Disertační práce

2015 Hrishabh Sandilya
The Geopolitical Determinants of India’s Central Asia Strategy

Disertační práce

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Keywords

Abstract

This dissertation aims to identify the drivers and determinants of Indian strategy and policy with regard to the five post-Soviet, Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan within a geopolitical framework. Contemporary scholarship recognises three determinants (drivers) of Indian strategy in the region – security and strategic necessity, energy diversification given Central Asia’s abundant natural resources, and, economic engagement and connectivity. Using this identification as a stepping-stone, the dissertation seeks to test the validity of these assumptions, and explore these determinants in detail. In addition, it attempts to identify other determinants of Indian strategy, and offers a conceptual framework through which to comprehend Indian agency in Central Asia.

In its exploration, the dissertation finds the initial hypothesis to be valid, and in addition suggests India’s great-power ambitions (and its subsequent use of soft power in the region) as an additional determinant of its strategy. It further argues that not only can Indian agency in Central Asia, be conceptually framed within a classical geopolitical perspective, but also suggests that the motivations for Indian agency in the region should be viewed from the lens of a nascent all-encompassing Indian grand strategy. As an ancillary objective, the dissertation offers commentary on India’s interactions with two status-quo powers in the region Russia and China, and offers some thoughts on the limited efficacy of Indian strategy and its way forward in the region. Using a qualitative case-study paradigm, empirical data was sourced from interviews conducted with Indian and Central Asian elites, and official Indian documentation and narratives on the subject in the last two decades. As its contribution to the literature, the dissertation offers a contemporary insight into Indian thinking on the region, and postulates an alternative conceptual framework using Indian grand strategy and India’s great power ambitions as explanation for its agency in the region.
Declaration

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Hrishabh Sandilya
20th September 2015,
Prague
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AF-PAK</td>
<td>Afghanistan and Pakistan</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
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<td>BHEL</td>
<td>Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited</td>
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<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
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<td>BPO</td>
<td>Business Process Outsourcing</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRIC</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, India, China [Grouping]</td>
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<td>CARs</td>
<td>Central Asian Republics</td>
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<td>CASAREM</td>
<td>Central Asia South Asia Regional Electricity Market</td>
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<td>CCA</td>
<td>Connect Central Asia</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>CICA</td>
<td>Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia</td>
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<td>CII</td>
<td>Confederation of Indian Industry</td>
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<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<td>CNPCI</td>
<td>China National Petroleum Corporation International</td>
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<td>COMINTERN</td>
<td>Communist International</td>
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<td>CSTO</td>
<td>Collective Security Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>Defence Research and Development Organization</td>
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<td>EACU</td>
<td>Eurasian Customs Union</td>
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<td>ECO</td>
<td>Economic Cooperation Organisation</td>
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<td>EEU</td>
<td>Eurasian Economic Union</td>
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<td>EIA</td>
<td>Energy Information Administration</td>
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<td>EURASEC</td>
<td>Eurasian Economic Community</td>
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<td>EXIM</td>
<td>Export Import</td>
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<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
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<td>FTA</td>
<td>Free Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>GAIL</td>
<td>Gas Authority of India Limited</td>
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<td>GCC</td>
<td>Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>HUM</td>
<td>Harkat-ul-Mujahedeen</td>
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<td>IAF</td>
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<td>IDSA</td>
<td>Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses</td>
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<td>International Energy Agency</td>
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<td>IEG</td>
<td>Institute of Economic Growth</td>
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<td>IFS</td>
<td>Indian Foreign Service</td>
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<td>IGC</td>
<td>Inter-Governmental Commission</td>
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<td>IJU</td>
<td>Islamic Jihad Union</td>
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<td>IM</td>
<td>Indian Mujahedeen</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>IMU</td>
<td>Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan</td>
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<td>INSTC</td>
<td>International North South Transport Corridor</td>
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<td>IPI</td>
<td>Iran Pakistan India [Pipeline]</td>
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<td>ISI</td>
<td>Inter Services Intelligence</td>
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<td>ISRO</td>
<td>Indian Space Research Organization</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>ITEC</td>
<td>Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation</td>
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<td>J&amp;K</td>
<td>Jammu and Kashmir</td>
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<td>JEM</td>
<td>Jaish-e-Mohammed</td>
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<td>JNU</td>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University</td>
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<td>JV</td>
<td>Joint Venture</td>
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<tr>
<td>JWG</td>
<td>Joint Working Group</td>
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<td>KIMBMRC</td>
<td>Kyrgyz-India Mountain Bio-Medical Research Centre</td>
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<td>LET</td>
<td>Lashkar-E-Taiba</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNG</td>
<td>Liquefied Natural Gas</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Line of Credit</td>
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<td>LOC</td>
<td>Line of Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>MBD</td>
<td>Million Barrels per Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEA</td>
<td>Ministry of External Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOC</td>
<td>Ministry of Commerce</td>
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<td>MOD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence</td>
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<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSCMD</td>
<td>Million Standard Cubic Metres per Day</td>
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<td>MTOE</td>
<td>Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>MW</td>
<td>Megawatts</td>
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<td>NAM</td>
<td>Non-Aligned Movement</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
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<td>NGG</td>
<td>New Great Game</td>
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<td>NHPC</td>
<td>National Hydroelectric Power Corporation</td>
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<td>NMMC</td>
<td>Navoi Mining &amp; Metallurgy Combine</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPCIL</td>
<td>Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSCS</td>
<td>National Security Council Secretariat</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSG</td>
<td>Nuclear Suppliers Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>ONGC</td>
<td>Oil and Natural Gas Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORF</td>
<td>Observer Research Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
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<td>PMO</td>
<td>Prime Minister’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Purchasing Power Parity</td>
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<td>PTA</td>
<td>Preferential Trade Agreement</td>
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<td>PwC</td>
<td>PricewaterhouseCoopers</td>
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<td>RATS</td>
<td>Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure</td>
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<td>RBI</td>
<td>Reserve Bank of India</td>
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<td>RSC</td>
<td>Regional Security Complex</td>
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<td>SCO</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organisation</td>
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<td>SIMI</td>
<td>Students Islamic Movement of India</td>
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<td>SLOC</td>
<td>Sea Lanes of Communications</td>
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<td>SREB</td>
<td>Silk Route Economic Belt</td>
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<td>TAPI</td>
<td>Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India [Pipeline]</td>
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<td>TCF</td>
<td>Trillion Cubic Feet</td>
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<td>TTP</td>
<td>Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNESCAP</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USI</td>
<td>United Services Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIF</td>
<td>Vivekananda International Foundation</td>
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<td>WNA</td>
<td>World Nuclear Association</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organization</td>
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1. Introduction

India has been the subject of much scholarly and popular discourse in recent years. As a rising power with a rapidly growing economy (estimated to be third-largest in the world in Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms), its external agency and international comportment are of great interest to a world flummoxed by its paradoxical rise – a contradiction that emerges from its concurrent status as a poor, third-world country with some of the worst rates of human development and social inclusion in the world, and as an innovative economic power, buoyed by its pool of talented English-speaking graduates and steadily growing entrepreneurial middle-class. As a result, and often driven by this irony, much scholarship and commentary have been dedicated to examining India’s international relations. In the same vein, this dissertation seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature in this field, and offer insight into Indian strategic thinking on Central Asia.

Concurrently, Central Asia too has been an area of great interest to scholars since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Initially conceived as a nascent playground for an emerging multipolar rivalry for the region’s rich energy resources and its strategic location in the heart of Asia, scholarship on the subject has come full circle, as the geopolitical complexities of the region are beginning to be better understood. While the region’s resources and location remain vital, the delicate interplay between authoritarian political regimes, religious extremism, terror and narcotics trafficking exposes the complicated matrix that external powers must engage with, as they seek to exercise agency. Developments post 9/11 have also highlighted the increasing agency of the elites of Central Asia, emboldened by their swelling wealth from the sale of resources and their iron-fisted grips on control, indicating that they are no longer puppets in hands of outside powers. With this perspective in mind, the next paragraphs explain the argument and reasoning behind this dissertation.

Much of the contemporary scholarship from both Indian and Western scholars on India’s relationship with Central Asia focuses on the region’s vitality to India’s strategic and energy security agenda, and casts the region as the key to expanding

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India’s economic sphere of influence, both as a destination and as a bridge to greater Eurasia. Framed within the perspective of a historical linkage and strong civilizational and cultural affinities between the regions, this scholarship argues India’s usefulness to the Central Asian Republics (CARS), as both an example of successful post-colonial political transformation (as a democracy) and as a benign counterweight to the other the powers in the region.

From a security standpoint, as a rising power in a troubled geopolitical environment, India has tetchy relations with its sub-continental twin, Pakistan, and its behemoth neighbour to the north, China. The three possess nuclear arsenals and India has fought wars with both, testifying to the precariousness of the situation in South Asia. With the addition of Afghanistan to this milieu, and the very real fear of the re-emergence of radical Islam and rampant terrorism after the Western withdrawal from the region, India’s worst security fears emanate from its north and west. The CARs share similar concerns, given Afghanistan’s overlapping position in South and Central Asia, and their previous experiences with religious extremism and radicalism.

In energy and economic terms, elites in India increasingly see the natural hydrocarbon and mineral resources of the CARs as vital to India’s energy security and its aims to diversify its sources. Similarly, economically they see the region as both a destination for Indian goods and services, and as a vital conduit for trade route and communication networks with the Eurasian sphere, as India seeks to build upon overland connectivity with Asia and Europe. For the CARs, too, India’s presence offers them an economic counterbalance to play against the hands of Russia and

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3 Reflecting contemporary scholarly trends, this work proceeds on the assumption that there exists an overarching Indian regional strategy for Central Asia, given the “assumed similarities” of the region’s republics. This thinking reflects the CARs’ statuses as a block of post-Soviet ethno-linguistically and religiously similar states, and their wholesale adaptation into the many geopolitical narratives that were woven around their emergence in the nineties. This view also gains traction from the discourses that external powers themselves distribute about the region, and holds true not just for India but also for China, Russia, the West, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. While one would be foolish to not to acknowledge the growing bilateralism that India also exercises with the individual CARs, this work takes the line that from the perspective of India’s international relations it is still possible to conclude that the overarching regional strategy drives Indian bilateralism in Central Asia (and not vice-versa), and should hence be the subject of study.
China, who continue to dominate the region. And, as elites in the CARs themselves acknowledge, they have less to fear from India’s growing presence in the region, than from any other powers.

Finally, in arguing India’s relevance to the CARs as a democratic, multi-ethnic, multi-religious, federal republic, Indian elites emphasise India’s cultural heritage as being deeply rooted in its Eurasian past. With this they stress the perceived cultural commonalities and the civilizational affinities between the regions, from the times of the ancient Silk Road and Buddhism, to the more contemporary love for Bollywood amongst the region’s inhabitants. Central Asian elites too are content with this approach, and both sides make extensive use of this narrative, letting it serve as a “cognitive filler” through which the reality of India’s limited contemporary engagement with the CARs, is offset by a destined “future greatness,” in their relationship premised on the successes of the past.

Given the centrality of these arguments to the discourse, this work attempts to explore them in detail, and ascertain their contemporary relevance to the dynamics of India’s relationship with the five CARs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as part of its main research objective. With this as a starting point, it also attempts to present an alternative conceptual framework for the comprehension of Indian agency in the region, premised upon the existence of an Indian-grand strategy for its interactions with the world as a rising-power. Finally, it uses India’s strategy in Central Asia as a case study to explore India’s great-power ambitions and its consequent comportments, as well as its interactions with the two dominant powers in the region, Russia and China.

1.1 Research Method

In order to investigate the determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia this work uses a qualitative paradigm. A choice of qualitative methodology allows for a holistic understanding of the doctrines and mind-sets that shape Indian strategy in the region.

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4 Ahamed, E. 'India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ Policy'. 2012. Speech at First India – Central Asia Dialogue, Bishkek.
by explaining, “why” and “how” instead of simply “what.” According to scholar Uwe Flick, qualitative research involves the appropriate choice of methods and theories; a diversity of participants and their perspectives; the reflexivity of the researcher and the subjects; and the use of varied methods and approaches. Similarly, as scholars Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon note, qualitative methods offer an approach premised on interpretation, subjectivity, and flexibility in research design. They add that the method itself is aimed toward “process rather than outcome”; in which “behaviour and situation are inextricably linked in forming experience”; and involves “an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation.”

Qualitative methods emerged out of a growing acknowledgement of the limits of quantitative research and in response to its rigidity. If quantitative research remains focussed on measuring variables and testing hypotheses, qualitative research takes a generally philosophical approach and aims to interpret the social sciences in terms of experience, comprehension and perception. This is vital in the approach used in this work, which seeks to interpret Indian motivations in the shaping of its strategy in Central Asia, and goes beyond the analysis of simple trade and economic data and bilateral security cooperation. Since the study is largely shaped by the perceptions and attitudes of Indian elites who display divergent sentiments and conceptualize India and Central Asia differently from each other, it is vital that the method selected reflects these variables and behaviours. Therefore, a qualitative paradigm was chosen, which allows for these idiosyncrasies, and yet offers a rational prism through which analysis can be performed. The following sections identify the different qualitative tools used in this work and explain the design, research questions and methodological limitations.

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8 ibid.
1.1.1 Qualitative Case Study

In their guide to qualitative case studies, scholars Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack define a qualitative case study as “an approach to research that facilitates exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources.” According to author Robert Stake, a qualitative case study is comprised of naturalistic, holist, ethnographic, phenomenological, and biographic research methods, and, he adds, “as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used.” Case studies offer flexibility that other qualitative methods cannot, given that they are designed to suit the needs of a particular case. Scholar Nerida Hyett notes that there are two schools of thought on case studies as a qualitative process, the first championed by Stake, which focuses on a social constructivist paradigm, and the second by scholar Robert Yin, which is based on post-positivist principles. The following paragraphs explain the use of a case study approach in this work, based on the rubric developed by Baxter and Jack in their guide.

Baxter and Jack who base their work on Yin’s scholarship argue that a case study design can be employed when the objective of a study is to answer how and why questions; when it is impossible to shape the behaviour of the research objects; when exploration of “contextual conditions” is necessary due to their vitality to the phenomenon; and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred. This explanation seems particularly valid in the current case, where the focus of study is the determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia, and the research objects are Indian policymaking elites, where, due to the absence of a formalised foreign policymaking institutionalised setup, the lines between the context and the phenomenon are blurred.

Baxter and Jack also argue that in order to successfully conduct a case study, it is important that “the case or unit of analysis” and “the boundaries” of the study are established. The case or unit is the “phenomenon” that will be explored, and the boundaries help delineate what is not that “phenomenon,” and hence suggest what lies outside the objective of the study. The case in question for this work could broadly be delineated as Indian strategy in Central Asia. Specifically, the aspects of the case that will be studied are: the process – how exactly is Indian strategy in Central Asia shaped? The actors – who is shaping this strategy and the determinants? And finally, what are the factors that influence this strategy? Similarly, in terms of setting boundaries for the case, Baxter and Jack suggest that this can broadly be done against the precincts of “time and place,” “time and activity,” and “by definition and context.” This work uses a timeframe to evaluate Indian strategy in Central Asia, and specifically looks at the period from the post-Soviet emergence of the CARs from late 1991 to early 2015, when the fieldwork for the study was completed. Additionally, by definition and context, this work looks at India’s relations with the five emergent CARs from within an international relations / geopolitical perspective, and, while acknowledging cultural and social elements, it focuses on a markedly political perspective.

Based on Baxter and Jack’s nomenclature for types of case studies, the research for this work was based on an “intrinsic” case study. This approach was suggested by Stake in 1995 in which he argues that an intrinsic method is undertaken to provide an enhanced understanding of a particular case. He adds that intrinsic research is not undertaken because the case is representative of other cases or traits, but because, “in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest.” This work satisfies Stakes’ conditions for an intrinsic case study, given that Indian strategy in Central Asia represents a unique situation that is independent of other cases, and that while some of the conceptual and analytical frameworks developed may have limited

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15 ibid. 545.
16 ibid.
17 ibid. 546.
18 Stake, Robert E. 1995. 237
19 ibid.
theoretical contribution to the field, they are not the primary purpose of the case study.

Additionally, the use of an intrinsic method in case study research is almost always predicated on having a single case for study. As Baxter and Jack explain, however, it is possible to have a single case with “embedded units.” According to them, studying the embedded units within a case facilitates “the ability to look at sub-units that are situated within a larger case,” because “data can be analysed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis).”20 This allows for the three determinants of Indian strategy in Central Asia, which are first identified in the initial survey of literature, to be treated as “embedded units” within the larger case, and facilitates exploration of their impact on the strategy and vice-versa.

In summary, while a qualitative single case study method has considerable merits, it attracts significant criticism from scholars who see it lacking in methodological rigour and too susceptible to researcher subjectivity.21 To address this issue, this work also makes use of process tracing as a method for generating data on causal processes and analysing complex-decision making. In addition, the work makes use of elite interviewing as a complementary strategy to process tracing, which then facilitates a three-way triangulation of data, to ensure that collected data is cross-checked against multiple sources to solidify the research discoveries. The next sections offer a description of both methods in detail.

1.1.2 Process Tracing

According to authors Andrew Bennett and Alexander George, in recent times, there has been increased emphasis on “causal mechanisms” in the methodology of social sciences from scholars who seek to infer “causal processes and intervening variables through which causal or explanatory variables produce causal effects.”22 This has led

to an increasing precedence of the use of process tracing as a method for ascertaining causal mechanisms. Simply put, causality in the social sciences is established by relating an independent variable to a dependent variable and using their interaction to establish causal effect and mechanism. Therefore, according to Bennett and George, “the process tracing method attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable.”

They view process tracing as essentially complimentary to the case study process (which itself is best suited to the study of causal mechanisms) because process tracing is the most appropriate method to uncover causal mechanisms.

Similarly, scholar David Collier defines process tracing as “systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analysed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed by the investigator.” In other words, process tracing for this study involves an analysis of “diagnostic evidence,” which is gathered from a rigorous inspection of the actors, policies and events that have played a role in the aforementioned timeframe (within the last two decades) of India – Central Asia relations. This study will attempt to explain the causal link between the independent variable of “Indian strategy in Central Asia” and the dependent variables of the determinants and the country’s great power ambitions as described in the later chapters of this work. A practical example of a process tracing method would be its use in the explanation of the different iterations of India’s Central Asia policies. So, for example, if one were to examine the differences between the unarticulated “Look North” policy, which emerged in the late nineties, and the articulated “Connect Central Asia” (CCA) policy, which was announced in 2012. As this work will show, it is possible to trace the causal links between the failures of the Look North policy and the proposed remedies in the CCA policy.

In summary, process tracing offers a useful analytical tool in the study of foreign policy, and, when combined with elite interviewing, addresses some of its

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24 ibid. 210-212.

shortcomings. As scholar Oisin Tansey notes, “process tracing frequently involves the
analysis of political developments at the highest level of government, and elite actors
will thus often be critical sources of information about the political processes of
interest.”

1.1.3 Elite Interviews

Elite interviews are an invaluable qualitative method, which serve as a source of
information and provide insights into the political decision-making process. According to scholar Andraz Bozoki, elites are “those with close proximity to
power,” who influence policymaking and participate in significant decision-making
 situations. He defines elite interviews as a specific type of focussed interview,
which offers, “individual insights, first-hand accounts, and rich depth.” When used
with process tracing as part of a larger case study approach, Tansey suggests that elite
interviews provide a valuable contribution to the practice of data gathering and
analysis. In addition, he submits various uses of elite interviews. These uses and
their applicability to this work are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Tansey identifies the first use of elite interviews as “to corroborate what has been
established from other sources.” Since elite interviews rarely serve as the only or
dominant method of data gathering, they provide an expedient approach to the
triangulation and the cross-verification of other sources of data. Since elite interviews
are often the last step of the data gathering procedure, elite interviews aid in
confirmation of the accuracy of other data gathered. In terms of this study, the
contribution of elite interviews to the actual data gathering process was minimal, yet
interviews (though often with subjects that requested anonymity) with Indian
policymaking elites and senior bureaucrats did often confirm the speculations and
hunches that emerged from analysis of secondary data.

28 ibid.
29 Tansey, Oisin. 2007. 5.
30 ibid.
According to Tansey, the second purpose of elite interviews is “to establish what a set of people think.” He suggests that elite interviews help establish “the value, beliefs and attitudes” of a certain section of society within a given context, in which they play key policy-influencing roles. In this work, semi-structured interviews with different cross-sections of the Indian foreign policymaking elite provided a rich and valuable source of information on Indian attitudes and beliefs on Central Asia. This proved invaluable in the search for a suitable conceptual framework for India’s strategy in the region, and locating this strategy within a broader understanding of Indian foreign policy and grand strategy. The interviews facilitated a far deeper understanding of Indian motivations in the region, especially in discussions with serving diplomats and bureaucrats who were able share more than the “official line,” on the condition of anonymity.

Finally, Tansey suggests that elite interviews “help reconstruct an event or set of events.” He argues that this use is most relevant to process tracing, and helps connect the dots within primary and secondary data gathered from other sources by making salient elements of the political decision-making process more accessible. In the context of this work, this was brought out in interviews with members of the Indian defence establishment and the armed forces, and their explanation of India’s security and strategic concerns in Central Asia and Afghanistan. They offered explanations for events often clouded in official secrecy, and were invaluable in their contribution to explaining the causal links between India’s security concerns in Afghanistan and Pakistan (AF-PAK) and its strategy in Central Asia.

Elite interviews, while immensely beneficial to the research process, are not without their limitations. The two most significant of these are both a result of subject bias. The first is a tendency of policymakers to either play up their roles or that of their institutions in the policymaking process, and the second, on the contrary, plays down their role, if they are uncomfortable with relieving facts. As explained, above, this

31 ibid. 6.
32 ibid.
33 ibid. 7.
34 ibid. 10.
work hopes to circumvent these limitations by making use a multiple-methods approach.

1.1.4 Data Sources

Primary data for this work was obtained from multiple sources, which included official Indian documents, press releases, inter-governmental legislation and agreements, speeches, annual reports, trade data and interviews. In India, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Ministry of Defence (MOD), the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) play a pivotal role in shaping the country’s international relations. This work therefore relied on analysis of official discourse from these sources and archives for the triangulation of views gathered from interviews.

A majority of primary interviews with policymaking elites were conducted during fieldwork and a visiting fellowship for the author at the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in New Delhi from October 2014 to February 2015. IDSA occupies a special place within the Indian foreign policy decision-making mechanism as an official, yet autonomous, think-tank of the MOD, which shares a close relationship with the MEA and the NSCS. The appointment of the Director General of IDSA as the Deputy National Security Advisor to the new BJP-led government in August 2014, serves as a testament to the importance of the institution within Delhi’s political elite. The fellowship at IDSA permitted a conducive research environment, with many of the interviewees being affiliated with the institution in some way. In addition, the IDSA library served as a valuable source of certain archival data.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted with elites in Delhi and Mumbai, with each interview lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. In total, 29 in-depth interviews were conducted. Indian interviewees included senior serving and retired officials at the MEA and MOD, retired and serving diplomats, senior armed forces officers, academics, researchers, public intellectuals and journalists. In addition to Indian interviewees, interviews were conducted with senior Afghan and Central Asian diplomats posted in Delhi, and a visiting Kazakh academic. Given the relevance of this analysis to India’s contemporaneous strategy in the region, and the
fact that interviewees included serving or recently retired officials, names of certain sources have been kept confidential (when requested).

This work was also informed by various shorter field assignments in India and Eurasia from 2008 onwards. These included trips to Azerbaijan (2013, 2014) and Turkey (2008, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2015), along with extended annual visits to Mumbai and Delhi. While these trips did not involve interviews or primary data gathering, they did facilitate extensive discussions on the subject with scholars of Central Asia and India, and the insight gathered was instrumental in shaping this dissertation. A final source of primary data was the press (both Indian and foreign) and current affairs websites. The work analyses public utterances of Indian elites in print journals like *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The Hindustan Times*, *The Mint*, *The Times of India*, *The Economic and Political Weekly*, *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy* and online sites like *The Diplomat* and *Asia Times* to supplement its observations.

Secondary data for this work was mostly obtained from books, journal articles, conference papers, research papers, various websites and newspaper reports. The secondary data served as a valuable source for background information on India-Central Asia relations, aided in the creation of a conceptual framework to comprehend Indian strategy, and provided a base through which Indian success or failure in the region could be evaluated.

1.1.5 Research Design

The research for this work was designed along the following methodological paradigms in order to render an epistemologically suitable analysis. (See Figure 1)

An initial survey of the literature on the subject of India and Central Asia at the time of the submission of the dissertation proposal yielded what this work has identified as the three determinants of Indian strategy in the region. These were security and strategic concerns, energy diversification and cooperation motivations, and ambitions to increase trade and connectivity across Eurasia.
With these in mind the work set out achieve three specific objectives and test hypotheses through the fieldwork and a thorough review of the data and literature; namely

- To seek a deeper understanding of the three determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia – specifically, an exploration of the various domestic and external forces that shaped these determinants.
- To examine whether a conceptual or analytical framework could be applied to the comprehension of the geopolitics of Indian strategy in Central Asia, based on its greater foreign policy and grand strategic interests.
- To investigate potential additional vectors or determinants that shaped Indian strategy in Central Asia that were related to its greater foreign policy interests that went beyond the region.

The study was based on qualitative research with extensive fieldwork in India (New Delhi and Mumbai) for primary data gathering, where elite interviews and the gathering of official Indian governmental documents and archival research were conducted. In addition to this, a rigorous secondary data investigation was performed, using contemporary literature and a host of secondary sources including analyses by Indian scholars and researchers.

The study yielded positive results, which are extrapolated in the form of the body of this dissertation. A far greater understanding of the three determinants identified in the initial research objectives was obtained, and an additional dynamic was identified. Based on the causal relations inferred, it was also possible to frame Indian agency in Central Asia within both a geopolitical reading and as part of a greater Indian grand strategy. This grand strategic perspective was closely linked to India’s great power aspirations, which in turn drove India’s aspirations to succeed in Central Asia and as such formed the fourth determinant of its strategy.

