlands has been the buffer area in the old Great Game and in the struggle between super-powers in the Cold War too. The 1979 Soviet attack on this buffer zone became a turning point of the Cold War strategic balance and its failure led to the fall of the Soviet strategic pillar in Asia (Ahmet Davutoglu, 1997-98: 8).

Russia, Central Asia and Afghanistan

The Soviet Union’s disintegration and emergence of Russia put an end to its proactive role in Afghanistan. Russia shunned the Soviet crave for global reach by gaining both continental and naval supremacy. It tried to consolidate its position in the divided heartland. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was a power vacuum in the strategic area of Eurasia. The Caspian region of Eurasia is geopolitically important as it provides land connectivity to different places and constitutes the largest continental area of the world. Furthermore, the natural resources and the landlocked character of Central Asian states add to the geopolitical importance of the region.

According to the estimates of geologists, the oil deposits of the Caspian Sea may not be quantitatively comparable to the deposits of the Persian Gulf, but they are still considered of excellent quality and able to provide a significant alternative source of energy in the 21st century. In particular, it is estimated that the entire Caspian Sea is a basin full of oil and natural gas, starting from Azerbaijan and continuing to the opposite shore in the territory of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. These deposits carry enormous importance because of the expected exhaustion of the deposits of Alaska and the North Sea by the year 2015 (Bernard A. Gelb, 2006: 3).

Russia has both geopolitical and geoeconomic interests in Central Asia. It considers Central Asia its strategic backyard and has a monopoly over pipeline diplomacy as it supplies the Central Asian natural...
resources through the pipelines existing since Soviet times. Russia’s role in Afghanistan has been shaped primarily by the threats to the region emanating from and facilitated by the latter. The Russian policy has been to contain the US’s penetration into the region and prevent the Central Asian Republics from radical Islamic influences and drugs generating from Afghanistan. For the US, the region is important to develop a continental strategy to contain the influence of Russia, Iran and China as all these major powers are geographically connected to and has stakes in the region and the natural resource potential also attracted the American attention towards the region. The American plan of laying down an alternative route for transfer of Central Asian resources to the world market through Afghanistan threatened Russia’s interests.

The flight of many Soviet Muslims during Stalin’s brutal collectivisation campaign and nationalist purges created a permanent Soviet exile population in Afghanistan. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the resultant weakening of its control over the Islamic republics, Russia believed that a radical Islamic regime in Afghanistan would push these people towards the north. Secondly, the regime through its Islamic influences would use the exiled population to destabilise the newly independent Central Asian Republics. Rise of Islamic opposition groups in different Central Asian states strengthened such Russian belief.

The increase in the production and trafficking of drugs is also related to the collapse of the Soviet-era economies and the elimination of Soviet-policed borders. Between 1992 and 2000, Russian border guards in Tajikistan seized about ten tonnes of drugs including a tonne of heroin. These seizures are believed to be a fraction of what actually gets through, given the multitude of river crossing points and other factors, for instance the openness to corruption of underpaid Tajik and Russian soldiers and border guards, the extreme poverty of the population on both sides of the long border where unemployed young men are prepared to take risks as smugglers, and the existence in northern Afghanistan of a flourishing drugs industry (Angelo Rasanayagam, 2005: 175).

Rising opposition movements and drug-trafficking in Central Asia were genuine concerns for Russia. The growth of Taliban in Afghanistan was a constant irritant for Russia. Sergie Ivanov, the head of the Russian Security Council, threatened to lunch missile and air strikes against Afghanistan after accusing the Taliban government of assisting the Chechen resistance. Moscow further accused the Taliban of giving sanctuary to Islamists from some of the Central Asian states and allowing them to train for guerrilla warfare to destabilise the states. During the Afghan Civil War, Russia kept pouring weapons and money in support of Uzbek and Tajik warlords. When the Civil War entered a decisive phase, Russia in order to push the Taliban out of Tajik and Uzbek areas threw its weight behind Ahmad Shah Massoud who had bases in Tajikistan.

However, it is argued that Russia exaggerated the role of radical Islamic groups to retain control over the former Soviet republics. The developments in Chechnya, Central Asia (Civil War in Tajikistan) and Afghanistan were seen as part of a larger plot hatched by a secretive network of Islamic activists and terrorists whose main goal, according to Russia’s Federal Security Service has been to create a Great Islamic caliphate. However, scholars like Rasul Bakhsh Rais argue that the link between the Taliban and the Islamic movements in Central Asia is questionable. According to him all these movements have indigenous roots and Russia and the ruling elites in Central Asia exaggerate the transnational links
among the Islamic movements to divert attention from their own political failures (Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 2000: 138).

**Afghanistan and Russia’s Central Asian Strategy**

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia’s policy towards Central Asia was consolidated into two tracks. According to Trenin, Russia’s policy was in the pursuit of economic opportunities and in shoring up stability by the military means of buffer-building. And common to both tracks is the desire to keep the Central Asian states within Moscow’s orbit, and to minimise outside influence in the region (Dmitri Trenin, 2000). Russia has been seeking to direct as much as possible the oil and gas exports of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan through Soviet pipeline routes and re-establish economic links through cooperation projects. However, Central Asian Republics like Turkmenistan are looking for alternative pipeline projects to reduce their dependence on Russia. The proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline is an example of this.

Russia had tried to prevent the US from developing long-term military bases in the Central Asian region for power projection with a plea to provide security to the weak states, to promote and safeguard the pipelines and to contain the penetration of other major powers into the region prior to 9/11. On the other hand, Russia developed military strategies for its own power projection in order to show that the Central Asian states can rely on it for their security. Russia expressed its willingness to play a major role in containing the spillover of terrorism and drug trafficking from Afghanistan into the Central Asian region. Even it played a major role in stemming Civil War like situation in the region. The Civil War in Tajikistan and unrest in Uzbekistan were considered Afghan exported phenomena. After the Tajik Civil War in 1992, Russian engagement in Central Asia became clearer. The Collective Security Treaty was activated. By 1997, Russia consolidated its involvement in the face of an enhanced US presence in the area, which included a military base in Kazakhstan and joint exercises with the Central Asian Battalion (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) (Dmitri Trenin, 2009: 302-303).

Russia developed an ideology of ‘sovereign democracy‘ to strengthen the role of leaders in the Central Asian politics and contain the American influence in the region according to Simon Shen (Simon Shen, 2010: 102). In order to spread influence into Central Asia, the US insisted on democratic transformation and observance of human rights and played a major role in coloured revolutions in the region. However, Putin considered Russian-style democracy was always likely to accord a far greater role to the state than in the west. In his Millennium Address in December 1999, he said, “The public looks forward to a certain restoration of the guiding and regulating role of the state, proceeding from Russia’s traditions as well as the current state in the country” (M. A. Smith, 2000: 3).

Apart from developing the ideology of ‘sovereign democracy‘ and military strategies to tighten its control over Central Asia and creating a buffer between Central Asia and Afghanistan, Russia tried to handle the Afghan issue diplomatically. Russia stressed the centrality of Iran to the settlement of conflict in Afghanistan. After disintegration of the USSR, Russia and Iran formed some kind of ‘strategic alliance’. While greeting then presidential candidate Hashemi Rafsanjani on a visit to Moscow immediately after Khomeini’s death in June 1989, Gorbachev had given full recognition to the validity and importance of Iran’s ideology. Gorbachev said that “we are receiving a representative of the state
which is our old neighbour and which embarked on the path of revolutionary renewal”. He further remarked that “the emergence of the new political thinking in the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran on the other hand, have created a basis for deepening ties and good-neighbourly cooperation, proceeding from respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, equality, and mutually beneficial constructive cooperation.” (Graham E. Fuller, 1990: 55). Iran considered Russian role in the Persian Gulf crucial to keep the American forces out of the region. Moscow repeatedly called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the Gulf. In Afghanistan, rise of Sunni extremism under the Taliban and the American plan to use the Taliban for an alternative pipeline system running through Afghanistan bypassing Russia and Iran brought the two countries together. For Iran, withdrawal of Soviet troops meant victory for America and Saudi Arabia. Both Iran and Russia provided assistance to Masoud with Tajikistan facilitating it by allowing its territory to strengthen anti-Taliban forces in Pakistan. At times, both the countries also supported the Uzbek warlord, Dostum against the Taliban. Iran also facilitated dialogue between Moscow and Shia parties in Afghanistan to unite them against the Taliban.