As an ancillary objective, the final step of the study involved an examination of India’s interplay with the international system and other powers in Central Asia, and an evaluation of its agency in order to understand the reasons for its limited success in
the region. In addition, some suggestions to the way forward in Central Asia are offered in the conclusion.

1.1.6 Research Questions

The work addresses the following research questions in its endeavour to address the research objectives identified previously.

Main Research Question
What are the determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia and what are the national, regional and international dynamics that shape these determinants?

Additional Questions that Supplement the Main Research Question
What are the historical trends that shape the contemporaneous interactions between India and the Central Asian states?
Are there particular conceptual and analytical frameworks through which Indian motivations and agency in Central Asia can be understood? If so, do they justify the initial hypothesis and identification of determinants?
In strategic terms, what are the regional security concerns of the CARs and the national security objectives of India that foster engagement between the two in this field?
What drives India to seek energy cooperation with the CARs and what is the current state of this cooperation?
What are the greater motivations for Indian trade and economic engagement with the CARs?
What are India’s great-power ambitions and how are they linked to its strategy in Central Asia?
How does India exercise its soft power and use its cultural capital in the region?
How has India interacted with other powers in Central Asia – both in bilateral and multilateral terms?
What are the reasons for India’s limited success in the region so far?
Figure 1 – Research Design
1.2 Literature Review

The purpose of a literature review within an academic work is to provide a standing for the work within contemporaneous literature and scholarship in the field of study. A literature review is a summate display of an author’s awareness of the field in question.¹ This knowledge extends to a cognizance of the related terminology, theoretical persuasions, phenomenological considerations, research methods and history that has been discussed and presented by other authors. A literature review, however, is not meant to be a simple consolidation of sources; it is instead meant to be a critical review of contemporaneous literature, where an interpretative reading is provided in order to synthesise information gathered and relate it to the work in question.² It is also through a literature review that gaps in current scholarship and thinking on the field in question are identified, and it is in addressing these gaps, that unique individual contributions (the sole purpose of doctoral dissertations) are made, contributing to the broadening of the intellectual scope of the field. Before a review of the literature relevant to this work is provided, it is important to note the following from an organizational perspective.

Given the larger than usual scope of the research objectives of this work, it would be an exercise in prolixity to attempt to review all the relevant literature within this section. Therefore, according to the classification system of the focus of literature reviews developed by scholar HM Cooper, this section focuses in depth on the research outcomes of the work as a whole.³ A deeper discussion of the literature germane to the various chapters (history, analytical framework and determinants) in this work is also provided within the body of each chapter (section) in greater detail. This division of the literature review across the dissertation facilitates both a greater critical discussion of each element of the work, and ensures a more relevant

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³ HM Cooper suggests a five dimensional taxonomy for literature reviews based on their characteristics: focus, goal, perspective, coverage, organization, and audience. Scholar Justus Randolph interpreting Cooper’s taxonomy argues that there exist four potential foci, and reviews focused on research outcomes are the most common. See, Cooper, Harris M. 'Organizing Knowledge Syntheses: A Taxonomy Of Literature Reviews'. Knowledge in Society 1.1 (1988): 104-126. Print. and Randolph, Justus J. 2009.
chronological structure, without having to constantly refer back to the first chapter when additional critique is sought.

1.2.1 Literature Relevant to the Overall Outcomes of this Work

Given the broad scope identified in the research objectives of this work, the first discussion of relevant literature must take place at the Meta level of works with similar overall objectives to this one. Given that the CARs came into existence a little more than two decades ago, only three such pieces of contemporaneous scholarship that focus on the holistic analysis of Indian policy in the region, and are rigorous enough their examination, have been identified. The most significant of these is Mapping Central Asia: Indian Perceptions and Strategies by scholars Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse. Published in 2011, the book is an edited volume of essays by Indian scholars with expertise on Central Asia, AF-PAK, China and Russia. The work is divided into three sections, the first focuses on the history of India’s engagement in the region, the second on the contemporary relationship, and the third on flashpoints like Tibet, Kashmir and Xinjiang – and what role they play. The essays by the Indian experts are largely descriptive and provide a valuable source of data, and are used extensively within the body of this work, given their basis in primary archival sources and the fact that many of these authors comprise parts of the Indian elite who were interviewed for this work. As scholar Joshua Kucera notes, the major contribution of the volume itself is the analysis put forward by the two editors Laruelle and Peyrouse, which offers a “critical and sophisticated interpretation of this understudied issue.” The contributions of Laruelle and Peyrouse with regard to this work, and the global scholarship on the subject are now discussed.

In the introduction, they talk of two “paradoxes” within India – Central Asia relations that motivated them to create this work. The first concerned the mismatch between the intense speculation by scholars and experts about India’s huge potential in the region and the sad reality of its actual engagement so far. The second was seen as the lack of codification of Indian elite thinking on the issue within Western scholarship

4 Laruelle, Marlène, and Sébastien Peyrouse. 2011.
on the subject. Addressing both of these issues were also amongst the broader objectives of this doctoral work,\(^7\) which also gives a voice to Indian elite articulations in its explanation of the determinants of Indian strategy in region, and, in the final chapter, evaluates the effectiveness of Indian agency in the region, and attempts to explain its lack of effect.

Laruelle, writing in the first chapter of the work, presents various analytical frameworks through which she attempts to deconstruct the agency of external actors in the region. She prefaces her work by suggesting that the geopolitical and historical readings that are offered by elites and scholars as cognitive structures to comprehend the action of external agency should be seen as part of a process of “mythmaking.” According to her, actors in the region (including India) must “legitimate their foreign policy decisions to their public,” by making use of “cultural symbols and legitimating arguments.”\(^8\) She adds that Central Asia is unique in this respect because this is taking place on two levels: First, within the CARs, as leaders seek backing from their societies to supplement their nation-building processes; and, second, between great and secondary powers who use this as a device in their own competition for the region.\(^9\) This view is echoed within the literature (by scholar Emilian Kavalski) and discussed in the last chapter of this work, which seeks to explain the mismatch between the actuality of Indian agency, and the speculation about its inherent potential in the region.

Laruelle first explores a geopolitical reading of the agency of external actors in Central Asia in the post-Cold War period. Much of her focus is spent on a critique of the most popular of the conjectural frameworks for explaining Central Asia today, the “Great Game.” She suggests that it revives old Orientalist and Romanticist notions of eastern mystery and colonial adventure, propagated as a cognitive moniker by Western scholars who seek justification for European and American involvement in

\(^7\)A revised dissertation proposal was submitted in May 2010 to the Institute of Political Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University, in which these developing aspects were clearly identified as a potential contribution of the work to the scholarly discourse. At the time of submission, Laruelle and Peyrouse’s work was yet to be published.

\(^8\) Laruelle, Marlène, and Sébastien Peyrouse. 2011. 8.

\(^9\) ibid.
the region. She adds that because it is so deterministic in its assumptions, it holds little validity today, since Asia is no longer divided between imperial Britain and tsarist Russia. Instead, she argues that the CARs are not “mere pawns” in the hands of external powers, and are independent actors capable of making their own foreign policy decisions. She is similarly contemptuous of the implications of Halford Mackinder’s “Heartland” theory and its more recent exploration in the work of Zbigniew Brzezinski, which suggests that the control of Eurasia (and Central Asia) enables global primacy. Yet she acknowledges that this thinking has shaped many of the new conjectural frameworks applied to the region by scholars and countries themselves, and emphasizes the need to comprehend this new ideologized geopolitics in their work. Finally, she discusses the conceptualization of the “New Silk Road” and its use within the discourse of China, India, the United States and other major powers, arguing that the Silk Road presents countries with an opportunity to play up cultural, civilizational and trade links, lending a special “national flavour” to the discourse. (For more on the Great Game, Heartland and the New Silk Road conjectural frameworks, see the third chapter of this work.)

Looking specifically at India, she critiques another cognitive structure that is offered by Indian elites to explain their country’s agency in the region: historical analogy. She suggests that Indian scholarship on the subject is stooped in history, using collective memory of a glorious shared past, “tinged with specific national elements,” to argue a great future for relations between India and the CARs. She argues that while the use of the Great Game, the Heartland and the New Silk Road frameworks as an explanation of Indian agency is valid for the agency of other powers as well, the use of historical analogy as a basis to explain a great potential for the present, is a uniquely Indian approach. To her, this “legitimization of the current situation,” through the use of references to histories and civilization, represents a form of “discursive inflation” that India uses to make up for its lacking in Central Asia, and she cautions against reading too much into Indian elite articulations that use this.

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10 ibid. 9.
11 ibid.
12 ibid. 11.
13 ibid. 12.
14 ibid. 12.
This work accepts this specific aspect of her criticism, and in the next chapter attempts to abjure from this discursive inflation in describing the shared histories of the region.

In her explanation of frameworks offered to deconstruct Indian strategy in Central Asia, Laruelle does not offer a particularly Indian point of view. That is to say she does not frame Central Asia within a broader perspective of India’s international relations. As mentioned, above, the geopolitical frameworks she critiques are general and have been used to explain the agency of other powers in the region as well. She does not critique or provide an explanation of India – Central Asia ties as a subset of an Indian grand strategy and, therefore, eschews an explanation of some of the greater objectives of Indian foreign policy and how this resonates in its ambitions in Central Asia. Her explanation of things from the perspective of India’s international relations is limited to a critique of the use of historical analogies, and a reduction of India-Central Asia ties to simply an element of mythmaking within Indian foreign policy.

This dissertation offers two criticisms of Laruelle’s offered conceptual framework for India – Central Asia relations in the first chapter of the book. The first suggests that Laruelle’s dismissal of geopolitical readings (the Great Game, Heartland, New Silk Road) as a framework for the comprehension of outside agency in Central Asia is perhaps in haste. It accepts her contention that these frameworks need to be nuanced, yet as it argues, in the third chapter, the fact that these articulations continue to find favour in the works of scholars, political elites and even official discourse of countries involved in the regions makes a strong case for their use in explaining India’s involvement in the region. Second, this dissertation posits that while India’s efforts so far have amounted to little, to reduce India’s motivations in the region simply to mythmaking is unfair, and does not take into account the broader complexities of its international relations. It therefore identifies these elements as one of the gaps in the literature, and uses an explanation of Indian grand strategy to frame its agency in Central Asia. This is done in addition to the geopolitical frameworks that Laruelle suggests, and argues for the partial validity of the Great Game, Heartland and New Silk Road approaches.
Other significant contributions of Laruelle and Peyrouse’s work can be found in chapter six: Peyrouse’s commentary on articulations of Indian involvement in Central Asia. To him, India’s late start in the region in the nineties was understandable due to the country’s focus on domestic issues and its faltering economy. However, as he notes, it is its later failure that is more serious and a symptom of a greater systematic malaise. He notes that India’s inability to position itself as a “model” to the CARs or as a country that can “lead the way,” has cost it posturing ability. He says that this is in part because India’s democratic status creates doubts in the minds of Central Asian elites as to its intentions; yet India’s refusal to play up its democratic values costs it normative support from the opposition and civil society. Thus India is playing a losing game to China and Russia, with whom the authoritarian elites are happy to work, and to the West, because they openly support Central Asian civil society. This is an important observation, and shapes the tone of the evaluation of Indian strategy in the last chapter of this dissertation. Similarly, in the conclusion, Laruelle and Peyrouse note the huge potential that exists for India – Central Asia ties, and posit that, should India be able to get its game together, several economic niches and avenues for security and energy cooperation exist, which India could use to extend its presence in the region. However, as they add, the large amount of geopolitical uncertainty that surrounds the broader region in areas like Kashmir, Tibet and Xinjiang is out India and CARs’ control, and this aspect will need to be addressed before India can envisage a presence that matches that of China and Russia.

In summary, the volume is a germinal contribution to contemporary literature on India – Central Asia relations, and, given its wide focus that cuts across the fields of geopolitics, history, economics, foreign policy and society, it remains the first choice of students seeking to comprehend India’s motivations and the actions of its agency in Central Asia. As explained above, it suggests a range of conceptual frameworks that provide a suitable prism through which Indian strategy in the region can be understood. In its explanation of Indian behaviour in the nineties and after, it offers valuable insight into understanding the lack of influence of Indian strategy, something

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16 ibid. 79.
that Indian scholars and experts rarely comment upon. Finally, its nuanced optimism and suggestions for what the future might hold for India and Central Asia are reflective of the reality of contemporary ties and remain grounded.

Another significant work on the subject of India’s involvement in Central Asia is the Nirmala Joshi edited volume, *Reconnecting India and Central Asia: Emerging Security and Economic Dimensions* published in 2010.\(^{18}\) The work explores the security and economic extents of India – Central Asia ties, giving voice to the thinking of Indian elites on the subject of Central Asia. Joshi, writing in the introduction of the book, frames India’s ties with Central Asia through the very same analogies that Laruelle criticizes, linking past relationships and cultural affinity to explain the potential of contemporaneous bonds. Joshi chooses not to present an ideological or conjectural framework through which to analyse India’s involvement in Central Asia in her introduction, given the fact that the book itself reads like a collection of related academic articles, rather than a running narrative. She instead proposes a regional solution, focusing on the neoliberal concept of Greater Central Asia,\(^{19}\) formed by the overlap of the South and Central Asian economies and trade infrastructures, and argues that while current conditions might preclude India from taking this idea forward, the “efficacy and validity of the idea are not in doubt.”\(^{20}\)

Joshi’s introduction is followed by a chapter on the *Strategic Environment in Central Asia and India* written by scholars Arun Sahgal and Vinod Anand. Sahgal and Anand adroitly identify the prevalent security conditions in both India and Central Asia that drive the two to cooperation in the field.\(^{21}\) Their work is a realist analysis of the geostrategic relevance of Central Asia, and they posit that the Heartland theory and its later exploration on Brzezinski’s work provide a valuable structure for the comprehension of the geopolitics of the region. They explain the complicated internal dynamics of Central Asia, and contrast the various faces of the agency exercised by

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\(^{18}\) Joshi, Nirmala. 2010.


\(^{20}\) Joshi, Nirmala. 2010. 32.

outside players like China, Russia and the West against each other. To them, the salience of Central Asia lays in the region’s hydrocarbon reserves and the fact that it lays at the “crossroads” of important trans-continental pipelines, communication links and multi-modal transportation networks. They frame Afghanistan as a vital geopolitical bridge that links Central and South Asia, and it is through Afghanistan that India seeks ties with Central Asia along the “energy and security” vectors. They also hint that Indian strategy in Central Asia and Afghanistan is closely linked to an emerging grand strategic vision for its relations with the world, particularly China and Asia. Though they do not indulge in a thorough discussion of this dimension, they do introduce the “Mandala” concept, which serves as a valuable starting point for linking it to the extensive discussion this dissertation provides on Indian grand strategy and the “Concentric Circles,” which is provided in the chapter three.

Joshi, writing in the third chapter, *Responses to Non-Traditional Threats & Challenges*, provides valuable commentary on the linkages between cross-border terror, Islamic radicalism, narcotics and weapons trafficking, and India’s domestic security concerns. She highlights the delicate interplay and the commonality of these threats to both India and the CARs, which arise from extremist groups like the Taliban, and the jihadi Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). To India, the predominance of the Taliban in Afghanistan goes hand-in-hand with the impudence with which Pakistani-sponsored terror groups operate in Kashmir. For the CARs, the Taliban support of the IMU and other Central-Asian jihadi networks has caused serious unrest in restive parts of the region like the Fergana valley. While Joshi misses out on the opportunity to link the Islamic radicalism that emanates from the broader South – Central Asia region to India’s delicate domestic ethno-religious make-up (which this dissertation does in the fourth chapter), she provides a valuable starting point for this analysis, which is provided in the fourth chapter of this work. Her coverage of the threats posed by drug trafficking, which stems from illicit poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, and the movement of weapons across the regions, and the

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22 ibid. 37.
23 ibid. 57.
24 ibid. 58-59.
responses of both the Indian and Central Asian governments, also serves as food for thought and is used as a base for further exploration later in this dissertation.

The final chapter, written by scholar Gulshan Sachdeva, focuses on *Regional Economic Linkages* and puts forward a neo-liberal trade argument for increased cooperation between India and the CARs, which, is argued, will generate prosperity and peace in the regions. Sachdeva contends that the opening up of the Indian economy and the transformation of the post-Soviet economies of the CARs in the nineties has ensured that the conditions to facilitate trade are in place, and this can drive economic cooperation. He also proposes that India’s motivations for economic engagement with the CARs go beyond simple trade overtures. Finally, he suggests that India seeks to cement a place for itself in the evolving “Asian economic architecture,” and that it sees access to Central Asia as a stepping-stone to economic engagement with the Eurasian continent. According to him, India does this in two ways: First, with its focus on Central Asia as a valuable potential resource for hydrocarbons, as India desperately tries to diversify sources for its increasingly energy-hungry economy; and, second, with its emphasis on the development of a number of trans-Eurasian pipelines, road and rail links, and communication networks, and its participation in a number of regional security and economic arrangements.

In summary, the overall contribution of this volume to this dissertation and the body of literature is its robust analysis of the dimensions of Indian strategy in Central Asia. Given its analytic focus, though, it does not offer a comprehensive conceptual argument for India’s engagement with the CARs over the last two decades. However, when combined with the conceptual arguments and conjectural frameworks proposed by Laruelle, Peyrouse and Kavalski (discussed next), it affords a deeper explanation of the action of Indian agency in Central Asia, a theme that this dissertation explores. Finally, this dissertation uses the primary dimensions of Indian strategy in Central Asia (strategic, (energy) security, and economic) as identified by Joshi, Sahgal, Anand and Sachdeva and develops these into what it considers the four determinants.

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27 ibid. 116.
of Indian policies in the region. This dissertation takes much inspiration from the way the dimensions are extrapolated in this volume, and maintains a similar style in its explanation of the determinants.

Finally, Kavalski’s *India and Central Asia: The Mythmaking and Relations of a Rising Power* remains a significant contribution to the literature on India’s international relations, and has proved to be a valuable guide for this dissertation.28 Rather than being a text that investigates India – Central Asia relations per se, it is essentially an exploration of how India’s foreign policy is deeply impacted by its domestic politics, and uses India’s “Look North” policy in Central Asia as a case study. Kavalski suggests that to frame Indian agency in Central Asia in geopolitical or grand strategic terms is moot, because, like Peyrouse and Laruelle confirm, this is essentially discursive inflation. Kavalski attributes geopolitical readings of Indian agency and the use of historical analogies to scholars taken in by the mythmaking of Indian elites, who do so to accommodate domestic interests. As scholar Varun Vira notes, Kavalski argues that India has increasingly relied on a “manufactured narrative of self-aggrandizement,” where it constructs myths around its actions to assertively posture itself on the global stage.29 According to Kavalski, this mythmaking has emerged in the shape of a more aggressive and militaristic foreign policy, which India adopted after the 1998 nuclear tests, and has an unabashedly resurgent Hindu nationalist hue, reflective of India’s “internal afflictions.”30 The “Look North” strategy of a renascent Indian foreign policy therefore represents one of the best examples of Indian mythmaking, in which it has argued historical and civilizational greatness, and attempted strategic cooperation with the CARs with its new-found status as a nuclear power. This dissertation, however, disagrees with Kavalski’s claim that Indian strategy in Central Asia can be reduced simply to a definition of narrative aggrandizement of ambitions for a domestic audience, and, while acknowledging its role in highlighting the deficiencies in India’s international relations, strongly argues a geopolitical and grand strategic reading (in the third chapter of this work).

This dissertation also engages with Kavalski’s contention that the Look North policy had no influence; in the final chapter of this dissertation India’s strategy in Central Asia is evaluated and Kavalski’s claims of the lack of “attraction” of the Indian model is discussed.\(^{31}\) Kavalski’s exploration of India’s relationship with China, Russia and the West is also used as a springboard for this dissertation’s own discussion on India’s interplay with other powers in the region (this also occurs in the final chapter). In summary, Kavalski’s work provides an important alternative perspective (if somewhat critical) to framing Indian agency and comprehending the reasons for its lack of success in Central Asia. While not entirely accepting of Kavalski’s contentions as “institutionalised realities,”\(^{32}\) this work acknowledges his contributions to the global body of literature on the subject, and engages with it throughout the text in a number of chapters.

1.2.2. Contributions of this Work to the Literature

Having afforded a discussion of the relevant literature and the resulting gaps in scholarship on the subject of Indian agency in Central Asia, the contributions of this work to the literature are now identified.

As noted above, one of the shortcomings in the contemporary literature that theorises India’s motivations and agency in Central Asia is the lack of a rational, India-specific conceptual framework (from the perspective of India’s international relations). Laruelle offers several strong geopolitical and critical history approaches to framing India–Central Asia ties, yet, as she suggests herself, these are not specific to India and can be used to comprehend the motivations of others powers (most significantly China). This is the case, too, for Sahgal and Anand’s approach, which provides a decidedly deterministic geopolitical reading of Indian motivations in the region. In contrast, Kavalski does offer an India specific approach, which frames Central Asia within India’s international relations, yet this ultra-critical reading, which essentially reduces India’s agency to mythmaking and dismisses its intentions as discursive inflation, does not provide a fair matrix (as the last chapter of this dissertation argues) to assess Indian strategy. Therefore (in the third chapter), this dissertation makes a

\(^{31}\) ibid. 200.

\(^{32}\) Vira, Varun. 2010.
theoretical case to envision Indian engagement in Central Asia as part of an all-encompassing grand strategy, which shapes its interactions with the outside world and is reflective of its great-power ambitions. This grand strategic perspective has been used successfully by scholars to explain Indian agency in other parts of the world, and, as this work argues, it can be applied to the case of Central Asia as well. Therefore this dual framework approach of geopolitics and grand strategy to understanding India’s engagement with Central Asia is offered as one of the scholarly contributions of this work to the subjective discourse (while individually not exceptional, the combination and duality of the conjectural approaches remains unique.)

The second contribution of this work is closely linked to the first. This work posits that India’s aspirations to great-power status are a major determinant of its strategy in Central Asia. As this dissertation argues in the sixth chapter, India sees its success or failure in the region as having a major bearing on its international standing and its ambitions as a rising power in the new world order. These ambitions, which also form the conceptual underpinnings of its grand strategy, are exercised through its soft power in Central Asia. The reasons for suggesting this identification (of India’s great-power ambitions as the final determinant of its strategy in Central Asia) as a contribution to the literature are now expounded.

As evidenced by the initial survey of literature, a number of scholars and experts, including Joshi and the authors in her edited text, identify security, energy and economic drivers of Indian strategy in the region. This explanation finds favour from within the viewpoints of interviewed Indian elites, and is echoed by official discourse on the subject. However, as this dissertation argues later, limiting the understanding of Indian motivations and agency in Central Asia to these three drivers and shared cultural affinities, belies the existence of a holistic grand strategy, which shapes India’s foreign policy and takes domestic interests into account. Therefore, this dissertation posits, that while India’s security, energy security and economic motivations to have a presence in Central Asia are real, they should be seen as vectors of a greater Indian grand strategy in the region, which is based on its very real great-power ambitions. The work thus argues that a connection must be made between India’s great-power aspirations and its strategic use of soft power in Central Asia, and
that this should be seen as the final determinant of its strategy, which in fact guides all of the others determinants.

The third contribution of this work to the literature in the field is its articulation of the thoughts of Indian elites on the subject of India – Central Asia relations. Laruelle and Peyrouse suggest that this is a contribution of their work, too. However, the contributions in their volume are decidedly scholastic, and are essentially articulations of Indian academics and researchers’ thoughts on the subject. What this work offers that is different from these, is a policymaker’s perspective, and an outlook from the field. This brings in an additional dynamic, shaped by the pragmatism of working in a political and diplomatic environment, which, occasionally, academic articulations cannot offer. This is not to say that scholastic thinking on the subject is not important, and does not shape policy. It does, and in fact many of the authors in Laruelle and Peyrouse’s volume were actually interviewed in the course of research for this work. However, the fact that this dissertation was supplemented by discussions with serving and retired senior bureaucrats and diplomats in the MEA, security and policy wonks in the MOD, members of the National Security establishment and the armed forces, and that many of their sentiments are echoed in the later chapters, suggests that it offers contributions to the literature that other works so far have not managed.

The final contribution of this work is the timeliness and relevance of its entire analysis on the subject of Indian motivations and agency in Central Asia, over other contemporary scholarship on the subject. There are two arguments that support this conclusion: First, other major scholarship on the subject is at least five years old (if not older) and does not account for the fluidity of the international environment, leading, as this works shows, to appear out of sync with current realities. Also, five years is a significant period when one considers that the entire timeframe of the subject of study (India – Central Asia relations) is a little more than two decades old. Second, this work has been able to account for, and offers commentary on, the effects of the significant tactical and geopolitical events that have occurred in the strategic neighbourhoods of India and Central Asia that older scholarship does not. Some of these include the consequences of the Western troop withdrawal from Afghanistan that began in 2014; the strengthening of the Eurasian Economic Union and the broader fallout of the crisis in Ukraine and Russia’s changing relations with the CARs.
and India; and the redrawing of Indian foreign policy under the BJP government of PM Narendra Modi in recent months.

1.3 Organization of Chapters

This dissertation contains six substantive chapters that explain Indian agency in Central Asia, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first two provide a historical explanation and a conjectural framework to comprehend Indian motivations in the region. The middle three chapters explain the determinants of Indian strategy and the resulting action India has taken. The final chapter provides a comparative evaluation of India’s engagement in the region.