However, Iran and Russia’s support for anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan could not prevent the Taliban from achieving success as the Northern Alliance represented warlords having divergent interests. For example, Massoud in order to receive arms and aid from the west complained about Iran’s interference in Afghanistan. Therefore, Russia at times tried to make peace with the Taliban. Russia’s the then Prime Minister, Victor Chernomyrdin met four of the five Central Asian presidents on 4 October 1996 to examine urgently the situation which was developing on the southern border of the CIS. In the discussions any military aid to anti-Taliban forces inside Afghanistan was denied. Instead, Russia along with the United Nations brokered peace between the Taliban and the Tajik government which enabled tens of thousands of Tajik refugees in northern Afghanistan to return to their homes. According to Sreedhar, the Russians threatening to bomb the training camps and sanctuaries provided by the Taliban to dissident groups of CIS, have not been able to do anything on the ground, other than increasing their number of border guards to counter-terrorism. This Russian hesitation to use force to neutralise the Taliban radicals resulted in a series of clashes in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in July-August 2000. Russia came round to the view of engaging the Taliban through Pakistan in constructive dialogue. The months of August and September 2000 saw a flurry of diplomatic activity between Moscow and Islamabad (Sreedhar, 2002: 281-282).

Moscow’s attitude towards international terrorism was formed through its struggle with the militants in Chechnya and resurgence of Islamic radicalism and drug trafficking in Central Asia. Vladimir Putin had long been arguing that Russia and the West were fighting a common enemy in militant Islamism and the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US proved that his analysis that the world was confronting ‘a crescent of Islamic terrorism’ stretching from the Philippines through Afghanistan, Chechnya and on to Kosovo had been correct. So far many Western commentators were reluctant to admit any international influence in the Chechen uprising. However, September 11 provided the opportunity for Russia to get international support on the Chechnya issue. Disputes over oil were at the heart of Russia’s decision to go to war against Chechnya in December 1994, because its sole operational pipeline for Caspian oil, which goes directly through troubled Dagestan and Chechnya, was under threat from the radical Islamic forces of Chechnya. Russia’s geo-economic reasons for establishing a firm control over Chechnya are
related to the need to control the resources of the Caspian. Apart from Russia’s concerns in Chechnya, to contain the increasing Islamic opposition movements and drug-trafficking in Central Asia, the prospect of Northern Alliance coming to power in Afghanistan and the need to reset the relationship with the West in the post-Cold War period were some of the important factors in Russia’s calculation to join the US sponsored ‘War on Terror’. Russia had supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban in terms of arms and economic aid during the Afghan Civil War. To see the Northern Alliance in power Russia provided key support to the alliance during the ‘War on Terror’. For example, it provided the Northern Alliance with 60 T-55 battle tanks, 12 T-62 K command tanks and 30 infantry fighting vehicles during the War. Nevertheless, the Northern Alliance’s progress towards Kabul was resisted by Islamabad and Washington (Angelo Rasanayagam, 2005: 253).

After September 11, Putin described the al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the US as ‘barbaric’ in a TV broadcast to the Russian people on 14 September 2001 and said that “Russia would provide all the information at its disposal about terrorist bases, and its secret services would cooperate fully with the West” (R. Sakwa, 2004: 216). A Russia-America Working Group was set up in 2000 to consult on counter-terrorist activities in Afghanistan. However, more controversial was allowing the US access to military bases in Central Asia. While Russia’s Foreign Ministry initially considered that the Central Asian states were independent states and could allow the US to establish military bases, the Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov ruled out any NATO presence in the region. The Chief of the General Staff, Anatoli Kvashnin said “Russia has not considered, and is not planning to consider, participation in a military operation against Afghanistan”. He reminded the Central Asian states of their ‘bilateral and other obligations’ to Russia (Dale R. Herspring and Peter Rutland, 2005: 273). The national security document of January 2001 and military document of 29 September 2001 of Russia listed international terrorism in Chechnya and Dagestan as the most important threat and next to it was the US and NATO assertiveness in the former Soviet republics (Anuradha M. Chenoy, 2004: 135). However, the US assured both Russia and CAS that its use of bases would be only temporary and Putin accepted the idea and persuaded the Defense department to facilitate the US military bases in the region.

To Russia’s disadvantage, the Central Asian states believed that the powerful US would be an effective security guarantor in the region. Furthermore, these states were interested to see diminution of Russia’s role in the region. Therefore, Central Asian leaders were quick to show themselves as US allies in the Bush administration’s ‘Global War on Terror’. Kyrgyzstan provided basing for the US and coalition forces at its Manas airbase, Tajikistan provided a refueling facility near Dushanbe, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan provided overflight rights and other support and more importantly Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov had signed a bilateral agreement with Washington permitting the US military to use its base at Karshi-Khanabad (K2), just 60 miles away from Afghanistan. As the outcome of the war became clear and the Taliban regime fell, the US Secretary of State said in December 2001 that the US did not intend to withdraw from Central Asia even after the war in Afghanistan since America had long-term interests in the region. The US Assistant Secretary of State to Central Asian states Elizabeth Jones stated that the US would support the states in their reforms and more aid would come depending on their reforms and she further said that US’s interest lay in the ‘transparent development of Caspian energy resources’ (Anuradha M. Chenoy, 2004: 135).
Russia’s Increased Interest in Central Asia and Afghanistan

In response to the American role in the region, Russia accentuated its military role in the region. In October 2003, Russia established its first new regional military base since the Cold War at Kant, Kyrgyzstan. Russian and Kyrgyz officials also discussed to establish another major Russian military facility in southern Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan granted Russia’s 201st Motorised Infantry Division a permanent base near Dushanbe in October 2004. In June 2004, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a Treaty on Strategic Cooperation which provides for additional Russian military assistance to Uzbekistan and the creation of a joint anti-terrorism institute (Jyotsna Baksi, Dec 27, 2005).

In May 2005, the US critically responded to the Uzbek government’s excessive use of force to suppress a violent uprising in the city of Andijon. It called for an independent investigation into the issue with international involvement. It was very difficult for the US to shed the ideology of democracy and human rights which was aligned with its long-term interests. Nevertheless, before the Andijon incident the US’s policy in the region was directed to strengthen the role of authoritarian leaders in order to get facilities to establish military bases. However, the Andijon incident led to a downturn in the bilateral relationship between Uzbekistan and the US. The Russian ideology of ‘sovereign democracy’ and the continued policy of supporting the leaders in Central Asia reaped better results for it. In November 2005, Russia and Uzbekistan signed a treaty on Allied Relations that pledged mutual military assistance in the event either becomes a victim of “aggression”.

To secure an American withdrawal from the region, Russia initiated a Shanghai Cooperation Organisation declaration in 2005 to fix time limits on the temporary use of infrastructure and on the length of military contingents by the anti-terror coalition. The SCO was formed in June 2001 when Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Five – Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – which had first met in 1996. Uzbekistan, which strongly resisted the Russian effort to bring Central Asia into closer security cooperation, joined SCO because Russia’s presence there is balanced by China. Currently, India, Iran and Pakistan enjoy the observer status in the group. The SCO’s declared purpose was security cooperation in relation to terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and separatism. However, after September 11, the organisation also seeks to counter Western influence in the region. Afterwards, America’s withdrawal from the Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan became a priority of Russian policy. The Kyrgyz President, Bakiyev speaking in Moscow after a lengthy haggling session in which he had secured a $2 billion loan from Russia, said that the Americans would be given six months to withdraw. Since the mid-2000s, the Manas airbase had been under attack in the Russian and local press, which succeeded to a large degree in shaping public sentiment against the presence of the US in Kyrgyzstan. In April 2009, Russian television broadcast a documentary alleging that Manas was a cover for a large-scale US spying mission on Russia (Annette Bohr, 2010: 112).

However, the Russian aim of ending the US use of the base was frustrated by the fact that US payments for use of the base represented a substantial financial assistance to Kyrgyzstan. When Uzbek President Islam Karimov announced that a cargo airport in the Uzbek city of Navoi could be used for airborne transport of NATO supplies to Afghanistan and that a major renovation at that airport would turn it into a world-class airfreight hub, the Kyrgyz government announced a deal with the US allowing Americans to continue using Manas Air base as transit centre. Moreover, the Kyrgyz government - like the governments of other Central Asian states - had good reason to believe that if the US and NATO
troops were not able to defeat Islamist extremist in Afghanistan, then sooner rather than later Islamists would become active in Central Asia (Dmitri Trenin, 2009: 302-303).