Chapter 2, titled *India and Central Asia: Before, Between and After Empires*, provides an analytical-historical perspective for the comprehension of Indian agency in Central Asia. Closely linked to the theoretical section that follows it, the chapter also presents a basis for the comprehension of India’s geopolitical imperatives in its contemporary relations with the region. Divided into four sections, it traces the seminal moments that have shaped the overlaps of the cultural, social and geopolitical trajectories of the regions. The first addresses ancient and medieval periods, from time of the Indus-Oxus civilizations to the Mughal conquests of the 16th century. The second looks at imperial and colonial ties between the regions under the Tsarist and British empires, also taking into account the period when Indian interactions with Central Asia were moderated via Moscow, under the Soviet Union. The third provides coverage of events in the nineties, as the newly formed CARs and a more assertive India interacted without outside interference. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the fourth section covers India’s Look North and Connect Central Asia (CCA) policies, which emerged in the new millennium, predicated on the increasingly convergent security, economic and energy concerns that both regions shared.

Chapter 3, titled *The New Great Game, the Silk Road and the Notion of an Indian Grand Strategy as a Conjectural Framework*, explains the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this thesis. It provides an explanation of the analytical frameworks for the comprehension of Indian motivations and agency in the region. Using a unique dual framework approach, it argues that Indian actions in Central Asia can be
comprehended by a geopolitical reading and in framing its actions from an overall grand-strategic perspective. The geopolitical readings are based on renewed interpretations of Mackinder’s Heartland theory (and the resulting competitive New Great Game) and a historical (critical geopolitical) perspective of the New Silk Road. In contrast to the geopolitical readings, which are not exclusive to India, the chapter posits that Central Asia should also be seen within the framework of Indian grand strategy, which is exercised in concentric circles. This grand strategy, which is increasing visible thanks to its pronounced great power aspirations, provides a valuable explanation of the determinants of Indian strategy in Central Asia, premised on its domestic considerations, ambitions and resources.

Chapter 4, titled *Security & Strategic Concerns as the Drivers of India’s Central Asia Policy*, delves into an explanation of the security determinants of Indian engagement in Central Asia. The chapter begins with an explanation of the complex regional security environment in Central Asia, highlighting the internal issues that the CARs must address in the light of increased external involvement in the region. Next, it addresses the broader geopolitical security concerns that manifest themselves in the overlapping regions of South and Central Asia (Afghanistan, North Pakistan, Kashmir) and explains the complex interplay between Central Asian security and India’s strategic neighbourhood. It then provides coverage of India’s national security interests (both domestic and external) and argues that a large overlap exists between these and security outcomes in the AF-PAK regions that straddle Central and South Asia. Finally, it concludes with an explanation of current Indian security cooperation with the CARs.

Chapter 5, titled *Energy Security as a Metaphor for Access to Central Asia*, looks at India’s rising energy security concerns and the role the CARs can play in assuaging these. Arguing that India sees energy cooperation with the CARs not simply as a goal unto itself, but also as a foot in the door for its trade, connectivity and great power aspirations, the chapter explores both paradigms. The first section explores the geopolitics of energy security and explains in detail India’s energy imperatives and its need to diversify its sources, given its rapidly growing economy and the burgeoning numbers of its middle-class. It provides an overview of India’s energy imports and consumption levels, and empirically explains how the CARs, with their energy-export
oriented economies, can help with India’s diversification agenda. The second section provides a country-wise breakdown of the energy reserves of the CARs across the oil, gas, nuclear, wind and hydropower sectors. The third section explains India’s current energy engagement with the CARs before the conclusion outlines how India sees successful energy cooperation as a springboard for the furthering of trade and connectivity ties – and its great power aspirations.

Chapter 6, titled *Trade, Connectivity and India’s Soft Power Play in Central Asia*, addresses the final two determinants of Indian strategy in the region. Divided into broad halves, the first part explains India’s motivations for greater economic engagement with Central Asia, premised on trade and connectivity with not just the CARs but also the greater Eurasian political space. The subsections in the first part explain the economic environment in place that facilitates trade in the CARs and India, provide coverage of current levels of bilateral trade and economic engagement, and, finally, explain how India sees Central Asia as a vital zone of connectivity for its greater economic aspirations in the Eurasian landmass. Closely connected to its desire for connectivity, is the final determinant of Indian strategy in Central Asia: its great power aspirations and its consequent use of its cultural and civilizational capital in the region. The second part of the chapter explains India’s global ambitions, before providing an overview of the different facets of Indian soft power in action in Central Asia, namely through its development assistance, its use of its “knowledge economy” skills in the region, and its cultural diplomacy.

Chapter 7, titled *India’s Interplay with the International System and Understanding India’s Limited Success in Central Asia*, examines India’s interactions with China and Russia in the region before evaluating the efficacy of Indian agency in Central Asia over the last two decades. Divided into two parts, the first addresses Indian agency in a comparative perspective looking at India’s interplay with great powers in the region, and its interaction with them and the CARs through institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The second part then uses this comparative perspective to appraise the effectiveness of Indian strategy in the region, before explaining India’s limited success so far.
In the final concluding chapter, remarks are passed on the major findings of the work and the overall efficacy of Indian agency in Central Asia, and the way forward for India. In addition, the conclusion states the limitations of the work and research design before highlighting possible avenues for further research on the subject, which emerged from the empirical research and fieldwork completed.
2. India and Central Asia: Before, Between and After Empires

Any work that focuses on India’s contemporary geopolitical engagement with Central Asia has to acknowledge and therefore mention the age-old ties that bind the two regions together. This ancient civilizational linkage continues to shape the narrative of the contemporaneous association between India and Central Asia, and references to it form an essential part of the official discourse that emanates from India and the CARs.\(^1\) Given this significance, this chapter seeks to explain the shared history of the regions, as well as provide commentary on the exchanges of peoples, ideas, cultures, languages and religions between the ages. These exchanges in turn have shaped the complex geopolitical orbits of South Asia and Central Asia right from ancient times, when the Achaemenid civilization in Sindh controlled the entire area of the Indus-Oxus orbit and the routes to Central Asia from Chitral and Gilgit-Hunza.\(^2\) Continuing over the Islamic golden age, the entrance of Islam into South Asia, compounded by the Persian, Turkic and Mongol invasions of the subcontinent from Central Asia over the turn of the first millennium, forced the next germinal overlap of the geopolitical trajectories of the regions.

With an impact that continued through the golden ages of Mughal rule in India, right up to the artificial division of the regions and creation of an Afghan buffer state in the 19th century by imperial Britain and tsarist Russia, the period from the 13th to the 18th centuries saw the greatest amount of interaction between the regions. Following the northward annexation of the Khanates of Eurasia into the Russian and then Bolshevik empire, and the reorientation of British India towards the coast and high-seas at the turn of the century, driven by mercantilist aspirations and Mackinderian calculations, the gulf that emerged between the regions through the 20th century proved a difficult starting point for the restoration of ties in the nineties. The newly established CARs did turn to India, the poster-child of the decolonization movement, in the hope that

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India could share with them her experiences in nation and state building. However, an inward looking India, concerned with the rejuvenation of its economy, could provide few answers. As the tide turned at the end of the nineties an increasingly confident India once again sought to reinvigorate ties as new doctrines and narratives for grand strategy materialised, echoing its status as an emerging power in the world.

This chapter is divided into four sections, and traces the seminal moments in the interactions between the regions – those that have shaped overlaps of the geopolitical, cultural and social trajectories. The first section looks at the ancient and medieval ties that bound India and Central Asia from times of olden civilizations that abounded in the Indus-Oxus deltas to the more recent political, cultural and social impact of the Mughals and their Turkic brethren. The second section addresses relations in the period that India and Central Asia were parts of different empires. Beginning with the annexation of the Khanates into the Tsarist Empire and ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and covering relations with both British and independent India, this section focuses on the modern historical context of India-Central Asia ties. The third section resumes at the turn of the millennium in the post-Soviet era and explicates the context in which the newly independent CARs and an economically reformed India interacted. Finally, the fourth section examines relations in the context of the enhanced security dynamic that enveloped both regions in the period post 9/11 and provides coverage of India’s Look North and Connect Central Asia (CCA) policies that have emerged as roadmaps for the shaping of India’s interaction with the region.

Eschewing a narrative descriptive style, this chapter provides an analytical understanding of the history of India-Central Asia ties, correlating this to the theoretical framework provided subsequently, and presents a basis for the comprehension of India’s geopolitical imperatives in its contemporary relations with the region.

2.1 A Long History: From Ancient to Colonial Times

Socio-economic and cultural links between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia have been traced back to Palaeolithic and Neolithic times and as far as 4000 BC by archaeologists who have documented the existence of close ties between the Altyr-
Tepe (Altyn Dep) civilization in Turkmenistan and the Indus Valley civilization in the northern reaches of the subcontinent. Scholar Devendra Kaushik states that it can be assumed that northern India, Afghanistan and the southern parts of Central Asia shared similar rural cultures as evidenced by their ceramic pottery, and the proto-urban civilizations in the region developed through similar processes. Other historians support this notion of continuous and parallel development, and exchanges within the region, through the succeeding periods of Indo-Aryan migrations and in the Harappan and post-Harappan epochs.

Contact between the two regions became more sustained and intimate in the era of the Achmaenid Empire as the geopolitical orbits of the two regions began to overlap, with the creation of the first durable political realms that assimilated Central Asian regions like Bactria, Parthia and Soghd into a geopolitical unit with parts of northern India. The subsequent arrival of the Greeks and the creation of a migrant Saka Empire that spread across the Pamir Mountains only served to strengthen this geopolitical bonding. However, as scholar Sanjay Pandey states, “the apogee of India – Central Asia relations was reached under the Kushan Empire,” which included large tracts of Central Asia and North India. It was during the period of the Mauryan and its successor Kushan Empire that some of the most significant economic and strategic historical ties were built between India and Central Asia, with the establishment of trade routes and new military strongholds across the regions. It was in Taxila, at the doorstep to Central Asia in the Northwest of the subcontinent, that Kautilya, the famous Mauryan intellectual and advisor to Chandragupta Maurya, composed his political-security treatise, the *Arthasastra*, in the fourth century BC, laying the ideological ground for the expansion of the Mauryan Empire into Central Asia.

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7 For more on Kautilya and the Arthasastra and their relevance to Indian strategic thought today, see, Modelski, George. 'Kautilya: Foreign Policy And International System In The Ancient Hindu World'. *The American Political Science Review* 58.3 (1964): 549. Print.
The spread of Buddhism into Central Asia from India with the imperial patronage of Ashoka and Kanishka in this period remains one of the most significant cultural bonds between the regions. The discovery of Buddhist monasteries in Transoxiana and the attributions on the walls of the Kandahar to Ashoka, dating as far back as 300 BC, attest to his involvement in the spread of the religion throughout the region.\(^8\) With the “Dharma” of Buddhism came the complimentary processes of monetisation, urbanisation and political establishment as it appealed to the landed gentry in the regions it spread to, enabling the creation and extension of new avenues for trade and industry.\(^9\) Scholar Johan Elverskog notes further that these increased interactions led to the creation of a “symbiotic relationship” between the states, the merchant elite and the Dharma, which not only led to the rapid spread of Buddhism, but also to the growth of networks of trade and communication between the regions.\(^10\)

This network development led to a sustained flow of information, scientific knowledge, literature and languages between the regions. Connecting into the great Silk Route, which originated in China and went deep into Eurasia, the Kushan epoch helped spread the Dharma of Buddhism further into East Asia, across China, Japan and the Koreas, becoming a pan-Asian phenomenon. The arts too benefitted immensely as the Bactrian and the Gandhara schools of Kushan Buddhism developed across the two ends of the empire in north India and the heart of Central Asia, with a lasting impact on the styles that emerged from the regions subsequently, as recent archaeological work by Soviet scholar G Puganchenko has shown.\(^11\) As the success of the Buddhist epoch and empires waned over the Kushan period, Elverskog notes, by 300 AD the Kushans were weakening and lost part of their empire to the emerging Persian Sassanids and the Hepthalites, forcing them south, out of the Central Asian orbit and towards the Deccan and the Indic geopolitical orbs. This led to a power

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\(^10\) ibid.

vacuum that would soon be filled by other invaders, who coveted the economy and the wealth of the trading routes of the region.¹²

As the rulers of the Sanskritised Indic orbit concentrated on their conquests and the spread of Hinduism in South East Asia towards modern-day Thailand and Vietnam, the Buddhist Central Asian orbit slowly lost its primordial place in the international trade system, leading to a weakening of the geopolitical bonds between North India and Central Asia. While political unity and economic trade between the regions slowly dissipated, language and literature kept the regions in close contact with each other; Sanskrit and Prakrit and the Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts remained in circulation in Central Asia well into the first millennium.¹³ Scholar D Devahuti traces the existence of a number of Kashmiri preachers and translators who worked across Central Asia and parts of Tibet, Xinjiang and China well into the fifth century.¹⁴

With the Arab invasions of Asia that began in the seventh century and the ensuing Islamisation of Central Asia and the North West throes of the Indian subcontinent by the Arabs, Persians, Turks and Mongols over the turn of the first millennium, linkages between Hindu India and Buddhist Central Asia were interrupted. The reliance on maritime trade by the Islamic invaders supplemented their land-based abilities, facilitating the conquest of Persia, Sindh and Asia-Minor, as Islam spread across Bactria, Xinjiang and further north toward Mongolia. The creation of the Delhi Sultanate by Mohammed Ghori after his conquest of the lands of Mahmud of Ghazni in the Northwest of the subcontinent, at the end of the twelfth century, facilitated the reestablishment of ties to Central Asia, under the leadership of the Malmuk, Khilji and Tughlaq Turk dynasties as, over the centuries, their empires annexed the southern parts of Central Asia. Perhaps the most fundamental impact of the Delhi Sultanate was the introduction of Sufi Islam, which many of its rulers championed through their support of Central Asian mystics, who migrated to India from Bukhara and Samarkand.¹⁵

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¹² Elverskog, Johan. 2010. 27.
Central Asia continues to have reverberations in modern India, as many Indian Muslim practice this syncretic form of Islam, which incorporates elements of the traditional Hindu practices that predated the arrival of Islam and has long been believed as one of the reasons that Hinduism and Islam have existed in India in a relatively peaceful manner for the better part of a millennium.

While the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century temporarily disrupted trade and cultural ties, North India’s absorption into Timur’s realm in the thirteenth century AD reinstated the link between the regions, as he moved a contingent of craftsmen from Delhi to Samarkand to build his new capital. The founder of the Indo-Islamic Mughal Empire, the Chagatai prince Babur, a descendent of Timur, was born in Andijan in the Fergana Valley, and for much of his life was a peripatetic monarch, as he vied for control and was exiled to different parts of India, Persia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Succeeding his father at the tender age of 11, as the Emir of Ferghana, Babur soon ventured south towards Kabul and the subcontinent, as he struggled to retain control of his Central Asian holdings. Accepted by the people of Delhi as a welcome change from the repressive rule of the Lodi’s in 1521, Babur finally ended three centuries of the Delhi Sultanate in the famous first Battle of Panipat in 1526, and formally established the Mughal Empire.

Babur’s rule saw the introduction of several hundred Turanis of Central Asian noble lineage into the Mughal courts in Delhi. Artists, poets, architects, writers, scholars and Sufi saints from Samarkand and Bukhara also began a transition toward Delhi, as the Mughal courts became more prosperous, patronised by Babur and his successors. Babur’s memoirs Baburnama, written in Chaghtai Turkic (Old Uzbek), contain vivid descriptions of Central Asia, and expel on the importance of the region to his empire, serving as a roadmap for Mughal diplomacy toward Emirates of the region, that his heirs too would follow. Under the reign of Humayun, his son, who also spent much of his life in exile in Persia and Afghanistan as he laboured to regain control of Delhi, the Mughal court kept a close watch on Central Asia with Humayun recognizing the

importance of Balkh as a buffer between him and the Uzbek Khans.\textsuperscript{19} To that extent he did conquer large parts of Afghanistan and Balkh, reuniting the Central Asian and the sub-continental geopolitical realms between 1530 and 1556.

The Mughal Empire reached its zenith under Akbar, who succeeded his father Humayun in 1556. Though not as emotionally connected to Central Asia and Afghanistan as his father and grandfather, who had both spent their formative years there, Akbar was sentient to the security implications of political unrest in Central Asia on India.\textsuperscript{20} To mitigate the effects of the power struggle that emerged in Transoxania in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century and to ensure the security of Akbar’s extended empire that now included Kabul, Kandahar and most of Afghanistan, Akbar negotiated a pact with Abdullah Khan Uzbek, the ruler of Badakhshan, where Akbar agreed to stay neutral as Uzbek took on Safavids in Khurasan, in exchange for Uzbek ceasing to support the trouble-making Pashtun tribes, which were threatening Mughal control of Kabul.\textsuperscript{21} Scholar Kaushik Roy states that the principal threat to Akbar remained the Uzbeks, reinforcing perceptions that Central Asia has historically been a potential source of strife that affects the unity of the subcontinent.\textsuperscript{22}, \textsuperscript{23}

However significant the perception of Central Asia’s security threat was to the Mughals, it did not preclude its importance as a vital trade route and destination for the empire. The overland caravan route from the Punjab, via Peshawar and Kabul through the Khyber Pass to the Central Asia cities of Samarkand and Bukhara and onwards to Persia, China and especially Astrakhan to trade with the Russians was

\textsuperscript{19} ibid. 424.
\textsuperscript{20} ibid. 426.
\textsuperscript{23} While the Uzbeks remained Akbar’s principal geopolitical threat in Central Asia and the region to the north of his empire, the Pashtuns led by Bayazid Ansari or Pir-Roshan (as he was commonly known as), presented an equally unwelcome existential threat to the Mughals from within the empire. Ansari, who witnessed Pashtun marginalisation at the hands of the Mughals, offered both philosophical and military resistance to Akbar during much of his reign. His religious and philosophical criticism of Akbar’s syncretic religion Din-e Ilahi, through his own Roshaniya movement from within the Sufi realm, and the corresponding Pashtun rebellion he lead, illustrate the importance of the border regions in India and Central Asia to the survival of the core. For more on Bayazid Ansari, see Siddique, Abubakr. \textit{The Pashtun Question: The Unresolved Key To The Future Of Pakistan And Afghanistan}. London: Hurst, 2014. 25-30. Print.
vital to the land-based economy of the Mughal Empire.\textsuperscript{24} Trade in horses, camels, silks, spices and textiles ensured the migration of Indian merchants across the markets of Central Asia, with the Mughals often waging war and forming strong alliances to ensure the sanctity of these routes and the safety of the caravans from attack by the various tribes that habituated the inhospitable boundary areas between India and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{25}

It was perhaps culturally that Central Asia left its most indelible mark on India in the medieval ages. The consolidation of an Indo-Islamic culture under the Mughals built on the previous intellectual and artistic exchanges between the Delhi Sultanate and Central Asia, as the Mughals began to impart their own artistic and cultural values to Indian society, which though Central Asian Turkic and Persian in its origin imbibed a sense of Indian values. This continued under Jehangir, Akbar’s heir, and the rule of Shah Jahan who succeeded Jehangir. It was under Shah Jahan, in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, that the Central Asian dialect of Persian spoken in the Mughal courts was Indianised leading to the creation of Urdu, which kept the grammar structure of the native Indian language, but used a heavily Persianised vocabulary.\textsuperscript{26} The itinerant Sufi saints and scholars helped spread the language with them as they preached across the empire. Aided by the creation of a common language, the literature that accompanied the Mughal period, though initially composed in Persian, too spread as Central Asian poets and writers flocked to the empire, with royal patronage. The art and architecture of the Mughal aeon, known for its distinctive Indo-Islamic style, remains the most significant contemporary reminder of the Central Asian roots of the empire, with many of the significant Mughal monuments being built by Central Asians, including the Taj Mahal, whose architect was reportedly a Badkashan Tajik, Ustad Lahauri.\textsuperscript{27}

The Mughal years were responsible for the establishment of the permanency of trade and commerce between India and Central Asia. As a land-based empire, it was forced to look North and Westwards, and with the annexation of Sindh and Afghanistan it

\textsuperscript{24} Richards, John F. 1993. 51.
\textsuperscript{25} ibid.
controlled the Indo-Gangetic plain in its entirety, allowing it to trade with Persia and the Central Asian Emirates.\footnote{The Mughal’s never managed to entirely annex Afghanistan and faced numerous challenges from the various Pashtun groups that controlled the border regions between India and Central Asia. Apart from Pir-Roshan (as mentioned above), the Durrani empire led by Ahmed Shah (or Ahmed Khan Abdali), he created the first truly trans-regional empire across the North of India and parts of Central Asia. As scholar Abubakr Siddique notes, at its peak, the empire extended from Central Asia to Delhi; and in the West to the Arabian Sea. For more, see, Siddique, Abubakr. 2014. 30-32.} Despite the empire’s declining fortunes with the arrivals of the seafaring Europeans, and the subsequent challenges it faced in reorienting toward the Deccan, the trade patterns it established and the merchant classes it supported, continued to flourish. Scholar Sanjay Pandey attributes a boost in Indian trade with Central Asia to the emergence of strong trading classes in Sindh and the Punjab in the 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} centuries.\footnote{Pandey, Sanjay. 2007. 19.} This was followed by the materialisation of a mercantile capitalist Hindu trading class in this period, which spread its presence across Afghanistan and Central Asia and provided financial and banking services, essential for trade – an area that Muslims were traditionally forbidden from being involved in. Scholar Claude Markovits, based on archival research and the first-person accounts of Alexander Burnes and George Forster, alludes to the existence of a Multani and Shikarpuri network of Hindu merchants across the Khorasan and Central Asia, who played a major role in the organisation and financing of caravan trade from India right from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century.\footnote{Markovits, Claude.\textit{ The Global World Of Indian Merchants, 1750-1947.} Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 60. Print.} Markovits also talks about the existence of Hindu colonies in Bukhara and other major trading towns in the region, comprised of merchants and those who financed trades by lending and exchanging money and enjoyed the protection of the state.\footnote{ibid.} The presence of a dispersed Indian diaspora and tens of thousands of their agents across Bukhara and Turkestan in the cities of Ghijduvan, Vangazi, Vabkent, Qarshi, Guzar, Yakkabagh, Chirakchi, Kerki, Baisun, Kitab, Kermina, Tashkupruk, Khatirchi, Nurata, Ziauddin, Shahrisabz and Qaraku, were the most significant aspect of India’s commercial relationship with its Northwest according to scholar Scott Levi.\footnote{Levi, Scott. ‘The Indian Merchant Diaspora In Early Modern Central Asia And Iran’. \textit{Iranian Studies} 32.4 (1999): 505. Web.}
As the British began to establish control over India and the Tsarist annexations of Central Asia continued into the 19th century, Indo–Central Asian trade began to dwindle as the economies of both regions began to reorient themselves in different directions. While both the British and the Tsar made attempts to reach out to native rulers in the opposite realms in this period, and even attempted to entice these rulers to trade, the recasting of India and Central Asia into two opposed empires and geopolitical realms in the latter half of the 19th century, would set the tone for relations over the next century and a half, as ties between the regions would slowly ebb.

2.2 From the Great Game to the Cold War

While India and Central Asia moved away from each other over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, Tsarist and British imperial policy did not initially intend for that to happen. Rebuffed in their approaches for the other’s possessions over the course of the 19th century, they finally saw it fit to demarcate their territory and establish Afghanistan as a buffer zone between imperial India and tsarist Central Asia at the turn of the 20th century, as it emerged as the only viable option to prevent all-out war, settle differences over Persia and not upset the delicate balance of power in Europe. Imperial Britain’s designs on the Khanates of Kiva, Bukhara and Kokand predate the Tsar’s attempts to reach out to Kashmir and North India. English explorer William Moorcroft, who was employed by the East India Company, planned a mission to Turkestan to purchase horses in 1816 in the company of George Trebeck, and his agent Mir-Izzat Allah who would eventually go as far as Samarkand and Bukhara. Charles Metcalfe, the Company Resident of Delhi, supported Moorcroft’s missions and it would provide the British one of the earliest first-hand accounts of Central Asia.

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36 ibid.
The Russians too dispatched emissaries in this period. Rafailov, an ethnic Jew, and 
Shargilov, an Armenian, travelled to Kashmir and Tibet between 1810 and 1820 as 
representatives of the Tsar carrying a letter for Maharaja Ranjit Singh of the Punjab.37 
Following the end of Napoleonic wars, Lord Bentinck, the Governor-General of 
India, favoured the dispatch of a British Agent to Kabul to keep an eye on activities in 
Transoxania.38 This was soon followed by the expeditions to the region, one led by 
Lt. Conolly, who travelled to India from the Caspian in 1830, and another by Lt. 
Alexander Burnes to Bukhara in the same decade.39 The Burnes mission as Devendra 
Kaushik states was mainly aimed at obtaining political and military intelligence,40 and 
his memoirs, which detail vividly social and political life in the Khanate, ‘Travels into 
Bokhara; being the account of a journey from India to Cabool, Tartary and Persia;’41 
would serve as a seminal primary source for much of the further research done on 
Central Asia from an Indian perspective.