Instead of opposing the US and Kyrgyz government, Russia looked for a new military base in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, which was to be a key component of the new Collective Operational Reaction Forces (CORF) under the auspices of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation. In June 2009, the CSTO formally created CORF as part of its ambition to create forces ‘on par with NATO forces’ and in view of the unstable situation in Afghanistan. However, Uzbekistan has objected to the opening of this military base. The Uzbek leadership has argued that the continued destabilisation in Afghanistan is largely in Russia’s interest, in so far as Russia has used the conflict there to justify an expansion of its military presence in Central Asia. Furthermore, Uzbekistan is likely to view a Russian-led military presence in the volatile Ferghana Valley - regarded as Central Asia’s heartland- as a factor impinging on its ability to continue to exert its hegemony on its smaller Central Asia neighbours.

The deal between the US and the Kyrgyz government was probably a major reason that Russia in July 2009 agreed to allow the US to transport troops and weapons across Russian airspace en route to Afghanistan. As the US had managed to maintain transit arrangements to Afghanistan through Central Asia, it had become meaningless for Russia to continue pursuing its objective of cutting off US supply lines. That agreement signed during a Russian-US summit in Moscow, permits 4,500 American flights per year and allows NATO to transport lethal weapons along Russian and Central Asian railways, an overland supply route known as the ’Northern Distribution Network’ (Andrew C. Kuchins, 2010: 33).

However, according to Dmitri Rogozin, the Russian envoy to NATO, Russia wants to help the US and Afghanistan as part of the international community but on its own terms. He said that they “negotiate from a position of strength” on Afghanistan. According to Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, in 2010, traffic along the Northern Distribution Network “was still dogged by heavy delays and disruption, while Russian and American military bases continued to jostle for influence in Central Asia, and Russian criticism of the ineffectiveness of NATO counter-narcotics operations grew louder” (Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, 2011: 227). Therefore, the relationship that the Obama administration developed with Russia and claimed to be strategic was far from being so.

Russian and American purposes in Afghanistan differed. America’s military objective was limited to stabilising Afghanistan and reducing Taliban influence there: there was no intention to meet all the security challenges of the region. Russians claimed that Central Asia’s borders were their southern borders and that Russia was vulnerable to a wide range of security threats within Central Asia. Not all of these threats concern America. It was argued that the Afghanistan campaign might have actual exacerbated the security problems by dispersing Taliban groups into Central Asia. Moreover, the issue of drug-trafficking which the Russians insisted to be firmly dealt with was not seriously taken up by the Americans. The warlords on whom the American-led Afghan operation depended never wanted drug production and drug-trafficking to be part of the operation.

M. K. Bhadrakumar argues that Russia negotiated with the NATO for transit route facilities that it found difficult to deny given the presence of France and Germany, which favour greater involvement of Russia in NATO affairs. At the same time, it was aware of the American plan of an alternative Caucasian route that would bypass Russia. (M.K Bhadrakumar, Feb10: 2011). It was also aware of the fact that the
US wanted to be less dependent on it for its war efforts in Afghanistan as the American containment strategy towards Russia could not be sustained if there was critical dependence on it. However, Russia has not lost its monopoly over pipeline diplomacy despite the recognition by the Central Asian states that the diversification of pipeline routes was prerequisite for their economic security. It is because there is lack of incentives for Central Asian producers to abandon long-term gas supply contracts with Russia and secondly, the Russian-Georgian war made export routes from Central Asia crossing the Caspian even less viable than before. Thirdly, the American policy of sanctions against Iran has made the west more dependent on Russia for supply of natural resources. Russia’s monopoly over supplies of Central Asian natural resources allows it a larger role in the region. For example, Russia through its company Gazprom prevented Turkmenistan from exporting its energy products in 1997 (Richard Weitz, 2006: 157). Perhaps because of Russia’s overriding influence due to its monopoly in oil supplies, the Central Asian states have agreed to strengthen CSTO as an alternative to NATO. In one of the top-level summit meetings, the CSTO leaders unanimously agreed that countries outside the regional security bloc would only be able to establish military bases on the territory of a member-state with the consent of all member-states. The Russian president Medvedev said “the decision we have made with regard to military bases in a third country is very important for the consolidation of positions within the CSTO” (Dadan Upadhyay, Jan 10: 2012). The CSTO member states’ such decision assumes significance in view of the reported American plans to redeploy to Central Asia some of the forces that will be pulled out of Afghanistan in 2014.