It is important at this stage to understand the foundations of the Great Game for Asia 
between Britain and Russia, which would shape world politics for the rest of the 19th 
century. The strengthening of Russia in the post-Napoleonic period and its gradual 
nexionation of Ottoman and Persian territories in the 1820’s brought Britain’s 
attention to the hazard its erstwhile ally posed to its expanding empire in West and 
South Asia. According to scholar David Fromkin in his seminal treatise in Foreign 
Affairs, “The Great Game in Essay,” the appointment of Lord Palmerston as Foreign 
Secretary in 1830 would see the implementation of a policy that sought to use the 
Islamic lands of Asia as a “buffer zone” against expanding Tsarist ambitions in the 
region.42 As Britain consolidated its mercantilist sea-based empire, building the finest 
navy the world had ever seen, Russia focussed its traditional land-power advantages 
on South and Eastward expansion in Eurasia.43 Both powers were hesitant to upset the 
balance in Europe, rebuilding itself after decades of war and in the midst of an

37 Kaushik, Devendra. 1984. 83. 
38 ibid. 85. 
39 ibid. 85. 
40 ibid. 85. 
41 See, Burnes, Alexander. Travels Into Bokhara; Being The Account Of A Journey From India To 
Cabool, Tartary And Persia; Also, Narrative Of A Voyage On The Indus ... In The Years 1831, 1832, 
43 ibid.
Industrial revolution. The creation of a buffer zone would protect British interests in India and Persia, providing security and precluding further Russian expansion to the seas of the Indian Ocean, where the British Navy could be challenged. 44 Economically too these Islamic lands were vital. The Ottoman Empire was Britain’s third largest trading partner, and maintaining access to its markets and blocking Russian access was essential for Britain’s industry to thrive.45

Fromkin highlights nine reasons that Britain had for opposing Russian expansion in Asia:

(1) it would upset the balance of power by making Russia much stronger than the other European powers; (2) it would culminate in a Russian invasion of British India; (3) it would encourage India to revolt against Britain; (4) it would cause the Islamic regimes of Asia to collapse, which in turn would lead to the outbreak of a general war between the European powers in order to determine which of them would get what share of the valuable spoils; (5) it would strengthen a country and a regime that were the chief enemies of popular political freedom in the world; (6) it would strengthen a people whom Britons hated; (7) it threatened to disrupt the profitable British trade with Asia; (8) it would strengthen the sort of protectionist, closed economic society which free-trading Britain morally disapproved of; and (9) it would threaten the line of naval communications upon which Britain’s commercial and political position in the world depended.46

Russian attempts to appropriate the Ottoman and Persian Empires as they crumbled, the Khanates of Central Asia, and the North of the subcontinent that comprised of Afghanistan, Kashmir and parts of Tibet had therefore to be repealed. To this effect, Britain was successful on the Western Front, winning the Crimean War in the 1850s and ensuring the Ottoman Empire stayed intact. In the Caucuses, as the Persian Empire gave, Russia expanded its writ, seizing the region and large parts of Northern Persia, as the Shah switched alliances to the Tsar.47 Faced with the prospect of losing the ports of Persia and West Asia, whilst the Russians seized the Khanates of Central Asia looking towards India, in the second half of the 19th century, Britain was forced to respond, as the last decades of the century drew the two empires into the Great Game.

44 ibid.
45 ibid.
46 ibid.
47 ibid.
Britain previously anticipated Russia’s attempts to reach the seas of the Indian Ocean. In 1838, it used Herat in Afghanistan as a base to keep an eye on activities in Central Asia. It even unleashed the First Afghan War (1838-1842) on an unsuspecting Afghanistan to pre-empt Russian designs on the region, after the Persian siege of Herat had been lifted.\footnote{Farooqui, Salma. \textit{A Comprehensive History Of Medieval India: Twelfth To The Mid-Eighteenth Century}. New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2011. 386. Print.} Faced with unexpected Afghan resistance, the British eventually withdrew, but their intentions had been made clear. Economically, too, they made attempts to entice the Khanates out of the Tsarist economy by dumping goods at low prices in Bukhara, in an attempt to drive the Russians out of business in the 1840s.\footnote{Kaushik, Devendra. 1984. 69-71} With a deteriorating domestic situation in India as native rulers spoke out against the British, and the eventual First Indian Mutiny in 1857, Britain was forced to refocus its energies in the subcontinent and reduce its activities in Afghanistan and the north. The lull, however, lasted only a few years as British intelligence reactivated its contacts with Bukhara and Samarkand in view of the impending Russian advance against the Khanates of Kokand and Bukhara in 1866.\footnote{ibid. 93-97.} The Punjab government played an important role in reaching out to Indian merchants in Central Asia, and relaying information to the Governor-General – it even requested permission to place agents in the different Khanate courts, which was, however, denied by the Privy Council.\footnote{ibid. 93-97.}

Following the annexation of the Khanates by Russia, Britain continued to successfully operate an elaborate intelligence network throughout Central Asia over the few next decades.\footnote{ibid. 93-97.} The purpose was two-fold: first, to keep an eye out for Russian plans for expansion southward, and increased involvement in the administration of the Khanates; and, second, and perhaps more important, to keep tabs on contacts between Indians and the Russian agents stationed in Central Asia. Indian rulers had been quick to send out feelers to the Russians, and as Sanjay Pandey states, the Rajas of Kashmir, Indore, Gwalior and Jaipur made an attempt to contact Tsarist Russia between 1866 and 1880 in the hope that they could take advantage of a Russian standoff with
Britain and benefit by establishing early ties. Contact between the Indians and the Russians was not limited to rulers, religious groups like the Kukka Sikhs and other independently minded individuals who had escaped after the failed mutiny in 1857, had taken up residence in the Khanates and maintained strong ties to India, attempting to garner support for the Russians back home.

In a broader geopolitical sense, the end of the 19th century was characterised by a struggle for control of the Pamir Mountains, Tibet and Xinjiang and the Western Indian Ocean, all of which centred on India and Central Asia. In the Pamirs, both empires sent out exploration teams to chart the mountainous terrain, supplement cartographical research, and, in instances, claim undiscovered mountain passes as their own. Initiated by the Russians, to explore the potential of an invasion of India through the Hindukush range, the governments reached an agreement in 1895, giving the British control of the passes and the Russians control of the plateaus. The battle for Tibet and Xinjiang also involved China, the Emir of Afghanistan, and the Dalai Lama, as Russia and Britain vied for control of the ‘rooftop of the world’. Britain supported Qing China initially, but that did not stop it from invading Tibet itself later in 1903. The Russians in response tried to evolve a Buddhist religious response, calling on monks and monasteries from its own Buddhist provinces to undertake secret missions to Tibet to counter the British. In the Indian Ocean, Britain upgraded its Naval capabilities to thwart potential Russian attacks that could originate from the Black Sea and Mediterranean routes. Meanwhile, Russia romped up construction of the railroad across its empire, and by the end of the 19th century it was close to connecting the Khanates to Moscow, finally making real the fears of a land-based invasion of India, that could be adequately supplied and fuelled.

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57 Sergev, Evgeny. 2013. 250.
Britain’s inability to put an end to the Boer uprising, and the protracted war that followed, pointed to its incapacity to develop a durable land-based deterrence force, reinforcing the idea that it was over dependent on its navy to secure its territories. As scholar AJP Taylor notes, the diplomatic victory against the Russians, secured in the Congress of Berlin in 1878, led the Britain to believe that they could have great power at little cost, “without reforming their navy and without the creation of an army.”

This put Britain in an ineffectual position, in as far as its ability to wage war and defend its territories away from the high seas. Lord George Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899-1903, was not oblivious to this fact, and favoured British support of an alternative railway line that could connect the subcontinent to Europe via Persia to counter this; He maintained that the Russian threat to India remained strong, as Russia continued to push its own schemes in Afghanistan.

Britain and Russia finally agreed to a truce in August of 1907, when the Anglo-Russian Convention was signed in St. Petersburg. The agreement enforced boundaries that both parties would respect in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet, reflecting the status quo that was prevalent at that time. While both empires continued to covet each other’s possessions, the rise of other players in Eurasia had significantly altered the balance of power in the region. Japan’s expansion into the Russian Far East and Manchuria in response to Russian provocation, had hurt the Russians who were further beleaguered by the Revolution of 1905. The inability of its navy to respond to Japanese attacks forced the Tsar to sue for peace instead.

The rise of Prussia and the United States, both industrial powerhouses, also forced Britain to refocus its energies in Europe. The Anglo-Russian entente allowed both powers the breathing space they needed and reduced tensions in South and Central Asia. Afghanistan would be left to the British and in effect emerge as a neutral zone between the two; Britain would have control of the Persian Seas and Russia its northern landmass, and Tibet would be dealt with separately in consultation with the Chinese.

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62 For a clearer description of the Anglo-Russian endgames in the Great Game see Pattee, Phillip G. 2013. 69.
As revolutionary fervour gripped both India and Central Asia in the first decades of the 20th century, a number of Indians took up residence in the Khanates of Central Asia to escape British pressure and establish linkages with similar-minded activists. The Bolshevik Revolution saw the initiation of ideological Soviet support for Indian Marxists. The Soviets used Tashkent as a base to reach out to Indian revolutionaries, intensifying ties between India and Central Asia. The Khilafat movement used Afghanistan as a base to connect with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, transiting through Central Asia. M.N. Roy and Abani Mukherjee were amongst the Indian dissidents who responded to the Bolshevik invitation, and used the establishment of the Central Asian Bureau of Communist International, (COMINTERN) to organise the foundational meeting of the Indian Communist Party in Tashkent in November 1920. While initially supportive of the Indian revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks were forced to cut ties by 1925 in response to mounting British pressure and the fear that the presence of Indian revolutionaries would incite the native Central Asians against Moscow. While Soviet support of the Indian communists continued, it was redirected away from Tashkent and via Moscow instead.

The establishment of Soviet rule and the carving out of Central Asia into Soviet republics put the breaks on the unfettered trade and communication links between the subcontinent and Central Asia. Hesitant to open its southern borders, Moscow discouraged contact between Central Asia and its neighbourhood, instead refocusing its economy and society towards Russia. While the Soviet Union was initially diffident to reach out to an independent India, the recasting of the relationship after the arrival of Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 saw a spurt in Indian contact with Central Asia, though it remained mediated through Moscow. Tashkent, nevertheless, continued to remain a base for Indian studies, following the relocation of Russian Indologists and the Institute of Oriental Studies from Moscow to aid the Russian war effort during the Second World War, and the establishment of an Indian Studies chair at Tashkent University. The teaching of Hindi and Urdu also supplemented

64 ibid.
65 ibid.
intellectual exchanges between the regions. The signing of the Indo-Pakistani Tashkent Declaration in 1966 served as a testament to the political role the Soviet Union played in India’s foreign policy, and recognition of the historical significance of Tashkent and Central Asia to the subcontinent.

The Soviet reluctance to allow cross-border trade and the partition of India, limited access for traders and the physical movement of people, ending what had been centuries of people-to-people contact and replacing it mostly with high-level political and intellectual exchanges. This, however, did not inhibit India from establishing an enduring cultural legacy in the years to come by creating of a wide audience across the Soviet Union for India’s films and cultural broadcasts. As scholar Anita Sengupta notes, (for the common Uzbek) even today India’s “music and films have an appeal that cuts across generations,” generating a form of “cultural capital” that it can leverage.

Apart from an increased Indian cultural presence which brought India closer to the common man in Central Asia, the re-alignment of India firmly toward the Soviet Union with the signing of the Indo–Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in 1971, paved the way for increased and sustained cooperation between the two. As author Surendra Gopal states, the University Grants Commission of India began the promotion of Central Asian Studies with the creation of a Central Asia department at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and a second one in 1980 at Kashmir University in Srinagar. Indian scholars like Ram Rahul, Devendra Kaushik and KL Warikoo, working along side Central Asian Soviet scholars like Dmitriev, Azimzanova, Baikova and Rasulzade greatly contributed to the academic discourse in this period, focussing on relations between the two regions, studying, art, history, languages and archaeology.

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69 Gopal, Surendra. 2007. 85.

70 ibid.
With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Central Asia once again re-emerged in the foreground of India-Soviet ties. India, under Indira Gandhi, initially refrained from criticizing the Soviet intervention internationally, and its reluctance to do so, earned it both international criticism and the loss of support among much of the Afghan populace.\textsuperscript{71} India’s increasing dependence on the Soviet Union for trade and oil, and the fear of encirclement by the China and the United States, kept it firmly entrenched in the Soviet corner for much of the eighties.\textsuperscript{72} However, as the decade wore on, the Soviet Union, which was being increasingly economically beleaguered by an unending war in Afghanistan, was forced to re-assess its priorities both in the region and domestically. With the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev as General Secretary and President of the Soviet Union, and the introduction of his policies of \textit{Glasnost} and \textit{Perestroika} to revive the stagnating Soviet economy, a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was underway by early 1988. Before the effect of the Gorbachev reforms were felt, the democratization of the Soviet Union undermined the power of the Communist party, which was reeling from its inability to restart the Soviet economy. By 1990, as food shortages rose and the state deficit grew, the emergence of nationalist identities, inspired by the secession of Eastern Europe from the Bloc began to threaten the core unity of the union.\textsuperscript{73} The Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics were hardly immune to the direction the wind was blowing and, by December 1991, they were on their own independent trajectories, for the first time in history.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{2.3 A Liberalizing India and the Newly Formed Central Asian Republics (CARs)}

As the only democratic state with formal diplomatic ties to the Central Asian region in 1991 India had a tremendous first-mover advantage over its rivals. According to Special Secretary, Asoke Mukherjee of the MEA, India opened a consulate in Tashkent in 1987 with accreditation to all five Soviet republics.\textsuperscript{75} The consulate was

\textsuperscript{71} Mishra, Manoj Kumar. 'India's Role And Interests In Afghanistan'. icpsnet.org. Web. 23 June 2014.

\textsuperscript{72} ibid.


\textsuperscript{74} For an insightful analysis into the reasons behind formation of the Central Asian Republics, see, Olcott, Martha Brill. 'Central Asia's Catapult To Independence'. \textit{Foreign Affairs} 71.3 (1992): 108. Web.

\textsuperscript{75} Mukerji, Asoke. 'India, Central Asia And The New Silk Road'. 2012. Speech at Arundel House
initially opened to fulfil a cultural role, but soon expanded its activities to support the nascent Indian student community in the region and some private sector activity in construction. Following the independence of Uzbekistan, the consulate in Tashkent was upgraded to an embassy and became India’s first representation to the newly independent CARs in March 1992. Indian recognition of the other Central Asian states, and the establishment of additional Indian embassies in their new capitals later that year, followed.

Within India, as scholar Anita Sengupta notes, the Central Asian region has been traditionally seen as “India’s extended neighbourhood.” With the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early nineties, India’s primary objective in the region was seen as ensuring a modicum of stability amongst the successor states in its extended neighbourhood, by establishing strong governmental links to the emerging political hierarchies in the CARs. Initially, India’s objectives were achieved and its courtship of the new regimes in the CARs met with much success. The fact that both the Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, in August 1991, and the Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in February 1992 chose Delhi as the destination for their first trips abroad was testament to India’s standing in the region, and their trips were summarily followed by visits from President Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan in March 1992, President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan in April 1992, and Prime Minister Abdumalik Abdullajonov of Tajikistan in February 1993.

The regional geopolitical uncertainties that emerged along with the creation of the Central Asian states, and the civil-wars in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, were soon to become the major areas of focus for the nascent India – Central Asian governmental partnerships that were in formation. Intertwined with these geopolitical uncertainties were the embryonic state and nation-building processes that were taking place within

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76 ibid.
77 Sengupta, Anita. 2011. 53.
79 Mukerji, Asoke. 2012.
the CARs. As newly independent states, with numerous challenges and visions for the future shape their nations could take, Central Asian elites sought inspiration from the countries around them, and searched for countries they could trust, due to an ostensible power vacuum, that emerged from Russia’s temporary absence in the region.\textsuperscript{81} India, with its cultural affinity to the region and as a secular state adept at dealing with the complexities of managing a heterogeneous population, emerged as a country, that the Central Asian elites turned to, and sought inspiration from.\textsuperscript{82} India, however, was not exactly in a position to reciprocate this interest, given its own internal compulsions in the nineties. This segment therefore proceeds to identify these compulsions and their effects on Indian foreign policy, before explaining the impact this had on India’s relations with Central Asia. It will also attempt to contextualise India – Central Asia relations in comparison to relations between other countries that shared similar cultural affinities with the CARs, which also reached out in this period, including India’s bête noire, Pakistan. Finally, it will explain the beginning of the resurgence of Indian outreach to the region toward the end of the nineties, and the evolution of the ‘Look North’ policy.

India’s economic dependence on the Soviet Union for international trade and foreign exchange, and the existence of the ‘Rupee Trade System’, left it in dire straits at the end of the Cold War and with the collapse of the Soviet-successor economies.\textsuperscript{83} As scholar Sebastien Peyrouse notes, while the arrival of the CARs “on the Indian radar” was seen as an opportunity in New Delhi in the nineties, India’s ambitions in Central Asia were thwarted by its internal economic tribulations.\textsuperscript{84} Peyrouse also states that most Indian Central Asia scholars acknowledge that while Delhi wanted to support the transitioning CARs, it was unable to do so, and the CARs had to look elsewhere.\textsuperscript{85} The economic transformation that India would embark upon in 1991, as intellectual Sumit Ganguly argues, was driven by the crises precipitated by the 1991 Gulf War,

\textsuperscript{83} For an analysis of the impact of the Rupee trade system and its collapse, see the chapter, Sachdeva, Gulshan. 'India - Russia Relations'. \textit{India's Foreign Policy In The 21St Century}. V.D. Chopra. 1st ed. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2006. Print.
\textsuperscript{85} ibid.
and the loss of valuable international markets for India.\textsuperscript{86} Indian policy-makers were forced to abandon historical policies and antiquated systems of regulations and permits, and instead commit to an agenda of privatization and industrialization.\textsuperscript{87} The economic transformation would force a recasting of India’s political aspirations both domestically and internationally, as the political elite was forced to reconcile its interests with the aspirations of an emerging Indian middle-class.

Peyrouse also suggests that, domestically, India was too absorbed by the unravelling situation in Kashmir and the rise of a hell-raising political \textit{Hindutva} agenda, which forced its attention inwards.\textsuperscript{88} Pakistani support of the insurgency and cross-border terrorism in Kashmir alerted India to the security risks posed by terror that emanated from the broader South – Central Asian region. Yet, with the emergence of a full-blown domestic political crisis following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya,\textsuperscript{89} India was unable to build on ties with the CARs. This heightened state of domestic concern was also driven by the political instability that dogged the country in the mid-nineties. After the fall of Narasimha Rao and the Congress-led government in 1996, it took another three years before the country saw political stability in Delhi.

India’s economic tribulations and domestic emphasis also had a consequent impact on Indian foreign policy. As scholar Emilian Kavalski explains, Indian foreign policy went through an extended period of “post-Cold War blues” in the nineties, which continued until the revival of the economy and the development of a sense of “nuclear assertiveness” following the Pokhran nuclear tests of May 1998.\textsuperscript{90} Kavalski’s reasoning in determining India’s “post-Cold War blues” and what he sees as the emergence of a new era in India foreign policy post 1998 is now examined further.

Kavalski first suggests that the breakup of the Soviet Union was the single most important factor in the recasting of Indian foreign policy in this period, due to the

\textsuperscript{87} ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011. 76.
\textsuperscript{89} The Ram Jannabhoomi movement led by the BJP precipitated the Babri Masjid crisis in 1992, see more about Hindu nationalism and the BJP in, Dossani, Rafiq, and Henry S Rowen. \textit{Prospects For Peace In South Asia}. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005. Print.
realignment of the global geopolitical order and the vacuum created in the absence of the Soviet Union – India’s ideological and geopolitical partner.\textsuperscript{91} Referencing the works of multiple indigenous scholars of Indian foreign policy, including most prominently C Raja Mohan,\textsuperscript{92} and BM Jain,\textsuperscript{93} Kavalski also suggests that the accompanying economic disarray caused by the implosion of the Soviet Union – India’s largest trading partner at the time (as explained above) – forced an inward looking “avoidance of war” mind-set on to the contours of Indian foreign policy.\textsuperscript{94}

Second, as Kavalski suggests, the failure of the nonalignment movement, which became increasingly apparent with the collapse of the Soviet Union, led to “policy-making anxiety,” attesting to the “challenge of addressing the gaping fissures at the very core of the country’s international identity.”\textsuperscript{95} In simpler terms, as the Cold War system unravelled forcing the world away from a bipolar system, India’s nonalignment strategy, that for years had combined \textit{Nehruvian} morality\textsuperscript{96} with a sense of positivity and pragmatism to secure India’s economic and security interests between the two superpowers and China, was now becoming less relevant.\textsuperscript{97} In a unipolar world, nonalignment would no longer guarantee India’s security, and was forcing India into an economic corner in which it could not survive without Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), forcing a change in strategy.

Finally, Kavalski suggests that as the failure of nonalignment and the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Cold War system on India were increasingly felt, a “tension” developed in New Delhi as to whether India should continue with a \textit{Nehruvian} approach to its international relations, or adopt a more \textit{Kautilyan} approach.\textsuperscript{98} This entailed a choice between a ‘moralist’ and a ‘militarist’ viewpoint, contributing to a paralysing debate in Indian policy circles. The relevance of this

\textsuperscript{91} ibid. 31.
\textsuperscript{94} Kavalski, Emilian, 2010. 31.
\textsuperscript{95} ibid. 35.
\textsuperscript{96} For a better understanding of the \textit{Nehruvian} underpinnings of an Indian Foreign policy, see, Mansingh, Surjit. \textit{Nehru’s Foreign Policy, Fifty Years On}. New Delhi: Mosaic Books in collaboration with India International Centre, 1998. Print.
\textsuperscript{98} Kavalski, Emilian, 2010. 35.
debate, as identified by Kavalski, and the contradictions it presented for India’s foreign policymakers in the context of India’s strategy in Central Asia is also noticed by Peyrouse who suggests that the choice between the Nehruvian socialist model and the (Hindu) nationalist view for India’s international relations, caused significant turmoil within the country at that time. While the resulting “Gujral Doctrine” would lead to the development of an extended neighbourhood strategy as a hallmark of Indian foreign policy in the mid-nineties, its limited applicability to Central Asia, and India’s increasing focus on the Pakistani context within its relations with the CARs, would continue to hamper its relations with the region.

Before an examination of Kavalski’s claim of a “post-nuclear assertiveness” in Indian foreign policy is conducted, it is prudent to examine another element of India – Central Asia ties in the mid-nineties, one that has raised much debate between scholars: India’s focus on Pakistan. Most foreign scholars, including Kavalski, Peyrouse and Marlene Laruelle, have been critical of what they perceive as an Indian overestimation of the importance of Pakistan, and India’s constant attempts to frame its relations with Central Asia through the prism of a Pakistani search for strategic depth in the region. Kavalski suggests that, for much of the nineties, India’s thinking on Central Asia was influenced by its South Asian constraints and its mistrust of Pakistan. Laruelle and Peyrouse suggest that the failure of India’s strategy is closely tied to its obsession with Pakistan, which is “omnipresent” in its “geopolitical projections in the region.” They also suggest that India misread the intentions of the nascent CARs, who turned to Pakistan (much like they turned to Iran and Turkey) out of a cultural affinity and a need for economic ties and development support in their embryonic nation-building stage.

However, this viewpoint is significantly different from that of Indian scholars like Ajay Patnaik and Meena Singh Roy. Patnaik suggests that, from the Indian perspective, Pakistan’s “search for depth,” did not end with a Taliban victory in Afghanistan, and instead continued toward Central Asia with its significant resources, which “could provide for greater strategic advantages.”103 Balancing Pakistan therefore formed an important element of India’s strategy in the region, given the geopolitical turmoil unleashed by the rise of the Taliban and the Tajik civil war, both of which significantly involved Pakistan. Roy suggested in 2001 that India needed to carefully watch for any Pakistani strategic gain in the region,104 and recently clarified that, in her view, Indian policy in the nineties toward Central Asia was not hampered by a preoccupation with Pakistan, but instead reflected the geopolitical realities that India faced at that time.105

While the debate over the significance of Pakistan to Indian strategy in the region continues even today (and as such is addressed in a following chapter), it is fair to conclude that India’s inability to draw away from the straightjacket of a ‘security first’ dynamic, which was built around the narrative of containing a Pakistani search for strategic depth in Central Asia, and instead focus on economic and developmental issues, did have an impact on its ties with the CARs and minimised its initial advantages.

Shortly after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) returned to power in March 1998, India announced itself to the world as a nuclear weapon state. While popular discourse has suggested that the nuclear tests were timed to match the ascendancy of the Hindu nationalist BJP, Ganguly submits that the tests were not the result of an aggressive Hindu nationalist strategy, and, instead, that Indian policymakers had their hands forced by the Clinton administration in the US, which was attempting to conclude a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, leaving the Indians with a limited window of opportunity.106 Nonetheless, going nuclear had a noteworthy impact on Indian foreign policy, and, as Kavalski postulates, India developed a sense of ‘nuclear assertiveness’

103 Patnaik, Ajay. 2011. 96
within its foreign policy after this period. He identifies three broad aspects of this “nuclear assertiveness” in significant contrast to the period of “post-Cold War blues,” which are now examined in detail below.

Kavaliski first suggests that the decision to go nuclear alludes to the end of the ambiguity and uncertainty that dogged Indian foreign policy in the nineties (as identified previously). His contention, based on an extensive analysis of the works of Indian scholars, is that India’s foreign policy elite began to view the international relations environment as a ‘zero–sum game’, and their decision to go nuclear represents a choice of the ‘militarist’ perspective over the ‘moralist’ perspective. Second, keeping with the idea that the ‘militarist’ perspective had triumphed, Kavaliski suggests that the nuclear tests represented a previously unseen “assertive foreign policy stance” from India. His reasoning suggests that this assertiveness was linked to the re-emergence of the “Curzonian school of Indian foreign policy,” within policy circles in India, implying an “Indocentric” and “forward foreign policy” approach in India. Finally, Kavaliski suggests that the third aspect of this ‘nuclear assertiveness’ was India’s clear move away from the Nehruvian underpinnings of its foreign policy toward a more Kautilyan approach, where the “imperatives of non-violence” were not prized over a realpolitik response to the geopolitical uncertainties it was facing.

Other factors, too, point to a resurgence in Indian foreign policy toward the end of nineties. With the fruits of the economic liberalisation that was put in place in 1991 beginning to be seen, a more confident India began to emerge on the world stage. By the late nineties, as scholar Marie Lall states, India was “opening up to the world, and economic growth rather than self sufficiency became the major driver for

109 ibid.
110 Kavaliski, Emilian. 2010. 41.
111 For more on the Forward school and the role of Lord Curzon, see Raja Mohan, C. 2004. 204-205.
112 Kavaliski, Emilian. 2010. 41.
113 ibid. 44.
international relations.” According to the author, India also benefitted from a degree of domestic political stability, as the BJP-led government would serve a full-term from 1999 to 2004. While Indian policy toward Central Asia had suffered in the nineties, the ‘Gujral Doctrine’ had proved to be successful in other areas. The emergence of a “Look East” strategy focused on India’s neighbours in South East Asia, and attempts to reach out to the US and Israel, which were fructifying, all lead credence to Kavalski’s proposition of the development of an Indian sense of “nuclear assertiveness” in this period.

It is important at this stage to return the analysis to the subject of Central Asia. For much of the nineties, Central Asia, though seen as vital to India’s interests, remained on the sidelines, as India struggled to re-establish its ties with Moscow and a new Russian political elite. As Peyrouse suggests, Indian elites continued to believe that the region remained under Moscow’s “sphere of influence,” and were therefore oblivious to the entry of China and other powers into the region, leading them to squander India’s initial advantages. It was only after the victory of the Taliban, India’s direct experience with terror emanating from the broader region with the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814 to Kandahar, and the Kargil War that India comprehended the changing geopolitical milieu and actively sought to engage the CARs. The emergence of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, with the Taliban supporting the formation of groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which festered opposition to the Central Asian regimes in areas like the Fergana valley, also convinced the Central Asian states of a need to reciprocate Indian overtures, and it is from within this context that the next section begins, with an analysis of India’s ‘Look North’ policy.


115 ibid. 28-29.

116 Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011. 78.


2.4 India and Central Asia from ‘Look North’ to ‘Connect Central Asia’

2.4.1 ‘Look North’

The origins of India’s ‘Look North’ policy can be found in India’s extended neighbourhood strategy, which formed an integral part of the ‘Gujral Doctrine’ of the mid-nineties. With its focus on South and East Asia, the extended neighbourhood policy was limited in its approach to Central Asia, given the broader concerns that Indian foreign-policy decision making faced in that period (as explained above). With a resurgent economy and a renewed understanding of the geopolitical uncertainties that emanated from the broader South – Central Asia region (especially in Afghanistan), Indian policy-makers attempted to recast Indian policy toward the region, stressing security and economic cooperation with the CARs as the way forward in the new millennium.\(^{119}\) The genesis of India’s ‘Look North’ policy can be traced to this period. Though never officially enunciated like its successor, the CCA policy, the following paragraphs attempt to explicate the underlying features of the ‘Look North’ policy, which drove Indian cooperation with Central Asia from 1998 to 2012.

Security cooperation, aimed at countering the threat of terror and from Islamic radicalism that emanated from the broader geopolitical region, stretching from the Central Asian borderlands with Afghanistan and across northern Pakistan and Kashmir, formed the bedrock of India’s overtures to the Central Asian region. With the aid of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, its closest Central Asian allies in the post-Soviet period, India worked assiduously alongside Iran and Russia to support the opposition Northern Alliance, led by Ahmed Shah Masood, against the Taliban in Afghanistan. India established a hospital at Farkhor on the Afghan border in Tajikistan, and is estimated to have pledged equipment and resources worth US $10 million in the period before 9/11 to the Northern Alliance.\(^{120}\) Additionally, with the advent of the United States’ (US) ‘War on Terror’, post 9/11, India worked to establish Joint

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Working Groups (JWG) to discuss security and terror issues with the Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tajiks. This cooperation continues till today. (A detailed analysis of India’s security cooperation with the CARs is provided in a later chapter.)

With the defeat of the Taliban and the establishment of a supportive government in Kabul, India attempted to go beyond the basic nullification of the threat of terrorism and achieve its long-term strategic goals in Central Asia: containing Pakistan, whilst being able to cast an eye upon China’s expanding ambitions in the region. The 2003 visit of PM Vajpayee to Tajikistan, to discuss the upgradation of the Ayni air force base (which would lead to the subsequent establishment of the first overseas base for the Indian Air Force (IAF)), was a significant articulation of India’s intent to project military power into the Central Asian region, according to scholar Stephen Blank. If one considers a more strategic reading of the ‘Look North’ policy it appears that it was also a response from policy makers to the tacit understanding that India’s foreign policy zone of interest had expanded since the nineties. Scholar David Scott, suggesting a Kautilyan reading of India’s northward push, states that India’s Mandala (concentric circles of interest) had expanded to include Central Asia. This is a view that is shared by Sengupta who states, “the broadening concentric circles that constituted her foreign policy now included not just South and South East Asia but also Central Asia and Afghanistan.” (A detailed explanation of the concentric circles of India’s grand strategy is provided in the next chapter.) Economically, the ‘Look North’ policy entailed a substantive trade reset between India and the Central Asian states, as India became increasingly sentient to the vast natural resource potential of the region as a possible solution to its growing resource needs in the energy and mineral ore sectors. Starting in the mid nineties, India was finally able to access the CARs overland via a circuitous route through the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas. The railroad, which links the Turkmen capital Ashgabat to the Persian Gulf, was opened in 1996, and India signed a tripartite agreement with Iran

and Turkmenistan shortly after in 1997, allowing for its use for trade between India
and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{124} While India put in place the steps to trade more effectively with
the region, its lack of direct overland access remained a barrier to increasing trade.
India’s total trade with the five CARs in 2000-2001 was a paltry US$ 94.5 million,
which rose to US$ 230 million in 2005-2006, out of an overall trade figure of US$ 29
billion for all five of the CARs in 2001.\textsuperscript{125}

The need to scale up trade and the attractiveness of Central Asia as an economic
destination for Indian goods was not lost on Indian decision makers. In 2003, senior
advisor to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), TK Bhaumik, called for a
“fresh start” to be made to revive trade and linkages with the region and to develop
long-term partnerships.\textsuperscript{126} It seemed that the government and private industry were
finally listening. In August 2005, the state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation
(ONGC), partnered with the Indian owned global steel conglomerate Mittal
Corporation to bid for strategic oil and gas investments in Kazakhstan, after the
Indian and Kazakh governments came to an agreement.\textsuperscript{127} While initially
unsuccessful, ONGC would eventually go on to secure a stake in the Satpayev field in
2011, and other gas exploration rights in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Scholar
Jagannath Panda viewed energy as a key factor in India’s ‘New Look at Central Asia
Policy’, suggesting that it had become as much of a driving force for India’s overtures
to the region as its strategic concerns.\textsuperscript{128} The Look North policy recognized the
strategic value of Central Asia’s energy resources, and aimed to facilitate trade
opportunities for India based on this. (India’s energy and trade relations are also the
subject of a detailed study in later chapters.)

Another economic aspect of India’s Look North policy was recognition in India of the
opportunities Central Asia could provide both as a zone of connectivity for Indian

\textsuperscript{124} Kaushik, D. 'India And Central Asia: Revitalizing Traditional Ties'. \textit{International Studies} 47.2-4 (2010): 327.
\textsuperscript{127} Pattanaik, Ajay. 2011. 99.
goods and services headed to Eurasia, and as a destination full-of investment potential. Roy, in 2002, talks of the development of the ‘North South Transport Corridor’ stating\(^{129}\) that the development of such a “corridor could boost Indian trade with CARs as well as Central Europe.”\(^{130}\) She also suggests, that not only could Central Asia be a transit hub, but also a destination for Indian goods and investment, and qualifies her thoughts on investment by making it clear that the Indian government would have to be responsible for the creation of a suitable atmosphere, guaranteeing the interests of Indian companies, much like the Chinese and Russian governments do.\(^{131}\) The entrance of these and other like-minded views into the Indian strategic discourse about Central Asia were essential to India eventually making the first steps to build on connectivity and investment opportunities over the next decade.\(^{132}\)

Other scholars have indicated that yet another element of India’s Look North policy was its attempt to portray itself as an example for future development to the CARs. When talking about the “narrative outlines” of India’s Look North policy, Kavalski suggests, referencing numerous Indian commentators, that India’s “experience of managing diversity within a secular and democratic polity” was an essential element of its foreign policy in the region, where India stressed its experience and relevance in the state-building process.\(^{133}\) This view is also emphasised by Peyrouse, who indicates that India looks to “lead the way” in “democracy, secularism, multinationality and economic modernization,” rather than positioning itself as a model.\(^{134}\) Both Kavalski and Peyrouse agree that India’s promotion of Central Asian regionalism and its steadfast attempts to encourage the creation of regional architectures for cooperation in the \textit{Nehruvian} mould, has been another tacit aim of the ‘Look North’ policy, just as India was one of the founders of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the post-colonial world order. India’s active involvement for the


\(^{130}\) Singh Roy, Meena. 2002.

\(^{131}\) ibid.


\(^{133}\) Kavalski, Emilian. 2011. 204.

\(^{134}\) Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011. 78.
last two decades in the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), the brainchild of Kazakh President Nazarbayev, should be seen in this light.\footnote{For more India’s involvement in CICA, see Ministry of External Affairs, India,. Conference On Interaction And Confidence Building Measures In Asia (CICA). 2013. Web. 5 July 2014.}

In attempting to “lead the way” for Central Asia, as Peyrouse suggests, India attempted to harness its ‘cultural capital’ and build on its civilizational affinities with the CARs. Apart from engaging them on strategic security and economic terms, India attempted to use its extensive development cooperation schemes to drive home its message of being a benevolent and respectful partner to the CARs. Where India couldn’t match Chinese economic muscle and Russian hard power, the ‘Look North’ policy codified India’s efforts to use its soft power attributes to attempt to even the playing field. India’s development cooperation in Central Asia was initially focussed on the disbursement of Lines of Credit (LOC), providing funding for medicine and drought relief through the nineties to the poorest of the CARs.\footnote{Shivkumar, Hemant et al. 2014.} However, realising the soft power benefits, India switched to providing grants instead of LOC after 2004, and focussed on humanitarian assistance and the revitalization of power and water plants in the region.\footnote{ibid.} Additionally, India’s Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme has been active in the region from the early nineties, and over 3000 students have benefitted from training so far.\footnote{ibid.} (India’s cultural and civilizational outreach to the Central Asia is explored in detail in a later chapter.)

Having provided an elucidation of India’s ‘Look North’ policy, at this stage it is prudent to offer some thoughts on its efficacy and to explain the transformation from “Look North” to CCA.

Kavalski, who made the ‘Look North’ policy a subject of an entire book, suggests that, in the end, the policy is nothing but a grand exercise in “mythmaking,” explaining that as a rising power India’s international relations are as much about fact as about fiction.\footnote{Kavalski, Emilian. 2010. 195-211.} (Kavalski’s arguments regarding mythmaking are dissected within a later chapter of this thesis.) Kavalski also proposes that India was forced into an
approach of “strategic bilateralism,” where it actively seeks strong bilateral relations with the individual CARs, and highlights India’s relationship with Tajikistan as an example of this.\footnote{Kavalski, Emilian. 2011. 205-206.} He reasons that the seeking of strong bilateral ties is a testament to the inefficacy of the ‘Look North policy’, and that, should the policy actually have influence, India would not need to resort to bilateralism, hinting to a confusion within India’s policy thinking as to what exactly is the best way forward.\footnote{ibid.} To this argument, he adds that the fact that India had to seek acceptance into a Chinese led regional security architecture, the SCO, signifies the country’s acceptance of China as the “next global power.”\footnote{ibid.} Reading between the lines it seems to also suggest India’s acceptance of China’s primordiality in Central Asia, and that its own strategic thinking (‘Look North’) has much catching up to do, a view that is shared by other scholars.\footnote{See, Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011 or Panda, Jagannath. 2011.}

### 2.4.2 Connect Central Asia

E Ahamed, India’s Minister of State for External Affairs, formally announced the CCA policy on June 12, 2012. Addressing Kyrgyz Prime Minister Roza Otunbaeva and other dignitaries at the first India – Central Asia Dialogue in Bishkek, Ahamed said:

> India is now looking intently at the region through the framework of its ‘Connect Central Asia’ policy, which is based on pro-active political, economic and people-to-people engagement with Central Asian countries, both individually and collectively.\footnote{Ahamed, E. ‘India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ Policy’. 2012. Speech at First India – Central Asia Dialogue, Bishkek.}

The CCA policy broke from Indian tradition, by being clearly vocalized by the MEA. Previous policies toward the region, while the subject of much intellectual solipsism, were never codified by the MEA and expressed as such. As a recently retired senior official at the MEA insinuated, the enunciation of a new policy was also a tacit admission of the failure of India’s previous policies aimed at the region in the two

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\footnote{Kavalski, Emilian. 2011. 205-206.}
\footnote{ibid.}
\footnote{ibid.}
\footnote{See, Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011 or Panda, Jagannath. 2011.}
\footnote{Ahamed, E. 'India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ Policy'. 2012. Speech at First India – Central Asia Dialogue, Bishkek.}
decades since the Cold War’s end. The official also added that India’s inability to actively engage the CARs economically, and the inadequacy of its positioning as a archetype for the CARs to emulate, had cost it valuable ground in the wake of a Chinese onslaught in the region, and that the policy, if executed correctly, could improve India’s future prospects considerably. The fact that the External Affairs Minister SM Krishna and Vice President Hamid Ansari made supplementary trips to the region in July and November 2012 is testament to the importance that India attached to the CCA policy and the region.

While much of India’s behaviour after the articulation of the CCA policy is considered and discussed in the later chapters of this thesis, it is important at this stage to provide an overview of the CCA policy, and more important perhaps to explain the differences between the CCA and the previous ‘Look North’ and ‘Extended Neighbourhood’ policies. This paper takes the view that the CCA policy did not develop independently from the other policies, and as such is not radically different from them. It should, however, be read as an iterative upgrade to the previous policies, given that it continues in the same mould, where the differences (between the policies) are reflective of the changing diversity of India’s needs and capabilities as a rising power in the world system. As Roy suggests, the CCA policy should be seen as an “acceleration of [India’s] engagement with the region to build a cooperative partnership.”

The variances between the CCA policy and India’s previous stratagems are now analysed in detail. The CCA policy, while reinforcing the strategic-security paradigm of cooperation that already existed, aimed to introduce a “pro-active political, economic and people-to-people engagement” element into the relationship. The CCA policy therefore added certain previous unseen elements to India’s strategy, and as Roy notes it introduced a new mantra into the discourse “of the four Cs, namely

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146 ibid.
148 Ahamed, E. 2012.
Commerce, Connectivity, Consular and Community.” The difference was that the CCA aimed to remedy the lack of progress on the economic front by encouraging greater people-to-people contact, using India’s strengths in technology, and education to facilitate a new kind of engagement paradigm.

In security and strategic terms, the CCA policy built on the previously strong bilateral relationships that India shared with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to address a looming issue – that of Afghanistan, and its future after the withdrawal of Western forces in 2014. This was to be done by strengthening defence and military cooperation, planning shared training exercises, and continuing with high-level visits and strategic dialogues. India also aimed to use the CCA to connect Afghanistan to Central Asia by developing a regional approach to the development of the Afghanistan, with the help of the CARs, to address issues of terror and radicalism. The CCA policy confirms Afghanistan’s vitality as a key component of any overland access route as well: India would need to facilitate trade between South and Central Asia, and addresses this as an element of necessary strategic cooperation between India and the CARs, as evidenced by the policy and additional rhetoric from the MEA.

Economically, though predicated on the commerce of energy and natural resources, the CCA policy aimed to raise India’s trade from the paltry US$ 500 million, through innovative approaches that converted India’s “enormous goodwill” into “tangible and strategic advantages.” As scholar Roman Muzalevsky states:

Specifically, India seeks to establish 14 flight connections with all regional countries and promote the development of IT, energy, banking, and pharmaceutical industries to facilitate economic exchanges. It also contributes to the development of a cross-regional energy infrastructure and e-network with a hub in the IT-savvy India.

152 Singh Roy, Meena. 2013. 309.
153 Muzalevsky, Roman. 2012.
With its focus on its technological strengths in non-traditional sectors, like banking, pharmaceuticals and education, India hoped to build on people-to-people connectivity to enhance its commercial prospects. Also, by aiming to establish more direct flight connections to the capitals in the region (most of which are closer to Delhi than Bangalore or Chennai), the CCA policy hoped to address the lack of connectivity and consular issues that were hampering better economic ties.

By building on the goodwill generated by its cultural capital and civilizational affinities, the CCA policy hopes to use India’s developmental cooperation and expertise in innovation and nation building to present India as a capable power, one that others should seek to emulate. As The Hindu noted in 2012, after the CCA policy was articulated, India was perceived as a rising regional power, “not quite in the league of China but interesting to behold because of its enormous market, its incredible culture, its singular capacity to innovate and even its fractious democracy.”¹⁵⁴ It is exactly this perception that scholars and policymakers suggest that the CCA policy sought to develop.¹⁵⁵ With plans for the establishment of a Central Asian University in Bishkek, and the creation of a pan Central Asian connectivity hub to provide tele-education and tele-medicine, echoing its past successes in East Africa,¹⁵⁶ India hopes that its demonstrated capabilities in technology, connectivity and innovation will help it regain the ground lost to China and other powers who made better use of the previous decades.

Finally, the CCA policy reiterates India’s commitment to regional solutions to regional issues through regional interactions. It actively supports the creation of regional transport and communication infrastructure that links South Asia to Eurasia via the CARs (the North-South corridor and other large connectivity projects, for example). India’s recent commitments to the continuation of the Iranian port project in Chahbahar, as the first step to an alternative route to the CARs, and its support of Central Asia South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM) should be seen in this light. It also recognises the importance of regional architectures, like the SCO and

¹⁵⁵ A number of interviewed scholars suggested this including Ambassador Phunchok Stobdan and the recently retired senior MEA official.
the Russia-led EEU amongst others. India is currently waiting to be accepted into the
SCO, and is in the process of concluding a trade agreement with the EEU. Additionally, the CCA formalised India’s own regional dialogue and summits for interaction with the CARs.

In conclusion, the CCA policy was looked at by many in India and abroad as a breath of fresh air, and an opportunity for India to mend the various faults in its previous approach to the region. The Hindu termed it India’s “second chance in Asia’s cockpit,” suggesting that with the unravelling of the Afghan situation and Russia’s re-emergence as a major player in the region, India would now have a renewed opportunity and that the CCA policy was its blueprint for success. Its success so far, two years after its enunciation, is a subject this thesis addresses in a later chapter.

2.5 Chapter Conclusions

Ties between India and Central Asia are age-old and continue to bind the two together. Interactions between the two regions can be traced back to prehistoric times (4000 BC), and as some scholars have contended, the geopolitical orbits of northern India and southern Central Asia were combined for many centuries, until the collapse of the Kushan Empire. It was in this period that Buddhism, which originated in India, went north to Central Asia before spreading further East. With the Arab conquests of the Sindh, and the Islamic and Mongol invasions of Central Asia, and later India, linkages between the regions were interrupted. However, once Babur came to power in Delhi, and the Mughal Empire was established, India and Central Asia enjoyed a collaborative cultural environment, leading to the creation of an Indo-Islamic artistic culture hugely inspired by Central Asia.

With the collapse of the Mughal empire, the arrival of the British in India, and the Russian Tsar’s forces at the doorsteps of the Central Asian emirates, the two regions were reoriented away from each, as the two imperial colonising powers fought their own great game. Throughout the 19th and much of the 20th century, at the mercy of their colonial masters, India and Central Asia took different paths, occasionally

157 Malhotra, Jyoti. 2012.
overlapping in Afghanistan, where the two imperial powers came close to war. With the Bolshevik revolution and India’s independence, ties between the two were brokered through Moscow, but limited to intellectual and cultural exchanges.

However, as the Soviet Union collapsed, and the nascent CARs began their own state building processes, India, their historical partner, was unable to help. Bogged down with its own economic crisis, domestic tribulations and troubled foreign policy making in the early nineties, India focussed its energies on Pakistan and South Asia. As it grew more assertive towards the turn of the millennium, it attempted to engage the CARs through shared security and strategic concerns. However, unable to match the Chinese and other players in the region, it lost ground economically, and has remained on the sidelines ever since.

Post 9/11 concern about the situation in Afghanistan and the impact of emanating terror, India has tried to reach out to the CARs culturally, by ‘leading the way’ and showcasing its experience as a democracy and a secular republic. Without the economic muscle to accompany this outreach and limited connectivity, however, its ‘Look North’ policy was a non-starter, and instead India had to resort to bilateral security cooperation, with the occasional economic investment, to make its case in the region.

With the articulation of the CCA policy, India attempted to address its previous failings by emphasising its cultural and civilization affinities and its technological and innovative capabilities, as a way to bridge the gap between its economic prowess and that of China’s. Whilst the official discourse that emanates from the CAR recognises the historicity and cultural affinities that exist between the two, this has yet to translate into tangible benefits in their present-day relationship.

This chapter has provided an overview of the historical nature of India’s ties to the region and a critical analysis of India’s capabilities, policies and actions in respect to its strategy in Central Asia in the post-Cold War period. In doing so, it presents a historical and factual base for a theoretical comprehension of India’s engagement in the region, which is provided in the following chapter. The breakdown of the ‘Look North’ and CCA policies into strategic, security, energy, economic, developmental
and cultural aspects, as presented in this chapter, allows for a profounder comprehension of the exact nature of the determinants of India’s strategy, which then become the subject of a deeper study (as individual chapters) later in the thesis.
3. The New Great Game, the Silk Road and the Notion of an Indian Grand Strategy as a Conjectural Framework

In order to offer a comprehensive understanding of India’s foray into the Central Asian region, it is important that a suitable theoretical and ideological structure is provided and discussed. A case is made here, therefore, to understand this from two broad perspectives. The first seeks to provide a rationale for the involvement of outside powers in the Central Asian region, based on its geostrategic significance (specific not only to India, this framework can be applied to understand the involvement of a host of powers in the region), and falls within the realm of traditional geopolitical articulations. The second seeks to provide an explanation for India’s specific involvement in Central Asia, something that is particular to India’s unique internal and external needs, largely conceived around the more holistic notion of an Indian grand strategy for its relations with the outside world, and is explained through the lens of Indian foreign policy. There is an increasing precedent for using this type of dual approach as suggested by its codification in scholarly work on the subject of Central Asia.¹ A more detailed explanation of what this chapter attempts to do is provided below.

Contemporary debates that surround the study of Central Asia employ a variety of approaches to explain the complexities of the interactions outside powers have with the region. However, these rely largely on a geopolitical reading, stooped in the deep-seated ideas that the region is at a crossroads of civilizations, a place of historical conflict that invites power projection from both its neighbours and distant powers, for its vast natural resources and the economic riches it has on offer.² This is often explained in terms of a ‘New Great Game’ (NGG) for Central Asia. This is also offered as one of the major explanations for India’s presence in the Central Asian region by scholars and in contemporary literature.³ While this geopolitical reading

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does provide a useful understanding of the situation, and continues to remain relevant today, it is deterministic and condescending to reduce the understanding of the international relations of the region to one limited to conflict and competition, and where the Central Asian nations are mere pawns, with no say in their choices of agency.\(^4\)

Therefore, to provide a more pragmatic reading of the region, it is prudent to include a wider conjectural base in this thesis, and provide an alternative geopolitical reading – one that also considers the idea of cooperation and negotiation in the region, a revivalist philosophy that is entrenched in the history of Central Asia, based on the idea of the old silk routes that traversed the area. This reading stresses the idea that the ancient trade roads which ran from China in the West, and India in the South to the Mediterranean Coast in the East, and Mongolia in the North provided a fertile meeting ground for cultures, religion, economic activity and civilizational interaction, and can provide a framework to execute a similar new-age strategy, which will bring peace and prosperity to the region. This reading has gained particular traction in the narratives of China and India as they try to reinforce traditional linkages with the Central Asian countries; this is discussed and presented as a corollary to the idea of the NGG.\(^5\)

Finally, in order to specifically understand the motivations of India as it projects power and seeks agency in the region, a theoretical case is made to envision its engagement in Central Asia as part of an all-encompassing Indian grand strategy that guides its interaction with the outside world. This grand strategy is in turn shaped by a complex mix of history, domestic considerations, external relations, and attempts to reconcile the country’s strategic aims with its ambitions and resources. There is an increasing body of scholarly literature that makes the argument for looking at India’s international relations as an emerging world power through the lens of its grand strategy. This approach has been successfully applied to rationalise India’s


interactions with a variety of actors, including Afghanistan. This thesis therefore attempts to use this dual approach of geopolitics and grand strategy to understand India’s engagement with Central Asia. While individually not exceptional (other scholars have suggested these approaches before), the combination and duality of the conjectural approach is unique, and is posited as one of the scholarly contributions of this work to the subjective discourse.

3.1 Geostrategy as a Framework for Analysis

Central Asia’s geostrategic significance has been the subject of much scientific scholarship for over a century. Lord George Curzon, Viceroy of India, wrote in his 1889 treatise on the subject, Russia in Central Asia, about the importance of the region to Britain, as an area that Russia could easily leverage to cast its eye on imperial India. The book, which was based on a series of articles Curzon wrote for the Manchester Courier, was inspired by his travels through the region and the impression that the tsarist expansion into the region had made upon him. Similarly, the founders of modern geopolitics, Halford Mackinder and Karl Haushofer, postulated upon Eurasia, as their nations and empires contested each other’s claims to the landmass. In the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the ideas of these and other scholars who sought to explain the path the region would take in geostrategic terms, would become prominent, as new policies and frameworks came to the fore. This continues today, as geography remains a key tool in our understanding of the complex politico-security environment of Central Asia. It is this perspective that informs the next sections.

3.1.1 Geopolitics and Central Asia

Before a discussion of the major geopolitical works and their theoretical relevance is presented, it is important to provide an understanding of the field of geopolitics and

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8 ibid.
explain why it provides a suitable base for comprehending the agency of external powers in the region, as in the case of India.

The concept of geopolitics was first associated with Swedish human geographer Rudolf Kjellen, who viewed the state as a geographic organism or phenomenon in space that politically manifested itself as a country or nation. Kjellen’s work was based on that of German thinkers Alexander von Humboldt, Karl Ritter, and later that of Friedrich Ratzel, a trained natural scientist who viewed the state as an organic, living being, where the state and the people are part of the same organism. Ratzel’s work on the living state would be further explored by Halford Mackinder, the founding father of modern political geography, who would use it to posit that geography needed to be made human in its interaction with its physical environment to create a “human habitat.” He explained political geography as an overall ecosystem through which societies and nature existed and conflicted, to create regions and cultures.