Being aware of the long term American interests in the region, Russia wants the American stay in the region to be temporary. Russia avoids building strategic relationship with the US to fight terrorism in Afghanistan. Moscow said it would just stop short of sending troops to Afghanistan. Russia’s Foreign Minister stated that under “no circumstances” would Russian soldiers return there (Vladimir Radyuhin, Nov 19: 2010). At times, Russia preferred to “let the Americans waste their money and troops” (Annette Bohr, 2010: 118). However, Russia’s interest in a peaceful and stable Afghanistan led Russia to compromise with some of the American policies in the region and it does not want a hasty American withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, after Russia’s interest to see Northern Alliance dominated by Tajiks and Uzbeks in power was resisted by the American forces and Karzai, a Pastun and pro-American leader, was instituted to power, Russia tried to maintain friendly relationship with him. Russia’s Foreign Minister Ivanov said, Moscow was “far from indifferent to what position a new Afghan leadership will adopt in respect to Russia” (Mike Bowker, 2007: 92). Ivanov wanted ‘stable and friendly relations’ and to this end, met with Karzai on a number of occasions. Furthermore, within days of the fall of the Taliban, Russia provided emergency aid to Afghanistan which “helped avert a large-scale humanitarian disaster in the region”, and thereafter sought to work with the UN and Karzai government to help rebuild a strong and stable Afghanistan (Mike Bowker, 2007: 92).

Later, American criticism of Karzai’s incompetence distanced him from the US. This came as an opportunity for Russia to increase its relationship with Karzai at the cost of the US. Karzai repeatedly tried to use the Russian option while dealing with the US/NATO. On the other hand the Russian Federation was one of the first foreign states to welcome both presidential and provincial council election results in 2009 (Humera Iqbal, 2010: 80). Russia welcomed the returning of Karzai to power as a
stabilising factor for the political development of Afghanistan. Russia wanted to further cooperation at all levels political, economic and humanitarian as well as anti-terror fight with the approval of the Karzai government. To strengthen the relationship with Afghanistan, Russia wrote off 93 per cent Soviet-era debts (Humera Iqbal, 2010: 80). Since 2007 Russia’s intelligence apparatus reactivated their relations with the Northern Alliance members and warlords and Russia re-opened its consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif in a bid to promote its interest in Afghanistan. While not contributing troops to Afghanistan, Russia responded positively to the Karzai government’s request for military equipment supplies. Russia along with Iran opposed the US led Taliban reconciliation strategy. It is of the view that any reconciliation strategy that is proposed has to be Afghan led. Russia has so far successfully used Iran’s nuclear programme as trump card in its geopolitical game with the west. It does not want a political resolution to the Iranian nuclear issue as such a resolution could only come about if Iran halted its nuclear programme in exchange for massive Western investment, security guarantees, and recognition of Iran as the West’s principal partner in the Islamic world. As a result, the West would find in Iran the best possible pipeline route option to export the Central Asian energy resources bypassing Russia (Yuri E. Fedorov, 2009: 312-313). Russia wants that the political and military resources of the west to be focused on Iran. Russia has so far vetoed all effective sanctions against Iran as it thinks that would lead to a political resolution to the Iranian issue. Iran is content with Russia’s investment in its nuclear programme.

Russia in order to lessen its dependence on the US to fight terrorism and drug-trafficking and gain some control over radical groups tried to develop relationship with Pakistan. The example of this is the quadrupartite summit of Russia, Pakistan and Tajikistan hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev in August 2010 at the Black Sea resort, Sochi where Moscow decisively moved to de-hyphenate its relationship with Islamabad and New Delhi. Sochi was a turning point in a sense that Mr. Medvedev’s bilateral meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit was marked by uncharacteristic warmth and both the leaders decided to have “very regular and frequent contacts” and engage in “good political dialogue” unlike in the past (Vladimir Radyuhin, Sep 9: 2010).