The term geopolitics has come to be defined and viewed from a number of perspectives. At its most basic level in contemporary discourse, it has come to signify the complex interactions that international politics has with the spatial dimensions of the geographies of the world’s nations. This simple oft-used meaning, in popular culture and the media, encompasses a relatively deterministic approach based largely on realpolitik, and assumes a world order perpetually in a Hobbesian State, where states are assumed to be rational actors who abide by the all or nothing maxim in their international relations. This realist interpretation of geopolitics is largely a by-product of its use during the first half of the 20th century, when it provided an ideology for British imperialistic perpetuation by Mackinder, and later by Haushofer, whose work would inspire and provide the ideological basis for much of Nazi.
Germany’s attempts at geographic aggrandizement, particularly in Eastern Europe. Further on, the work of Dutch-American Nicholas Spykman, and his work on containment, would serve to influence the policies of George Kennan, and keep this realist interpretation of geopolitics alive throughout the Cold War. In the early 1990’s a new set of thinkers, including Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel Huntington, would go on to use geopolitics as a rationale for American hegemony and as an explanation to describe the international relations of much of the post-Soviet space and the post-colonial world.\textsuperscript{15}

Central Asia (or Eurasia) is a recurring theme in much of the geopolitical discourse that has emerged since Mackinder first postulated that the region was key to the control of the Eurasian landmass, and hence the rest of the world, in his seminal paper, \textit{The Geographical Pivot History}.\textsuperscript{16} This notion would be later reflected in the works of Haushofer and Spykman, as they provided the rationale for their countries to seek supremacy and control, or at the very least the containment of Eurasia. It would then provide the basis for the intellectual discourses that emerged in the breakup of the Soviet Union, as external actors sought to grapple for the resources of the region, as borders were re-drawn and new sovereign states emerged. As further configurations of geo-strategic and geo-economic cooperation and competition developed in the region, new discourses that had this ideal at heart would surface, not only from the United States, but also from Russia, China, Iran and Turkey.\textsuperscript{17,18} Among these discourses was a revival of Mackinder’s pivot/heartland theory, which was explained in the context of a NGG for Central Asia, reviving notions of the imperialist standoff between Britain and tsarist Russia, and comparing this to a conquest for the space and resources by a host of powers vying for influence in an area from which the Soviet Union had just been evicted.\textsuperscript{19} The pivot/heartland theory


and the notion of a resulting NGG form the conjectural basis of the next sections, which aim to understand and hypothesize the behaviour of external powers seeking agency within the spatial dimensions of Central Asia. They are explored in further detail in the paragraphs below, and a discussion on their applicability and suitability to the hypothesis of this thesis, as well as criticisms of these theories, also follows.

3.1.2 The Pivot/Heartland Theory and the Great Game

Mackinder originally postulated the “pivot” theory in his paper and address to London’s Royal Geographical Society in 1904, entitled *The Geographical Pivot of History*. He claimed that the pivot (or heartland, as it would later be known) area of Eurasia, which included much of tsarist Russia and Central Asia at that time, was essential to the balance of power in the world, and that the state that dominated the heartland would dominate the Eurasian region and eventually the world.\(^{20}\) The crux of his pivot theory centred on that one maxim, and would remain essentially the same over the three iterations he eventually produced. The theory, however, was in fact part of a much larger geopolitical philosophy, for which a detailed explanation needs to be offered if it is to be used toward an ideological framework for this thesis.

Mackinder’s overriding concern when he postulated the theory at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century, was how to maintain the superiority of imperial Britain in the Eurasian continent in a world that was increasingly being linked by railroads and global trade and where other global empires, including that of tsarist Russia (in which Britain was locked in a great game) were emerging. The term ‘Great Game’ was thought to have been coined by Arthur Conolly, an officer in the British East India Company’s service in the middle of the 19\(^{th}\) century, as a moniker for the emerging strategic rivalry between Britain and Russia for the Central Asian emirates.\(^{21}\) It was, however, thanks to Rudyard Kipling and his novel *Kim* that the term became frequently used in public discourse at the beginning of the 20\(^{th}\) century.\(^{22}\) Originally used as part of the plot in *Kim*, where the protagonist becomes a pawn in the game working as a British spy,\(^{23}\)

\(^{20}\) Mackinder, Halford. 1904.
\(^{22}\) ibid.
the ‘Great Game’ soon became a popular euphemism for the period of Anglo – Russian competition for Central Asia, Persia and the subcontinent in the 19th century, which continued until the détente in 1907. Scholar Matthew Edwards traces two periods of further continuation of the ‘Great Game’: the Drang nach Osten, undertaken by Wilhelmine, Germany and aimed at India; and a Bolshevik charge following the October 1917 Revolution, aimed toward relieving Asia from imperialist domination. While the German attempt saw little success, the Soviet Union expanded to take control of much of Eurasia. As Edward states:

Territorial control, or at least hegemony over territory, was key to the aims of the Great Game, with the stakes being imperial domination. Irrespective of the individual aims and fluctuating fortunes of the players, the prime objective—imperial security and power—remained constant.

A trained natural scientist, who also studied biology, zoology and geology, Mackinder was a patriot committed to securing Britain’s interests in the Indian subcontinent, as he tried to blend this with his holistic vision for a “new geography”; A geography that was as much human as the natural environment and eco-system it was contained in, moving away from the staid inanimate study of land, places and maps. Land was not only about its area and size, but also about natural resources, ecology, human populations, transport linkages and access to the seas. Mackinder understood the importance of Eurasia in terms of its role in shaping contemporary European society. To him, a Europe post-Westphalia and a Victorian England were the upshot of the thousands of years attrition that European societies had faced from invaders from the east. In his speech to the Royal Geographic Society, he defined European society as an outcome of its ability to withstand attack from Asia, and looked at the modern European nation-state as a product of the responses that older generations had made as they evolved their societies to address the threat from Eurasia better. He stated:

I ask you, therefore, for a moment to look upon Europe and European history as subordinate to Asia and Asiatic history, for European civilization is, in a

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25 ibid.
26 Seiple, Chris. 2006. 45.
27 Mackinder, Halford. 1904.
very real sense, the outcome of the secular struggle against Asiatic invasion...28

Mackinder, in essence, was trying to explain to his audience the very heart of his theory, asking them to consider the threat from Eurasia to be real again in 1904, just as it was to the great civilizations of the past. To him tsarist Russia's increasing prowess in the Eurasian steppes was a matter of great concern, as it had begun to build a railway, and was conquering the Khanates of the region by winning the support of the people. He believed the time had come for the British Empire to seriously consider and address this threat, as it was only a matter of time before the resources, and impregnability of Eurasia, would be used against Britain.29

He believed that the balancing was tilting in the Eurasian heartland, with the advance of the trans-continental railway allowing access to the region, and the creation of infrastructure in what were once areas that were devoid of resources altering and transmuting the conditions of land-power.30 Britain, he thought, was weakening and needed to strengthen its resources in the region – it had fought two disastrous Anglo-Afghan wars in the previous fifty years, and was not seen as a force to contend with in the region. With the trans-continental railway potentially being able to grant the Russians access to warm-water seas, its completion was a sign of trouble for Britain, both economically and militarily. As a sea power where it reigned unchallenged, it was restricted to the speed and capacity of its ships; a more modern railway system, could not only carry more, but could do so with greater efficacy and speed. In essence, Mackinder viewed land power as primordial over sea power.31

What Mackinder therefore proposed to do with his hypothesis, was to provide a roadmap or formula for Britain to be able to deal with this looming threat. In his words, “my aim is not to predict a great future for this country, but to make a geographical formula into which you could fit any political balance...”32 His formula was simple, and as such described the state of the international system as one where

28 Mackinder, Halford. 1904. 423.
29 Seiple, Chris. 2006. 45.
30 Mackinder, Halford. 1904.
31 ibid
32 ibid. 443.
the balance of political power was the product of geographical conditions, both economic and strategic, and of the population and relative competitive advantages of the different groups in the system.\textsuperscript{33} This was now especially apparent in the case of Eurasia, and his postulated pivot theory would help explain and address the potential imbalance of power that was about to occur.

Looking at the pivot theory in detail now, it essentially states that, in the modern industrial age, the natural resources, physical environment and strategic conditions in Eurasia are so vast that any one power that would be able to dominate this region, would then be able to dominate the world. It identifies this region as a ‘pivot area’, (see Figure 2) around which swathes of coastlands are vulnerable to attack from the sea, and have historically been so. However, Mackinder viewed the pivot area as the greatest natural fortress on earth – with the Arctic Ocean and the permafrost of Siberia at its northern extremes, and being bound by the mighty Himalayas, arid deserts and great lakes on its Southern and Western margins, the pivot area was safe from the designs of any modern sea power of his time.\textsuperscript{34} The pivot area was surrounded by littoral states like China, India and Turkey in the South and the East, and bordered by Prussia and Austro-Hungary to the West, which formed the ‘inner crescent’ (see Figure 1). Finally Britain, the United States, Africa, South America and Japan formed the ‘outer crescent’. Mackinder contended, that an alliance of outer and inner crescent states could ally and seek control of the pivot area of Eurasia.\textsuperscript{35}

Mackinder would go on to revise the theory in 1919, after the end of the First World War, in his book \textit{Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction}, where the pivot would be known as the heartland, focussed on northern Eurasia, and reflected the altered geopolitical realities of post-War Europe.\textsuperscript{36} The heartland theory divided the world into a ‘world island’, which comprised Europe, Africa and Asia, and several smaller islands (see Figure 3). The major difference between the two theories was the enlargement of the heartland, to account for the advances in land transportation, growing populations and industrialisation,
extending it from Eastern Europe to China. Reflecting the mood in Europe, and the creation of independent Eastern European republics, Mackinder coined the famous phrase at Versailles in 1919, “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World.” As scholar Saul Cohen notes, Mackinder’s belief in the world as a closed system remained – where the balance of power could only be maintained by force, underlining his lack of belief in the ‘League of Nations’ and the new world order that had emerged.

Figure 2 – The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)
While Mackinder remained a prominent political figure in Britain, his ideological work did not have the same impact in the inter-war period. Instead Haushofer continued in the same vein, providing Hitler and Nazi Germany with ideological support based on Mackinder’s work on the heartland. According to Francis Sempa, who cites Hans Weigert, Haushofer advocated the formation of a “Eurasiatic great continental bloc,” a pact between Germany, Japan and Russia that would eventually be aimed at the British Empire – fulfilling in some ways Mackinder’s prophecy.42

Mackinder would be asked to revise this theory one last time in 1942, by Foreign Affairs magazine. Sticking to his guns, he claimed his theory remained valid, while reworking the heartland to reflect the territory of the Soviet Union west of the Yenisei River, and giving due importance to the power of seas, and the rise of the US, echoing the geopolitical turmoil of the times as the allies fought the axis powers.43

3.1.3 The New Great Game

Before an explanation and discussion of the NGG is provided, it would be prudent to explain the circumstances in which a revival of Mackinderan geopolitics took place within American ideological thinking during the Cold War, which would shape the narratives of geopolitical thinking around post Soviet Eurasia in the nineties. For this we have to turn first to the work of Spykman, who in the 1940s postulated the ‘Rimland’ theory. Based on the ideas of thinker and US Admiral Alfred Mahan and Mackinder, Spykman, who was ideologically opposed to Haushofer and Nazi Germany, emphasised the primacy of sea power over that of land power, essentially refuting Mackinder. In his book *The Geography of Peace*, Spykman, according to Sempa, acknowledged the value of Mackinder’s heartland but believed that it was overrated, and instead of the heartland, the key was the ‘inner crescent’ that bordered the heartland. This, Spykman renamed the rimland. The rimland included Western Europe, the Middle East, South Asia, China and the Far East. To Spykman, the rimland “combined with the offshore islands of Britain and Japan, possessed greater industrial and manpower resources than the heartland, and wielded both land and sea power.” Spykman believed that only a sea based Anglo-American alliance working in cohesion with a Soviet land force could prevent Germany from taking control of the rimland and then iteratively the entire world.

Spykman’s work and reinterpretation of Mackinder’s theories would perhaps have its greatest practical effect in the Cold War, and the American strategy of ‘Containment’. George Kennan, in his X-article, based his reasoning for containing the influence of the Soviet Union and preventing its spread in the rimland on the works of Mahan and Mackinder, but also strongly reflected Spykman’s hypothesis. Interestingly, containment would also play a key role in US policy in South Asia in the post-colonial period. In search for allies, the US saw India as a “pivotal” state in the region, and as Stephen Cohen notes:

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46 ibid.
The objective of the strategy was to help India and Pakistan defend against external attack, to obtain bases and facilities from which the United States might strike the Soviet Union with its own forces, and to help both states meet the threat from internal (often communist-led) insurrection and subversion.\(^{48}\)

Nehru, however, had other plans for India and the NAM, eventually allying with the Soviet Union, as Pakistan joined the US lead CENTO and SEATO groups. Analysing containment in the Cold War period from an India-Central Asia perspective would lead one to conclude that the strategy probably drove India closer to the Soviet Union, and helped facilitate contact with Central Asia via India’s ties to Moscow.

Mackinder’s views and realist geopolitical approach would continue to be reflected throughout the Cold War, by various other ideologues associated with the US national security establishment including most prominently intellectuals like Kissinger, Brzezinski and Huntington. As Leslie Hepple notes, a revival of geopolitics took place with the appointment of Kissinger as National Security Advisor (NSA) in 1968, and the changes in the international political and economic order, the failure of US-Soviet bipolarity and the strategy of containment.\(^{49}\) Kissinger’s arrival saw, the conflation of geopolitics with the search for a new US global strategy, and the popularization of the term as an “umbrella term for policy in a global – regional context.”\(^{50}\) As Brzezinski replaced Kissinger’s legacy as NSA with his own in the seventies and eighties, geopolitics and Mackinderan thinking were increasingly used in the narrative explications of US global strategy in a ‘Cold War world’, rocked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iranian revolution and crises in South America. Brzezinski’s geopolitical worldview was based on the struggle between Eurasian land and sea power,\(^{51}\) and it would continue to play an influential role in President Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy in the eighties with US support of the Afghan mujahedeen against the Soviets.

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\(^{50}\) ibid S22.

\(^{51}\) Cohen, Saul Bernard. 2014. 30.
With the success of the ‘Regan Doctrine’, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of Mackinderan terms and the concept of the ‘great game’ were introduced to describe the situation playing out in a Eurasian landmass witness to numerous parallel state and nation-building exercises. Scholar Milan Hauner in the Eurasian Report in 1992 referred to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) being established in the “heartland of Eurasia” before contemplating the future of Eurasia in Mackinderan terms and the ideas of Russian geopolitical ideologue Igor Malashenko. In 1993, Boris Rumer talked about a “new great game in the heart of Asia,” as the five new CARs “started to define their geopolitical orientation,” and noted that the “outcome, indeed the very process, threatens to alter political and military equations from China to the Persian Gulf.” Brzezinski himself would write his treatise, *The Grand Chessboard*, in 1997 where, apart from talking about the “game,” he construed the “Eurasian Balkans” as a geostrategic chessboard, on which he saw Russia, China and India as the major players along with the US. Noting Eurasian similarities with the Balkans, he adapted Mackinder’s heartland to explain the competition for Central Asia, in economic, energy, politico-security terms, linking primacy in the region to the US’s ambitions as the world’s only superpower.

The concept of the NGG would become a major feature of intellectual analysis of post Soviet Central Asia in the nineties. Premised on Mackinderan notions of antagonism for the region’s strategic space, and elucidated in terms of a competitive game for the region’s energy and economic resources, a number of scholars rationalised the effects of external agency in this way. As Edwards notes in 2003, “a New Great Game has emerged, one that is a competition for influence, power, hegemony and profits in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.” Expounding his argument, he considers Central Asia the key to Eurasian security, and that the NGG is essentially a geostrategic and geo-economic competition; “competition for influence, whether at

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54 Igor Malashenko was a senior researcher at the powerful International Department of the Central Committee (CCID) of the Communist Party Politburo.
57 ibid.
political, economic or cultural levels.”

Other commentators, have viewed it as a “power vacuum” that external powers would seek to fill, the competitive diplomacy of “black gold” amidst a contest for oil pipelines amongst countries and corporations, and a competition between alternate models for state and nation building models. Today, as the West departs from Afghanistan, and the CARs themselves are able to project power in the region, the game has taken on a whole new meaning, as a weakened Russia, and emergent India, take on a rampant China.

Edwards, in his analysis, presents taxonomy of the differences between the ‘Great Game’ and the NGG. He identifies the following aspects of this differentiation: location, actors, aims and means & scope. This taxonomical framework has been adapted to reflect current narratives of the NGG, and to explain its relevance to the comprehension of the ideological underpinnings of external agency in the region, including that of the type exercised by India. After this taxonomy has been presented, an argument is made to demonstrate the germaneness of the concept of the ‘New Great game’ in today’s Central Asia, before showing its relation to India.

In terms of location of the NGG, the Eurasian landmass continues to be the canvas on which the game is construed. In the early nineties, as Rummer notes, it involved only the nascent CARs. However other scholars have expanded the playing fields of the game to include the Caucuses, the Caspian Basin, Afghanistan, Tibet, Xinjiang and Mongolia, the outer fringes of the heartland. Post 9/11, as scholar Rajah Menon notes in 2003, and the ‘War on Terror’ refocused the game toward Afghanistan and its bordering CARs, as the focus shifted away from geo-economic competition to geo-strategic cooperation for a short period, as Islamic radicalism and terror became the target of powers like the US, Russia, China, Iran and India. As more recent analysis and commentary has shown, the game has regained its competitive element, and refocused itself upon greater Central Asia, as external powers seek to fill the vacuum.

59 ibid.
created by the withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan, which began in 2014.  

The actors and players in the NGG have remained fairly consistent over the last two decades. Scholar Ian Cuthbertson, writing in 1994, viewed China, Turkey, Iran and the United States as the major external players seeking to fill the strategic void in an inward looking Russia’s backyard, each with their own tools of influence – cultural, economic and strategic. Dianne Smith, writing in 1996, added India and Pakistan to the mix, and suggested that evolving collective security arrangements, like the Collectives Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and multilateral organisations like the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organisation), would have an increasingly important role to play in the game. More recently, Alexander Cooley in his 2012 book *Great Games Local Rules* stresses the primacy of American, Chinese and Russian power in the region, with the caveat that the CARs themselves are now players in the game, and not merely pawns subservient to the interests of the great powers. He adds that the fact that all three great powers have had different strategic aims in the region post 9/11 has facilitated an environment where the CARs can now set the rules of engagement for the game. This view is shared by other scholars including Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, and is used in their explanation of Indian agency in the region.

In terms of aims of the game, they have been varied and multi-fold, as Edwards himself states of the aims:

> at state actor level the establishment of a form of neo-imperialist hegemony, the formation of cultural allegiances and influence and the promotion of state security concerns; at non-state actor the maximisation of profits, securing of contracts and dominant shares in consortia and the securing of local influence and politico-religious aims.

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68 Laruelle, Marlene and Sebastien Peyrouse. 2011. 8-12.
69 Edwards, Matthew. 2003. 89.
The focus of the aims, though, has also depended on the nature of external agency and the overall geopolitical situation in the region. Whilst in the nineties, Russia was focussed on regaining its strategic and economic space in the region, other powers, like China and the US, were more interested in the geo-economics of oil and gas. Conversely, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia were interested in providing models of governance and Islamic state and nation building to the CARs, while India and Pakistan were locked in a battle of ‘strategic depth’ over the CARs. In the decade post 9/11, whilst the US and Russia focussed on politico-security aims in the region and Afghanistan, China was able to consolidate its economic advantages, slowly becoming the principal player, leaving India, Iran and Turkey behind. Today, as the playing fields of the region open up again after the West departs from Afghanistan, a host of aims have emerged as Russia, China, India and the others seek primacy in a region that is being secured by multinational groupings like the SCO and EEU, yet being threatened by the rise of the Islamic state and other internal turmoil.

The means and scope of the NGG, like the aims, are equally mottled. Emilian Kavalsksi, while acknowledging the existence of the NGG in his 2010 article, states that the game is accompanied by an additional dynamic of “hegemonic fragmegration,” which characterises the increased international involvement in the region. This process of “hegemonic fragmentation” occurs when external actors engage with other actors “to advance their own goals and thwart the advances of others — an objective, which also produces some paradoxical alliances between them.” He adds that this also prevents any one power from dominating the CARs, and hence reduces the potential for violent conflict between outside powers in the region. On the subject of the NGG, Kavalski states that the process of globalisation in post Soviet Central Asia has led to the merging and overlap of the geopolitical orbits of South Asia, East Asia, West Asia, Europe and Africa via Central Asia, leading to a situation where the pattern of Central Asian affairs are being transformed into “one which is dominated by a complex network of overlapping inter-regional relations.” Further, he states, “the foreign policy engagement of various international actors in Central Asia indicates the particular political, socio-economic, and (geo)historical

70 Kavalski, Emilian. 2011. 27
71 ibid.
72 ibid.
conditions within which their agency is framed,\textsuperscript{73} a view that Indian scholar and former Director of the Centre for Russian, Central Asian and East European Studies at JNU, Shams-ud-din, proposed for the CARs in 1997. Shams-ud-din argues that the CARs are seriously engaged in the creation of their foreign policies, determined by geostrategic, geo-economic and geo-cultural factors.\textsuperscript{74} It is with keeping these viewpoints in mind, that this work now attempts to substantiate the cogency of the NGG hypothesis in rationalising India’s agency in the CARs, and its validity presently.

On the subject of the validity of the NGG, a number of scholars have argued both for and against it as a conceptual depiction of the effects of external agency in post Soviet Central Asia. While a detailed account of both sides of the argument is not feasible within this work, an attempt is made to explain succinctly the key aspects of both arguments, and then explain why this work considers the concept still valid. In arguing against the NGG, Edwards states that, as an analogy, it is misleading: referring to the past, and what took place between imperial Britain and tsarist Russia was totally dissimilar to what is taking place in post Soviet Central Asia.\textsuperscript{75} Further, as a concept he questions its validity and its linking with realist geopolitics, stating that the term has been used in analysis without adequate academic interrogation. This view is shared by commentator Christopher Fettweis, who questions the relevance of the connected heartland in his analysis of US policy in Eurasia in the nineties.\textsuperscript{76} While the concept and validity of the NGG are not without their detractors, who question its use as a semiotic device, a host of other scholars, and, more importantly, Indian policy-makers, continue to acknowledge its importance as a discursive structure in understanding the region through the use of the analogy in their analysis.

A recent search on Google revealed 188,000 search results for the term “New Great Game,” and a majority of these results are from sites dated after the turn of the

\textsuperscript{73} ibid.  
\textsuperscript{74} Shams-Ud-Din, Mr. 'The New Great Game In Central Asia'. International Studies 34.3 (1997): 331. Print  
\textsuperscript{75} Edwards, Matthew. 2003. 97.  
millennium,\textsuperscript{77} signifying that the term continues to be used in popular discourse and academic writing. As shown in this work previously, scholars from various backgrounds such as Stephen Blank, David Scott,\textsuperscript{78} Menon, Cooley, Kavalski and Robert Kaplan, have acknowledged the existence of the game and agree that it continues to be played, though they differ on the details. In his 2009 essay, \textit{The Revenge of Geography}, Kaplan, postulated the revival of Mackinderan thought, and viewed understanding strategic geography as essential to winning the 21\textsuperscript{st} century’s fight for the Eurasian heartland.\textsuperscript{79} Similarly, Blank in an article in 2012 for the \textit{Journal of Eurasian Studies} argues that while the NGG is substantively different from the ‘Great Game’, this difference does not mean that the agency exercised by the players in this new game is markedly dissimilar from those under imperialism, and is therefore important as a framework to understanding developments in the region.\textsuperscript{80} Pointing to recent developments in the region, including attempts by the US, China, India and Russia to secure military bases; the presence of multiple great and middle ranking powers jostling for influence, access and leverage; the presence of international institutions and multilateral bodies; and the increasing involvement of regional actors like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in shaping their security environment as they benefit from economic growth, Blank presents a compelling argument.\textsuperscript{81}

Elites in India too see the NGG as a viable analogy for a description of the geopolitical events currently underway in Central Asia but are, however, quick to point out that the CARs themselves are players in the game, not “pawns on a chessboard.”\textsuperscript{82} As, Arvind Gupta, the Deputy National Security Advisor and formerly Director General of IDSA, also notes:

\begin{quote}
“Traditionally, Central Asia has been an arena of “great game.” The modern version is being played out even today. Russia, China, US, Turkey, Iran, Europe, EU, Japan, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan have all substantial security and economic interests in the region. In order to maximize their geo-political advantage and also to ensure that their national interests are safeguarded, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} Kaplan, Robert. 2009.
\textsuperscript{81} ibid.
\textsuperscript{82} Author interview: Daihya, Rumel. Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi. 2014.
Central Asian countries have engaged with the rest of the world through a variety of channels and institutions.\textsuperscript{83}

For India, the dynamics that drive the current great power involvement in the region have been more or less the same since the early nineties, and reflect the determinants of its own strategy in the region (what this work aims to explore). Strategically, the region, as highlighted before, shares its geopolitical orbit with that of South Asia and lies in India’s extended neighbourhood. It is therefore in India’s interest that no power inimical to India be allowed to gain control of Central Asia, be it China or Pakistan. In security terms, the flow of terror, narcotics and arms between the porous borders of Kashmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan and the CARs is of major concern to India, given its past issues with cross-border terrorism. Ideologically, India is located at the eastern fringe of a crescent of Islamic states and, with the second largest Muslim population in the world, India remains weary of any Islamic radicalism that could make its way through the region and upset its domestic stability. In terms of energy security, with a growing economy, India has been forced to diversify its energy supplies, and Central Asia, with its abundant resources, is emerging as a key region in this diversification process. Economically, India sees Central Asia as both a vital market for its goods and services, but also as a transport hub and access route to the markets of greater Eurasia. In civilizational terms, India, with its past historical affinities to the region, believes that it can leverage its cultural advantages and technological prowess to emerge as a modern-day partner for the region, rivalling the power projections of China.

Indian elites and scholars admit, that India too is a player in the game or seeks to be a player in the ‘New Gate Game’ as it is being played today, yet they are eager to emphasise that India is not involved in a game of competition or for conflict, and instead seeks cooperation with the CARs and other players. Ajay Bisaria, Joint Secretary (Eurasia) at the MEA, in an interview, stated that the Indian policy-making was informed and aware of these types of geopolitical articulations, but reiterated India’s commitment to development and support of the CARs as an age-old friend.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{83} Gupta, Arvind. ‘India And Central Asia: Need For A Pro-Active Approach’. IDSA Policy Brief. 2013. Web. 15 Nov. 2014.

\textsuperscript{84} Author interview: Bisaria, Ajay. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014.
A number of other Indian elites who were interviewed shared this view, and while acknowledging India’s realist aspirations in the region in geopolitical terms, legitimised India’s presence through a historical prism. Some of these went so far as to justify India’s presence in the region as more legitimate than of other actors, using historical affinities and India’s democratic nature as a reason to argue that India – Central Asia ties, were better suited to stand the tests of time. Given how deeply entrenched these historical perspectives are, the next section seeks to explore these historical analogies and their relevance to understanding the determinants of India’s Central Asia strategy.

3.1.4 Historical Narratives and The Silk Road/Route

A plethora of Indian scholarship on Central Asia, written in the past two decades has emphasised the role of history, and skilfully woven it into the discursive narrative of the relationship between India and the CARs. Focussing on shared cultural, religious, linguistic and civilizational affinities, Indian scholars have been prominent in highlighting the importance of these historical linkages, often using them as a justification for India’s claims to a greater status within the region, in comparison other competitors. Often these historical narratives are woven into analogies and metaphorical expressions that aim to evoke a collective memory of a bygone era, where India and Central Asia were joint at the hip, and as Laruelle and Peyrouse note, are used a “sort of discursive inflation” to make up for its inaction, and lack of meaningful influence in the region. They add that since India and the CARs have a conflict-free relationship, both sides resort to this creative interpretation of historical narratives, to explain and place in context their current engagement. Other Indian scholars and policy-makers though continue to assign great importance to this historical narrative (as shown in the previous chapter), and as Chairperson of the Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies at JNU, Ajay Patnaik confirmed, it is in the properly understanding this historical relationship, that the genesis and future of any India – Central Asia relationship lies.

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85 Author interview: Patnaik, Ajay. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. 2015.
87 Laruelle, Marlene and Sebastien Peyrouse. 2011. 12.
88 Author interview: Patnaik, Ajay. 2014.
The use of historical analogies as a framework for the explanation of contemporary events in the international relations of Central Asia is not unique to India alone. Other countries that make use of this type of articulation include China, the US, Japan and Turkey, who all present the CARs frameworks for cooperation entrenched in deeply-rooted historical and cultural affinities. This work now proceeds to explain the use of historical analogies in international relations, before turning to a description of the most prominent of the Indian narratives, those of the Silk Route and Mughal linkages, and a comparison of the Indian narrative, with that of China and others. Finally, it comments on the relevance of this approach to understanding the actions of international agency in the region.

Scholar Drazen Pehar writing on the use of historical rhetoric and analogy in international relations identifies four meanings of the purpose of historical analogies, which can be adapted to explain the discourse that countries like China and India have used to frame their ties to Central Asia. First, historical analogies form a vital aspect of “national narrative and identity,” forming collective national memories that reinforce symbols of success from the past, allowing national populations to “transcend temporal limits.” This is true in the case of both India and the CARs, where much of the historical narrative in the contemporary setting focuses on grand past successes, i.e. the Kushan Empire that ruled both domains or the rise of the Mughal empire in India from its Central Asian roots.

Second, as Pehar states and closely linked to national narratives, is the concept of “identity maintenance,” where historical analogies, help define the origins and permanency of a nation. This dynamic too is evident when one analyses the discourse on India-Central Asia ties, seen perhaps most evidently from this paragraph by scholar, B.B. Kumar in the introduction to his book.

India and Central Asia, with common and contiguous borders, climatic continuity, similar geographical features and geo-cultural affinity have long traditions of socio-cultural, political and economic contacts since remote past.

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90 ibid.
91 ibid.
Their relations have been multi-dimensional, deep, old and continuous. There has been uninterrupted flow of men, material and ideas between the two regions. The Indian and foreign literary sources attest to the fact. According to *Zend Avesta* the ancestors of Iranian, Indian and Turanian people were the three sons Tratoria, namely Arya, Sairimia and Tura respectively.\(^92\)

Similarly, China too expounds a similar storyline, using the Silk Route as a narrative that harks back to the pre-Islamic time that connected China and Central Asia via Xinjiang under the glorious periods of the Han and Tang dynasties, serving its current geopolitical needs in curtailing the spread of Islamic radicalism on its western flank.

Third, Pehar talks about the role historical analogies play in providing a sense of “cognitive orientation in international affairs,” by projecting “an image of past developments into the future” making the future cognitively manageable.\(^93\) This can be understood to explain China’s use of the Silk Road metaphor in its entire strategy in the region, or for instance India’s strong ties with the Central Asian states under Soviet times, and their affinity for Indian popular culture and the ubiquity of Bollywood in the region. Finally as Pehar notes, historical analogies are used as “colourful imagery, which neutralises a boring and non-dramatic kind of political reality.”\(^94\) This is particularly seen in the case of Indian and Central Asian elites, and their perceptions about the current realities of the relationship. As highlighted above, the discursive inflation they employ presents an overly optimistic view of relations, in comparison to the reality, that they are often reluctant to face.\(^95\)

Indian discourse on Central Asia is resplendent with historical analogies, and references to the good times of the past. Of these, two particular metaphors stand out, the first refers to the Silk Route trading and caravan system, that lasted over empires for thousands of years, and the second highlights the Central Asian roots of India’s Mughal Empire. The previous chapter highlighted the seminal contribution of the Mughal period in Indian history and their Central Asia connections, therefore a detailed description will not be provided here. Instead, a discussion on the Silk Route

\(^{92}\) Roy, J. N, and B.B. Kumar. 2007. 3.
\(^{93}\) Pehar, Drazen. 2001. 121.
\(^{94}\) ibid.
and what these analogies mean for contemporary relations and their relevance is provided in the following paragraphs.

The Silk Route for millennia was the most important overland route in Eurasia. Not a monolithic spatial construction, despite what its name suggests, it was a collection of caravan paths and routes that went as far as the Pacific in the East, the Indian Ocean in the South, the Altai Mountains in the North and the bazaars of Roman Europe in the West. Far beyond a simple trade rout, its overland nature compelled interactions between the traders who led their caravanserais across the morass of Central Asia, and the distinctive communities they passed through. These interactions would then in turn result in the sharing of culture, languages, religions across civilizations and continents, and represents in the minds of many one of the earliest forms of globalisation. The Silk Route traces its roots back to 500 BC to the Scythian nomads who dominated the Eurasian Steppes. As Daniel Waugh notes, it was under the Huns in the second century BC, that the beginnings of the ancient silk trade, that lends its name to the route, could be traced, with the silk trade reaching its zenith under the Han dynasty in China in the first century BC. Analysing the flow of Buddhism northward out of India, into Central Asia and then eastward across China in the second century AD helps one comprehend the impact these overland routes had within the local eco-systems they transited through. Waugh notes further, as the route expanded, it was also responsible for the spread of languages and cultures as evidenced from the expansion of the Soghdian Empire between the 4th and 8th Centuries AD.

With the Arab conquest of Asia Minor and the Sindh in the 8th Century and the defeat of the Soghdians, Islam spread along the Silk Route, from Abassid Baghdad, all the way across the Central Asian heartland to Mongolia. Accompanying this spread of Islam between the eighth and tenth centuries was the growth in maritime trade, tying in the Silk Route to the Indian Ocean trade routes. This was complemented by the transmission of substantial artistic skills across the regions in the route, as Islamic culture both Arab and Persian, came to dominate the heart of Asia. While the Silk

97 ibid.
route reached its zenith as an intercontinental force, in the Islamic period under the Mongols in the 12th and 13th centuries, it continued to remain an important part of the lives those in Central Asia right up to the 20th century. It was thanks to the Silk Route, that the Mughal rulers of India were able to attract the artists and architects from Central Asia, who were responsible for the Indo-Islamic cultural revival. As the Silk Route story came to the end with the European Age of Discovery, its importance would fade into history before being rediscovered in the 20th century, as an object of scientific interest.

As scholar Sreemati Ganguly notes, modern interest in the Silk Routes was rekindled in the eighties. With much of Eurasia under Soviet control, it was Soviet orientalists, who began a detailed study of the phenomenon, being joined by their Western counterparts, eager to study the post Soviet space. She identifies two subfields of this study: the first, which has a historical focus and seeks to revive interest in the routes themselves and the “ideas of romance an adventure” associated with the term; and the second which involves projections of economic and cultural revivals of the broader region, mostly led by outside powers, who seek to use the Silk Route as their historical justification for re-establishing contact with the CARs. Much of the modern Silk Route conceptualisation falls in the second category, as numerous countries have attempted present their own ideas for a revival. Of these the two most prominent have been China’s ‘New Silk Road Strategy’ which was the subject of much speculation and was finally announced in 2014, and the US’ “New Silk Road Initiative” announced in 2011. While a detailed discussion of these strategies is not feasible in this work, a description of India’s revivalist Silk Road aspirations and the discursive framework it provides is offered below.

Scholar Mushtaq Kaw, Director of the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Kashmir, writing in the China And Eurasia Forum Quarterly in 2009, made a compelling argument for revitalizing the southern branches of the Silk Road, that connect the subcontinent to Central Asia via Kashmir. His analysis is amongst the few

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by Indian scholars that seriously puts forward a cogent proposition for the revival of the Silk Route that would be in Indian interests, and is examined in detail below.

Kaw notes that the subcontinent fed into the Grand Silk Route network through two routes that originated in Punjab and went north via Kashmir. The first went via Ladakh and connected to Tibet and onward to Central Asia before splitting into two, and was hence known as the Ladakh route; and the second went north via Srinagar, and split into three after it passed the Gilgit region – the easternmost route ending Xinjiang, the western route ending in Iran, and the middle route would split further before ending up in the heart of Central Asia. Observing that the routes were responsible for the shared culture that emerged in the regions they ran through, economic prosperity and facilitated the transfer of knowledge and ideas amongst civilizations, Kaw also highlights in his article how the a revival of these routes would be of benefit to India. Linking the Silk Routes in Kashmir to the present day subcontinent. Kaw suggests that India would benefit in economic terms with greater connectivity to China and Eurasia, on the energy front via pipelines carrying Central Asian gas, in security terms with a better relationship with China and Pakistan, and finally have a chance to be the kind of the partner the CARs have always desired.

In terms of energy security, a revival of the old Kashmiri silk routes would facilitate the creation and functioning of the much discussed Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indian (TAPI) pipeline, linking the subcontinent to the energy grid of greater Eurasia and “solidify intra-regional cooperation for peace and development and strengthen the fragile economies of Afghanistan and Pakistan.” This view is also shared by other commentators like Tridivesh Singh Maini and Manish Vaid who note the importance of the TAPI pipeline to India’s Silk Road aspirations, (a detailed


101 ibid.

102 ibid.

103 ibid.
explanation of the TAPI project is provided in a later chapter) and its connectivity to the Eurasian energy grids.\textsuperscript{104}

On China, Kaw believes a resuscitation of the Ladakh route, would facilitate trade and economic linkages between India and China, and if both are able to resolved their differences, their security objectives in combating terrorism too could be achieved.\textsuperscript{105} He adds that if the borders were reopened and ancient trading posts reactivated, India and China would be able to take forward their relationship, with India potentially participating in China’s New Silk Road strategy and potentially having access to the CARs via Xinjiang and Tibet, addressing India’s greatest problem of a lack of connectivity. On Pakistan and Afghanistan, Kaw believes the reopening of the Srinagar route, would allow for greater trade and prosperity in the region, allowing for interconnectivity in the energy grids of South and Central Asia, and international transport corridors, suggesting that such “cooperation would help transform the region into a more peaceful and progressive zone, promote human security, social sustainability.”\textsuperscript{106}

Elites within India’s policy-making establishment also share Kaw’s enthusiasm and they too consider a revival of the Silk Road as a suitable discursive matrix to describe India’s CCA policy. According to Asoke Mukerji, Special Secretary at the MEA, speaking at a conference on India – Central Asia relations:

Reference to the new Silk Road as a metaphor, combining the use of the old land route networks and new networks created by 21st century technologies, enables us to take stock of the challenges and opportunities we face in connecting India with Central Asia.\textsuperscript{107}

Mukerji added that building the international North-South corridor and the creation of stable energy grids along the new Silk Road were core parts of India’s CCA policy. In addition, he suggested that real advantages of the new Silk Road lay in “creating new networks independent of the traditional land routes” something that India was aware

\textsuperscript{105} Kaw, Mushtaq A. 2009. 65.
\textsuperscript{106} ibid. 73.
\textsuperscript{107} Mukerji, Asoke. 'India, Central Asia And The New Silk Road'. 2012. Speech at Arundel House, London.
of, and was seeking cooperation with the CARs in the fields of health-care and education.\textsuperscript{108}

India’s Silk Road aspirations as outlined above, are largely based upon three dynamics – the first seeks a revival of the ancient routes to facilitate communication links, better transportation, and hence the revival of the Silk Route economic system, which would benefit India’s trade and commercial ambitions. The second, links the Silk Road revival to a new energy and pipeline grid that would connect South and Central Asia, generating prosperity and human security along the way. Finally the third, would revitalise India’s civilizational and cultural ties to the countries along the routes, allowing India to project its own ideas and influence, rivalling that of China and Russia. This understanding of India’s revivalist Silk Road aspirations, is vital to an understanding of this work, and hence the determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia, which are expounded upon in the next chapter. Before this work turns to the final section of this chapter, and an explanation of India’s grand strategy, a short discussion is provided on the applicability of the New Silk Road as a discursive framework and its differences from the NGG.

The revival of the New Silk Road differs from the NGG at its most primeval level as a philosophy that emphasizes cooperation over competition. Whilst the NGG, is different from the Great Game, it is still essentially a simultaneous situation of conflict, competition, and cooperation where great powers and secondary powers, indulge in a game for influence, security and resources, working with and against each other and the individual CARs. The New Silk Road strategies, be it Chinese, American or Indian narratives, emphasise the cooperative element, and play down the competitive and conflictual aspects. The question that then arises is which is more relevant in explaining the actions of external agency in Central Asia. This work posits that both geopolitical frameworks provide a valuable conjectural basis in the comprehension of the actions of external agency in the region (like India’s), yet do not account for all the motivations that inspire actors to seek agency. Therefore as suggested earlier, it is prudent to frame India’s forays in the region from another perspective, that is India specific. The work now proceeds to expound upon Central

\textsuperscript{108} ibid.
Asia’s place within India’s grand strategy and its resultant foreign policy as an emerging power.

3.2 Indian Grand Strategy and the Determinants of its Central Asia Policy

The idea that an Indian grand strategy that serves as an almanac for the country’s international relations, exists, has gained prominence in scholarship on India’s international relations in the past years. The narrative of a grand strategy is not new. As the godfather of Indian strategic thinking K Subrahmanyam writes,\textsuperscript{109} India was one of the few nations, which had a grand strategy at the time of its formation.\textsuperscript{110} What is new however is the use of the process of interpretation of this grand strategy to understand India’s external motives as an emerging power. This section seeks to do exactly that, and uses grand strategy as a prism to understand India’s engagement with Central Asia that has accompanied its economic growth and its rising power status in the new millennium. Using scholar C Raja Mohan’s conceptualisation of Indian grand strategy as being exercised in “concentric circles,”\textsuperscript{111} it explains Central Asia’s location in India’s extended neighbourhood and the motivations that drive India to engage with the region (the determinants). This section also provides a background on Indian grand strategy, and links the analytical framework of grand strategy to the main body of this work that follows in later chapters.

3.2.1 A Short History of Grand Strategy and India

Grand strategy as Hal Brands notes is “one of the most slippery and widely abused terms in the foreign policy lexicon,”\textsuperscript{112} and attempting to define a concept as ambiguous as it is broad in exact terms, is a process fraught with danger. With this in mind, it is first important to understand the difference between grand strategy, foreign

\textsuperscript{109} K Subrahmanyam is widely credited for being the guiding light of Indian strategic thinking. For more on his contribution to the field in India, see, Mukherjee, Anit. ‘K. Subrahmanyam And Indian Strategic Thought’. Strategic Analysis 35.4 (2011): 710-713. Web.


policy and strategy, before one sets out to define grand strategy. According to scholar William Martel, if foreign policy is seen as the sum of all political, military and economic actions taken by a nation in its relationship with other states; and the term strategy encompasses all the political, economic and military means that are used to achieve a state’s objectives, then grand strategy should be seen as answering why states “pursue such policies using particular strategies.”

Grand strategy was popularised in the 20th century by British historian Basil Lidell Hart who viewed it as aiming to “coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, toward the attainment of the political object of the war.” This militaristic definition would find favour with the geopolitical climate of the time, but as war gave way to Cold War, the concept of grand strategy itself was expanded to view it as a nation’s overarching plan for its systemic interactions with the outside world. In this vein, as historian Paul Kennedy notes:

The crux of grand strategy lies therefore in policy, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non-military, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime and peacetime) best interests…. it operates at various levels, political, strategic, operational, tactical.

Brands defines grand strategy as “the theory, or logic, that binds a country’s highest interests to its daily interactions with the world.” Looking at Brands’ explanation of grand strategy, he states that it serves as the link between the present reality and future goals of a nation, and as a process it is about using the current policy environment to effect future policy changes. Adding that grand strategy is about achieving objectives, using the limited resources available and hence a discipline of trade-offs, he cautions against a single interpretation of grand strategy and suggests that countries normally have multiple grand strategies in force acting together. Finally he suggests that grand strategies do not have to be formally articulated (as in the case

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116 Brands, Hal. 2012. 3.
of India), and that what is really imperative is the execution of the grand strategy, and it is only nations that have done it well, who have succeeded.\textsuperscript{117}

From an Indian perspective, Kanti Bajpai, Saira Bisit and V Krishnappa in the germinal (and probably only) text in the field, \textit{India's Grand Strategy: History, Theory and Cases} define grand strategy as “the combination of national resources and capabilities – military, diplomatic, political, economic, cultural and normal – that are deployed in the service of national security.”\textsuperscript{118} In turn they view national security as comprised of both internal and external security, and as an umbrella term encompassing other types of security including: human, economic, energy, cooperative, and environmental security amongst others.\textsuperscript{119} With these definitions in mind, the paragraphs below attempt to explain the evolution of Indian grand strategic thinking, and the current imperatives that drive it.

Historically, as scholars Frank O'Donnel and Harsh Pant argue, India has demonstrated a tradition of strategic thinking that dates back to ancient times. In a recent paper, they attempt to distil a uniquely Indian perspective on grand strategy, using two historical case studies – Kautilya’s \textit{Arthasastra} and another from the Mughal Empire in the time of Akbar.\textsuperscript{120} In their detailed and robust analysis, they find certain similarities and recurring themes between the practices of grand strategy in these two periods, which they suggest have theoretical and policy relevance to Indian grand strategy today. They state that the basic precursors of a successful grand strategy derived from lessons in Indian history are:

I. A well-informed political leadership able to balance competing priorities; deliver clear, integrated political judgment of external and internal policy; and allocate all appropriate state resources to meeting these ends;

II. A supportive state infrastructure that can develop, coordinate and integrate resources to inform, support and implement political judgments.\textsuperscript{121}

\textsuperscript{117} ibid. 4-8.


\textsuperscript{119} ibid. 3.


\textsuperscript{121} ibid. 207.
More recently, in the last written treatise before his death in *Grand Strategy for India: 2020 and Beyond*, K Subrahmanyam posited about the challenges that Indian needed to evolve a grand strategy for in the 21st century. Stating that in the 20th century:

> Indian grand strategy was a package of nonalignment to deal with external security challenges, adoption of the Indian Constitution to address the problems of the governance and development of an exploited colony of three hundred and fifty million people and a partially centrally planned development strategy to accelerate its growth.\(^{122}\)

Subrahmanyam felt that the challenges India faced in the 21st would be markedly different from those in the past, and to guarantee India’s national security it would be vital address these challenges. Some of these challenges, relevant to the comprehension of India’s grand strategic thinking process, are explicated upon in the following paragraphs.

While he views developments in international relations in a positive light stressing the verity of the ancient Sanskrit term “Vasudeva Kutumbakam (the world is a family),” he notes the existence of serious internal and external challenges to India, and its world view.\(^{123}\) In geopolitical terms, he views the threat of jihadi terrorism and Islamic radicalism that originates in Pakistan and to India’s Northwest as the biggest existential threat to the country.\(^{124}\) To this he links Pakistan and its state policy to use to terror as a balancer against India, and states that the situation is further complicated by the proliferation of nuclear technology which allowed Pakistan to develop a large of number of weapons. The link between the safety of Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal and the increasing loss of Pakistani control of these terrorist groups is also a major worry for him. Related to this, he views China as responsible for facilitating Pakistani access to nuclear technology, in order to contain India’s ambitions. Finally, noting China’s ambitions to primacy in Asia, he cautions that India and the world should be weary of an “untethered hegemon” capable of mischief in the international system.\(^{125}\)

\(^{122}\) Subrahmanyam, K. 2012. 13.

\(^{123}\) ibid. 18

\(^{124}\) ibid.

\(^{125}\) ibid. 21.
Subrahmanyam also believes that the best way forward in the “new world order” where “knowledge power” will be at a premium, is for India as a “swing state” to ally with the US, “defending pluralism, secularism and democracy from the challenges of one party oligarchical system allied to jehadism.” In non-traditional security terms, Subrahmanyam sees climate change, food security and energy security as challenges, that India will need to face in the 21st century to meet the needs of its burgeoning population, noting additionally that these factors significantly interact with India’s internal challenges of poverty alleviation and (economic) growth.

Contemporaneously the other doyen of Indian strategic thought C Raja Mohan identifies four major objectives of Indian grand strategy in an article in Foreign Policy, in 2010. Sharing Subrahmanyam’s concern of jihadi terrorism, Raja Mohan first emphasises India’s need to pacify AF-PAK and the northwest of the subcontinent. Noting the historical geopolitical significance of the northwest as a source foreign influence and “alien ideologies,” Raja Mohan accentuates the need to move AF-PAK toward “political moderation, economic modernization, and regional integration,” as an imperative for India in the future. Second, as Raja Mohan states, is India’s objective to ensure that it becomes an “indispensable power” in its own strategic backyard. Using the example of the Indian Ocean World and the Pacific southwest, he argues that India wants to reprise Britain’s role as the security provider in these regions, using that legacy to fend of an increasingly belligerent China. To achieve this India is forming new alliances and tweaking old ones, whilst at the same time engaging China economically and politically. (A similar argument can be made for Indian presence in Central Asia.)

This then leads to India’s third grand strategy objective, which according to him, is to emerge as a “rule-maker” in the international system, and seek a more a prominent

126 ibid. 23.
127 ibid. 24.
130 ibid.
131 ibid.
role in global governance and the functioning of international institutions. This increased prominence in the liberal institutional world order, sits well with the ambitions of India’s elite who wish an international status for the country befitting its emerging power ambitions. Finally Raja Mohan states, India’s fourth grand strategy objective is to ensure that its domestic capabilities match its global aspirations. Echoing Subrahmanyam again, he identifies sustained economic growth, consolidation of its strengths as a knowledge economy and modernization of its armed forces as essential to exercising influence commensurate with its aspirations on the global stage.

Having provided a succinct history of Indian grand strategy and the imperatives that drive it, it is now time to clarify how India’s engagement with Central Asia, can be explained in terms of its grand strategic objectives, and why this is an important conceptual lens through which we should view India’s agency in the region.

3.2.2 Locating Central Asia Within Conceptualizations of Indian Grand Strategy

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2006, Raja Mohan put into words what many in India’s security establishment had been thinking since the beginning of the new millennium. In his essay, Raja Mohan noted that while Indian elites shied away from the explicit enunciation of grand strategic objectives or foreign policies, they had worked assiduously since the end of nineties to cultivate India’s relations with the world, and in fact a complex Indian grand strategy was in place. Reasoning that India has overcome two of the three major obstacles to realizing its grand strategic goals, with the economic liberalization of the nineties (which ended the socialist system in the country) and the reorientation of its international relations after the end of the Cold War, Raja Mohan declares that India was finally in a position to present itself as a rising power to the world. He also notes that while India continued to have geopolitical concerns in its South Asian neighbourhood, its democratic nature, economic growth, and own great power ambitions were now driving fuelling its

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132 ibid.
133 Mohan, C. Raja. 2006.
134 Raja Mohan identifies the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and creation of an avowedly Islamic state in Pakistan, which caused India’s separation from historical neighbours like Iran and Central Asia as the third obstacle to Indian grand strategy in the past.
ambitions beyond South Asia into its extended neighbourhood, as it sought to engage
the existing great powers of the world.

In the article, to explain how India perceives the world, he posits that Indian grand
strategy divides the world into three “concentric circles.” The first circle comprises
the immediate neighbourhood of South Asia, the second circle comprises the
extended neighbourhood that stretches across Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, and
third circle encompasses the world and the stage upon that India sees itself as a great
power. In each of these circles, India has different strategic intentions that reflect its
concerns or opportunities. In the first circle – the immediate neighbourhood, Raja
Mohan states, “India has sought primacy and a veto over the actions of outside
powers.” The immediate neighbourhood reflects India’s greatest national security
concerns as it addresses the situation in AF-PAK, and represents India’s utmost
challenge to great power status, as it must contend with China and its attempts to gain
influence in the region. In the second circle – the extended neighbourhood, he states
“India has sought to balance the influence of other powers and prevent them from
undercutting its interests.” In the extended neighbourhood (which includes Central
Asia), India seeks to be a major player, using its burgeoning economy to play a
greater role in regional architectures, all the while proactively engaging in security
and political cooperation that ride on the back of its soft power, to support its
ambitions on the global stage (the third circle), and, prevent a negative spill over into
its immediate neighbourhood. In the third circle – the global stage, he states “India
has tried to take its place as one of the great powers, a key player in international
peace and security.” It is here that India seeks to be a heavyweight, where it can
project power beyond its extended neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean across the
world and play a leading role in international institutional governance.