Russia’s President Medvedev has also pressed for an increased regional involvement in the Afghan problems, not only with the collaboration of the Central Asian republics and other regional states, such as Pakistan, but also with the SCO (Maria Raquel Freire, 2009: 134). Afghanistan, in turn, has expressed its willingness to gain maximum assistance possible from the platforms of CSTO and SCO. In March 2009, the SCO held a special conference on Afghanistan in Moscow which aimed at establishing the SCO as an important stakeholder or investor in the security and stability of Afghanistan. In order to check the Chinese influence in the region, Russia is also promoting CSTO-SCO cooperation.

There are instances of consultations between India, Iran and Russia to devise ways and means to deal with the Afghan problem. For example, Russia’s first Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov, India’s Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao and Iran’s Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Ali Fathollahi sought closer coordination between their countries to keep the Taliban out of power (Russia-Iran-India alliance, Nov 20: 2010). However, the consultations between these countries are sporadic and there is nothing like Russia-Iran-India alliance has come into existence on the Afghan issue.

The bottom-line of Russia’s interest in Afghanistan is securing a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. To attain this objective, Russia lent quick support to the US-led War on Terror. It agreed to the American
need of establishing bases in Central Asia. It provided emergency aid to Afghanistan saving it from a humanitarian disaster. It cooperated and maintained friendly relationship with the Karzai government in its initial stages knowing that it was pro-US.

However, whenever opportunity arose, Russia did not hesitate to hinder American interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan. After the Andijon incident in Uzbekistan, Russia tried to rollback the US’s influence in the region. It did not contribute its troops to Afghanistan although the US requested for the same as it might have believed that loss of American troops and money would rob its energy to project its power in a region vital to Russia’s interest. Even while both Russia and the US established military bases in different parts of Central Asia, their direct contacts have been surprisingly limited. In April 2005, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said “Russian and US military bases in Kyrgyzstan are not bothering each other” (Richard Weitz, 2006: 162). Nevertheless, it did not want the situation in Afghanistan to deteriorate to such an extent that problems of terrorism and drug-trafficking would engulf the entire region and therefore there was cooperation between the US and Russia. But the cooperation was far from being full-fledged. It is argued that Russia is interested in an unstable Afghanistan where role of the radical groups is partly curtailed by the US and international actors. It exploited the unstable situation in Afghanistan to tighten its grip over Central Asia. However, to contain American interest in Afghanistan as it is already noted, Russia called for a larger role of the regional organisations like SCO and CSTO in securing security and stability in Afghanistan, reactivated its old relationship with the Northern Alliance, assured Karzai of its support when the US criticised him as incompetent and welcomed the 2009 election results which the US alleged to be fraud. Karzai, in turn, used Russia as an option to deal with the West. It has also diplomatically handled Iran and Pakistan to undercut American influence in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

After disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia’s role became more defensive in relation to Afghanistan and offensive in relation to Central Asia. Russia became busy in finding ways and means to keep the divided heartland under its control. Russia seemed neither interested nor capable in securing a pro-Russian regime in Afghanistan as was the case during the Cold War. Russia, to contain the two non-conventional threats namely drug-trafficking and Islamic fundamentalism emerging from Afghanistan, required the American presence - a conventional threat in the region. Therefore, it facilitated the American presence in the region to conduct its War on Terror, though not unconditionally. However, Russia seems to be aware of the American plan to install a pro-US regime in Afghanistan. Therefore, it has reactivated its relationship with the Northern Alliance since 2007 to hinder American interest in Afghanistan. In order to contain the influence of the US in the region, it has taken recourse to multilateral bodies like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Diplomatically, Russia has supported Iran in its nuclear programme and opposed heavy sanctions against it. Russia believes the continuing stalemate on nuclear issue would sap American energy and weaken its role in the region. Iran and Russia share the common perception on the American intentions in the region. Both countries agree that any reconciliation strategy to include the Taliban must be Afghan-led rather than being American-led. Russia perceives threat from the long-term presence of American forces in Afghanistan and existence of military bases in Central Asian states. At
times, Russia has stipulated that American forces must leave the region after the war on terror comes to a halt.

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This paper is the second part of a trilogy concerning Afghanistan’s recent past. The concluding part will appear in the next issue and is entitled ‘Afghanistan and US Interests in Central Asia’. — Editor