Raja Mohan’s theory has proven to be seminal in understanding India’s strategic
aspirations in the recent past, as evidenced from other scholarly work. As Raja Mohan
himself notes in another article, this conceptualization of Indian grand strategy
through “concentric circles” is based on Kautilya’s *Mandala* concept elucidated in the *Arthashastras*, “which locates India at the nucleus of concentric rings of potential friends and foes,” and a “neo-Curzonian” foreign policy which is premised “on the logic of Indian centrality, permitting multidirectional engagement — or “multi-alignment” — with all major powers and seeking access and leverage from East Africa to Pacific.”

The uniqueness of this hypothesis is in the fact that it combines the concepts of “immediate” and “extended” neighbourhoods, which had been popularised in the nineties by leading Indian politicians, with India’s geopolitical imperatives, to explain her global ambitions as a rising power. In terms of Central Asia this work contends, it is no different, and the determinants of India’s policies in the region are shaped by its imperatives in its second circle as identified by Raja Mohan. The following paragraphs provide an explanation of this.

Geographically Central Asia, lies just beyond the AF-PAK region, and borders India’s immediate neighbourhood. With shared cultural and civilizational affinities it is a vital part of India’s extended neighbourhood, and India’s attempts to seek agency in region, should be seen from Raja Mohan’s perspective of trying to balance the influence of other powers, as it seeks to create its own legacy. In its quest for energy security and trade ascendancy, its economic relationship with the region has become a driver for its engagement. Its endeavour to join the SCO grouping and the EEU should be seen within this light, as it seeks to leverage regional architectures to improve its chances in the region. In security terms India’s military and political cooperation with the CARs to counter the threats posed by transnational terror, radicalism, narcotics & arms trafficking, and India’s use of soft and smart power to build on its cultural capital also provide substance to applicability of the extended neighbourhood concept to Central Asia.

An argument can also be made to show that it is possible to conceptualize Central Asia as indirectly part of the first and third circles of Indian grand strategy as well. With Afghanistan’s position as an overlap between South and Central Asia’s geopolitical orbits (and as a meeting point for the Central and South Asian Regional Security Complexes – as explained in the next chapter), the security concerns that

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emanate across AF-PAK and Central Asia, interact with India’s national security objectives, and hence indirectly placing Central Asia within the first circle (from a security perspective). Similarly, Central Asia as explained previously, is a region where great power politics continue to be played out, and while much of India’s agency in the region can be explained in terms of the extended neighbourhood concept, India’s interactions with China, Russia and the US in the region, and its great power ambitions also hinge on its ability to succeed in Central Asia and move beyond it to the entire Eurasian continent, indicating Central Asia’s relevance to India on the global stage (the third circle).

Finally, it is also important to test the practical validity of Central Asia’s conceptualization within India’s extended neighbourhood as hypothesized by Raja Mahan, in order to prove that the framework presented in this work is appropriate. This is done in two ways; first by conferring with other scholarly work which also uses a similar lexicon of neighbourhoods and circles to explain India’s engagement in Central Asia, and second, by looking at articulations of Indian strategy by the MEA and Indian elites.

From a scholarly perspective Scott, writing in 2009 explains the extended neighbourhood concept as:

Power projection by India; be it hard power military and economic projection or be it soft power cultural and ideational strands. The extended neighbourhood has become the conceptual umbrella for India; eastwards, southwards, northwards and westwards.... of the opportunities available to India outside South Asia.\textsuperscript{140}

He goes onto explain that in Central Asia, geo-economic and geopolitical considerations have been an explicit concern, and that India has made several economic advances into the region in the past decade focussed on energy security and trade. Additionally he clearly identifies India’s political and military cooperation with the CARs as both denying Pakistan strategic space in the region, and as a “balancing measure” against China.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore in terms of Raja Mohan’s conceptualization of


\textsuperscript{141} ibid. 128.
the second concentric circle, Scott’s reasoning confirms the extended neighbourhood as a space where India seeks economic engagement and to counteract the agency of other powers. Indian scholars like Ajay Patnaik and Vinod Sahgal too share similar perspectives as evidenced by their writings on the issue, and their use of Raja Mohan’s ideas in their work, to explain Indian agency in Central Asia.  

From an elite perspective, a number of policy-makers who were interviewed shared similar views and concurred that Raja Mohan’s hypothesis could be used to explain Central Asia’s importance to India. Most prominently, strategic affairs guru Commodore C Uday Bhaskar, a former officiating director of IDSA, suggested that energy security and concerns about terrorism drove Indian ambitions in the region, and that it was vital that India did not concede further ground to China (and indirectly Pakistan). Similarly scholar and former Indian Special Envoy, Professor SD Muni highlighted the importance of energy security cooperation with Central Asia in the extended neighbourhood as the way forward, stressing India’s civilizational linkages. At the MEA, Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), speaking in Delhi suggested that Central Asia was a vital part of India’s extended neighbourhood and that:

> While for India, the geo-strategic position of the region is salient; of no less importance are the emotional bonds between us that stem from our civilizational links. Energy security is also a crucial driver of India’s relationship, with ambitious projects like TAPI on the table.

Finally, Amrit Bagia in his 2011 dissertation at Georgetown University sought to measure the relevance of Raja Mohan’s hypothesis in comprehending Indian grand strategy, using official sources and documents from the MEA. His conclusions are

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143 Raja Mohan himself when interviewed suggested that the conceptualization could be applied to understand India’s agency in Central Asia, which he accepted as part of India’s extended neighbourhood. Author interview: Mohan Raja, C. Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. 2015.

144 Author interview: Bhaskar Uday, C. Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi. 2015.


that Raja Mohan’s hypothesis continues to remain valid, and Indian strategy can be understood through a prism of three concentric spheres of influence.\footnote{Bagia, Amrit. 'Understanding India’s National Security Objectives Through Indian Sources'. Dissertation. Georgetown University, 2011. 40. Print.}

In conclusion, this section has shown Indian grand strategy as exercised in three concentric spheres of influence, in the conceptualization of Raja Mohan offers a valid framework for the conception of Indian agency in Central Asia. It offers a valuable method to comprehend what drives India’s ambitions in the region, and explains how the determinants of India’s strategy (politicosecurity concerns, energy security, trade and its global ambitions as rising power) are best explained by Central Asia’s conceptualization as within India’s extended neighbourhood.

**3.3 Chapter Conclusions: A Cognitive Structure to Understand the Determinants of India’s Strategy in Central Asia**

This chapter so far has outlined the nature of India’s tryst with Central Asia and presented a suitable ideological framework that seeks to provide an understanding of India’s contemporary engagement with the region. From a geopolitical perspective, the NGG concept, built on a modern revision of Mackinder’s Heartland hypothesis, has been particularly useful in explaining the action of outside agency in Central Asia, and continues to be a relevant (if somewhat deterministic) framework. As evidenced in this chapter, this also has applicability in comprehending India’s strategies in the region so far. Yet other scholars have argued, and this work concurs that the NGG presents a comprehension, that is overly built upon the ideas of conflict and cooperation, and does not adequately address the internal agency that is exercised by the CARs themselves. Therefore an alternative geopolitical reading is also offered. The New Silk Road framework is presented as a revisionist geopolitical model, stooped in a historical narrative, that stresses cooperation over conflict and competition as seen from Chinese, Indian and American articulations of their strategies for Central Asia. Focussed on the revival of ancient communication and trade links, the creation of new energy pipelines and grids across South and Central Asia, and offering India an opportunity to use its civilizational linkages to project
influence, the New Silk Road framework emerges as a valuable tool to understanding how many Indian elites conceive relations with Central Asia.

From an Indian perspective, Central Asia forms an indelible part of India’s extended neighbourhood. As this work has shown, Raja Mohan’s conceptualization of Indian grand strategy being exercised in three concentric circles provides a valid framework for comprehending India’s agency in the region. In the second circle or extended neighbourhood, India’s primary concern is with balancing the agency of other actors, and using trade and regional architectures to achieve its economic ambitions. The strong link between Central Asia and South Asia via Afghanistan, adds a security dynamic to India’s concerns in the region, suggesting that elements of its Central Asia strategy are based on its concerns in the immediate neighbourhood or first circle. Similarly, India’s success or failure in Central Asia also has a greater impact on its global ambitions, which then also explains Central Asia from within Raja Mohan’s third circle. The use of Raja Mohan’s hypothesis by other scholars and within official Indian discourse in recent times, also attests to its validity as a conceptual framework, for the explanation of Indian agency.

Finally, if the work is to argue that the analytical framework of the NGG, the New Silk Route and the conceptualization of Central Asia within the notion of an Indian grand strategy in India’s extended neighbourhood, are applicable explanations for India’s renewed attempts to exercise agency in the region, it is necessary that the argument be proved. In order to do so, the next chapters identify the determinants of India’s Central Asia strategy linking them to the conceptual framework as identified in this chapter here. The determinants are as follows:

First, the interplay that exists between India’s national security objectives and the complex internal and external security environment of Central Asia, with a focus on quelling the spread of radical Islam and terror, the stabilization of Afghanistan, and the reduction of security risks from non-state actors. Second, India’s need to ensure adequate energy security for its rapidly growing economy, coupled with a substantive intensification in the size of the middle class, whose demands for energy and natural resources continue to increase. Given, Central Asia’s proven natural hydrocarbon and ore reserves; there is widespread consensus in India, about the vitality of the region to
its energy security policies. Third, keeping with India’s growing economic stature and the need to constantly explore new markets for its goods and services, Central Asia as a destination, and as a bridge to the broader Eurasian region, is seen as of immense potential to the Indian economy. Fourth, given the age-old civilizational ties and that the regions share and the substantial bonhomie that exists between the populations of both India and Central Asia, the ability for India to succeed in the region is seen as vital to India’s metamorphosis from an emerging to a rising power within the world system.
4. Security & Strategic Concerns as the Drivers of India’s Central Asia Policy

Within the Indian political psyche and security imagination, Central Asia – the great north west of the subcontinent – occupies an exalted space. Phunchok Stobdan, former Indian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia scholar, views the region as essential to the understanding of India’s strategic thinking. Stating, “Indian strategic thought, propounded in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*, had its genesis in Central Asian dynamics,” Stobdan, along with other scholars views the India-Central Asia security dynamic as the biggest driver of India’s contemporary engagement with the region. Whilst energy resources, trade and commerce, and cultural interactions are all essential parts of India’s Central Asia strategy and ability to project power, they remain largely potential ties, whereas India’s security concerns are real, tangible and evidently present.

This section therefore attempts to explain the complex interaction of the regional security environment in Central Asia with that of greater South Asia, India’s strategic neighbourhood. Afghanistan, which straddles both South and Central Asia, forms a crucial aspect of the security policy of India and the Central Asian countries. In exploring this link, the section first outlines the strategic environment within Central Asia, after which it looks at the situation in South Asia (Afghanistan and Pakistan) and the destabilizing role of non-state actors in both regions. Next, the section argues that large overlaps exist between India’s national security interests (both domestic and external) and the security outcomes in the extended South and Central Asian neighbourhood. Finally, the section concludes with a look at the steps India has taken to engage with Central Asia in security terms.

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3 ibid.
4.1 The Security System in Central Asia

The internal security environment in Central Asia is shaped by the complex interaction of actors both within and outside the region. The interlinking and dependent nature of the security threats and opportunities that the countries in Central Asia face, permit a shared reading and analysis of them. Scholars Roy Allison and Lena Jonson view the countries in Central Asia as being within a Regional Security Complex (RSC), given the internal security dilemmas they share and the commonality of the external agency that is exercised upon them. Scholars Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde in their seminal text, Security: A New Framework for Analysis, redefine a security complex as one where “a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another.”

Given the shared history, religion and cultural affinities – and the more recent disordered transition that all of the CARs experienced after the fall of the Soviet Union – it is reasonable to assume that commonalities across the security architectures of the individual nations exist, which derive from their past. Further, the resemblances within the societal structures, kinships and hierarchies that shape their nation building processes in the post-Soviet period, also point to a similarity within their political and economic challenges, which in turn supports the rubric of a regional security approach. Finally, the nature of the interplay between the internal and external pressures, which shapes how the countries in the region interact both with each other and with great powers who vie for influence in the region, also points to the existence of a RSC, and satisfies the conditions of a security complex as defined

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by Buzan, Waever and Wilde. The following paragraphs examine in detail the internal security dynamic within Central Asia and the role that external powers play in the shaping of the security architecture of the region.

The first determinant of internal security within the Central Asian Region is the prevailing ‘crisis of legitimacy’ that affects nearly all of the governments in the region. This crisis of legitimacy emerges from the fact that these governments do not enjoy popular support yet maintain control by concentrating power in the hands of a select few. As scholars Arun Sahgal and Vinod Anand note, “the existence of informal networks of power, which are clan-based, region-based and interest based,” forms the bedrock of governance (or the lack of it) in the region, and only serves to exacerbate the democratic deficit. In a nation- and state-building story that is only two decades old, this concentration of political power leads not only to a sinuous development of state institutions and governance structure, but also to an enormous amount of wealth being redistributed to the elites, instead of being allocated to public good.

This consolidation of power also shapes the ability of local elites to enrich themselves by leveraging the competing interests of external powers against each other. Additionally, as authoritarian regimes that emasculate all forms of opposition to keep a firm hold on power, there is always a risk that an opposition, which has been forced into submission, may turn violent. The Andijan uprising in May 2005, where Uzbek President Islam Karimov was forced into a crackdown to show that his elites still effectively controlled country, led to the death of 700 people, and showed the world how fragile the situation in Central Asia really was at the time. While popular

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rhetoric may argue that in fact it is the opposite, the presence of strongmen in Central Asia often prevents the region from falling into turmoil. Their system of governance runs the risk of creating a suppressed yet strong opposition – as we have seen in the case of the rise of political Islam (which is explored later in this section) – that eventually is able to contribute negatively to the security dynamic of the region.

The second determinant of the internal security environment within Central Asia is the prevailing socio-economic situation in the region. The socio-economic situation relates closely to the faltering development of political and state institutions, and the inefficient distribution of wealth amongst the masses in the region, which in turn is caused by the concentration of power and economic clout amongst elites associated with the regimes that control the governments. It is unfair to draw a monolithic comparison across the entire Central Asia region here. Kazakhstan, and to some extent Turkmenistan, have been able to buck the trend, and ensure better distribution of wealth and social development within their populations. However in Uzbekistan, the most populous country, and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the poorest in the region, there has been little consistent socio-economic growth and development in the past two decades.

The link between socio-economic growth and compromised human security is well established. Most Central Asian countries continue to face challenges to state institutions, water management, infrastructure development, food security, migration and healthcare systems, which in turn seriously impacts the overall security of the region. The inability of the Central Asian countries to reach compromise on issues such as shared resources, water and river management, migration, and borders, and the failure to upgrade transport and communication infrastructure that was built in Soviet times, has hampered the overall economic development of the region, and has affected greater security cooperation between the states.

14 Swanstrom, Niklas. 2010. 47
The third determinant of internal Central Asian security is the issue of conflict and competition between the states.\(^\text{17}\) This is largely felt in two spheres: ethnic conflicts, due to the large spill over of populations from one ethnic state into another, as seen in the case of the restive Fergana valley which lies across Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; and competition for natural resources, as seen in the issue of water-sharing of the region’s two rivers, the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya. Ethnic conflict remains a potential driver of security instability in the region, especially because security cooperation between the states remains abysmal. All five of the CARs either exercise claims or can exercise claims to parts of the territorial sovereignty of the other states.\(^\text{18}\) In particular, Uzbekistan, which is the most powerful militarily, continues to monitor the situation in Fergana, and fears Tajik and Kyrgyz support for their minorities within Uzbek parts of the valley.

Water, too, is seen as a potential driver of competition and even conflict within Central Asia. Scholar Beatrice Mosello contends that the Central Asian countries view water sharing as a “zero-sum” game, where one’s gain is at the loss of another.\(^\text{19}\) While water may not be a source of armed conflict between two states in the near future, it is already the cause of localised conflict.\(^\text{20}\) The “zero-sum” nature of water competition confirms its securitized nature, with water driving the economies of Uzbekistan – through its vital role in supporting cotton farming (the largest export) – as well as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, via hydroelectric power. The attempts of Tajikistan (an upstream country) to dam the flow of the rivers and increase generation of hydroelectric power at the cost of reduced irrigation supply to Uzbekistan, and the Uzbek decision to turn off the flow of natural gas to the Tajiks in response, exemplifies the very nature of this threat.\(^\text{21}\) Mosello also states that the situation is exacerbated by the linking of ethnic issues with that of water competition, as seen in

\(^{17}\) ibid.


\(^{20}\) Ibid.

the Fergana valley\textsuperscript{22} (see Figure 4, below), which further serves to complicate issues of regional security.

**Figure 4 – Water Management in Central Asia: State and Impact**\textsuperscript{23}

The role of external powers that seek agency within the Central Asian matrix is primordial to the strategic and security environment, and to India’s abilities to raise its profile in the region. As explained previously, the NGG framework postulates that external power projection creates a simultaneous situation of competition and cooperation, both between the external powers in the region and between external powers and the CARs themselves. Russia, the United States, China and the EU play

\textsuperscript{22} Mosello, Beatrice. 2008. 159.

the role of great powers, and Iran, Turkey and India (along with a whole host of others) are seen as secondary powers within the Central Asian matrix. This potent combination of great power, secondary power and Central Asian elites’ interest has a significant impact on the internal security dynamic in Central Asia. Russia’s reassertion of hard power in its strategic backyard in recent years, through its bilateral security arrangements with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, is a cogent example of the external power impact on internal Central Asian security.24

China’s increasing influence through its energy and economic engagement, and Western involvement via civil society and international non-governmental actors, also play a role in shaping the human security environment in the region. Further, as a number of scholars have shown, there is an inherent degree of localization within the ‘New Great Game’ taking place,25 where Central Asian powers also are able to set ground rules for interactions with external powers in the region, and even use the presence of external powers to benefit their elites. This is not only limited to economic gain, as pointed out above, but also used as a justification, through a process of “norm localization,”26 to exercise further control of already subdued populations.27

Finally, the role of strong authoritarian rulers, who dominate decision making in the security and the strategic sphere within their nations (and in doing so suppress the military decision-making apparatus), limits the ability of the nations in the region to cooperate effectively in the security sphere. This, when combined with the apparent distaste that the rulers have for their contemporaries, leads to a situation where the nations are compelled to seek security guarantees from multilateral organizations and frameworks like the CSTO and the SCO.28 While the SCO and CSTO are indeed multilateral, they remain backed by a strong individual power – Russia in the case of

25 Cooley, Alexander. 2012. 3.
26 ibid.
27 Cooley describes “norm localization” in Central Asia as occurring when elites using repressive ideas about political suppression, frame these as acceptable since they are imported from and in use within foreign powers.
the CSTO and China in the case of the SCO – and only compound the role of external agency within the security dynamic in the region. This, and the others factor pointed out above, also shape India’s perceptions of Central Asia, and affect how it should attempt to achieve its national security objectives within the region.

4.2 Afghanistan, Radicalism and Terror - Where South and Central Asia Meet

South and Central Asia have been part of the same spatial and socio-cultural construction for thousands of years. The reordering of Central and South Asia into separate geopolitical spaces occurred during time of Russia’s annexation of Central Asia into the Tsarist and Soviet empires, and South Asia’s reorientation towards the British empire. The 20th century creation and use of modern Afghanistan as a buffer zone between the two empires did not, however, reduce the intricate linkages that both the regions shared with it. In the south and the east, the Durand line that separated the country from British India was a contested ideal, as the Pashtuns paid little heed to it, moving across their territory as they pleased. In the north and the west, the ethnic linkages that the Tajik and Uzbek minorities in Afghanistan had with the Emirate of Bukhara and Khanates of Kiva and Kokand persisted, shaping the direction an independent Afghanistan would take after the collapse of British India.

Similarly, with the end of the Soviet Union, the involvement of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the Afghan civil war that took place in the nineties mirrored that of Pakistan, as a successor state to British India. All three countries used their significant ethnic minorities in Afghanistan to give the war a different direction. Pakistan, with its control of the majority Pashtun population via its own Pashtun minority, supported the Pashtun groups including that of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and later the Taliban. The Uzbeks supported their strongman Rashid Dostum, who in turn was loosely allied to the mostly Tajik Northern Alliance, led by Ahmed Shad Masood. India played an important role in supporting the Northern Alliance throughout the nineties. As history has shown us, the degree of mutual interaction or opposition that occurs in Afghanistan will define any relationship that a South Asian power will seek to have with a Central Asian power. This was the case with the British, the Russians, the Americans (via their allies, the Pakistanis) and the Soviets, and in more contemporary
times, as both Pakistan and India sought to build ties with the newly formed Central Asian countries.

There is a predominant view within India, and amongst scholars of international relations, that Afghanistan sits at the crossroads of the South Asian RSC and the Central Asian RSC. And, as such, the Central Asian security environment overlays with that of South Asia, with Afghanistan and the northern parts of Pakistan and Kashmir forming the foreground of this intersection. In 2003, shortly after 9/11, scholars Buzan and Waever stated that Afghanistan acted as an “insulator” between the RSCs that surrounded it. In their view, Afghanistan did not link the security dynamics of the regions around it, but instead acted as a barrier to security interplay between the regions. Within the Curzonian British perspective, and later during the Soviet Union, this “insulating’ quality,” as Buzan and Waever deem it, did have an evidentiary claim, and was applicable to Afghanistan. However, the post 9/11 period, characterised by increasing cross-border Islamic radicalism, transnational terror groups and the persistent flow of weapons, drugs and people across South and Central Asia, now points to a different reading of the perceived role of Afghanistan as a country between multiple regional security architectures.

It is the contention of this work that Buzan and Waever’s postulates from 2003 are no longer applicable to the case of Afghanistan, and it does not remain only an ‘insulator’, as suggested by other scholars as well. Instead, Afghanistan is now seen within India as a “bridge and buffer,” especially in the context of India’s policy in Central Asia, according to General BK Sharma of the United Services Institution (USI) in Delhi. As a bridge, Afghanistan is seen as a passage to Central Asia with its energy resources and economic potential, within Indian strategic thinking. As a buffer, Afghanistan serves as a barrier to the instability and radicalism that could

32 Author interview: Sharma, B.K. Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses, New Delhi. 2014. in person
permeate down into India from Central Asia.\textsuperscript{34} Further, as some scholars contend, Afghanistan, rather than being conceptualized as an insulator, should be seen from the prism of an “aggregator of interests,” which has brought together the overlapping regions it sits upon.\textsuperscript{35} In light of the Western troop drawdown from the country after 2014, it is only logical that regions surrounding Afghanistan will have to work together or against each other to ensure that their interests in the country are maintained.

As Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East) at the MEA, India, suggested in March 2014, “the region has moved closer to the centre of the strategic canvas, with the eruption of security threats in and around Afghanistan. While for India, the geo-strategic position of the region is salient….”\textsuperscript{36} It is this perspective that brings India and the Central Asian countries together. Like in the nineties, they share similar perceptions of what the problems are in Afghanistan – stemming the spread of radical Islam and its political effects, preventing terror from upsetting the delicate power balances in the region, and clamping down on non-traditional threats like drug and human trafficking. The fact that they worked on the same side, aligned behind the Northern Alliance against the Pakistan-backed Taliban during the civil war, only highlights the importance of these countries to India, in light of Pakistan’s renewed attempts to seek strategic depth in Afghanistan, as General RK Sawhney at the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) in Delhi states.\textsuperscript{37}

The numerous challenges that emerge from Afghanistan as the West withdraws from the country over the three-year period from 2014 onwards are of grave concern to both India and the CARs.\textsuperscript{38,39} The potential vacuum of power that may emerge as the newly elected unity government of President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah struggles to find its feet, risks destabilizing the country and regressing it towards a nineties style calculus – splitting it on ethnic and religious

\textsuperscript{34} Author interview: Sharma, B.K
\textsuperscript{35} Destradi, Sandra. 2013.
\textsuperscript{36} Wadhwa, Anil. 'India’s Extended Neighbourhood: Prospects And Challenges'. 2014. Speech at IDSA, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{38} See Pant, Harsh. 2014.
lines. This is a situation that both India and the CARs are desperate to avoid, given the historic precedent of the Afghan civil war, which impacted both negatively. Tajikistan, which was drawn into its own civil war in the nineties, was inextricably linked to the situation in Afghanistan. India, too, saw much turmoil in Kashmir, as local rebels freely mixed with transnational militant groups, leading to a decade long insurgency in the state, with much loss of life and control.

Having outlined the significance of Afghanistan, and the overlapping areas of interest between India and Central Asia, it is cogent to provide an explanation of the specific nature of the threats that emanate from this region, which in turn helps provide an understanding of India’s security engagement with the Central Asian countries. These threats are namely: (1) Ethnic strife and instability that emanates from a possible Taliban return to power; (2) the spread of radical Islam and terror; and (3) the trafficking of drugs and the movement of weapons across the region. Central Asia scholar and Director of the India–Central Asia Foundation, Professor Nirmala Joshi, confirms this opinion. The next paragraphs analyse these threats in detail, and their impact on the security of the region.

The scenario of a Taliban return to power in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of Western forces post 2014 remains the most significant concern to policy-makers in both India and the CARs. The Taliban, in their first run in government in Afghanistan between 1998 and 2001, were a divisive force in the varied ethnic makeup of the country. As an ethno-radical Islamic grouping comprised of mostly Pashtuns, they were opposed to a more prominent role for Afghanistan’s other minorities, with the Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras rallying behind the opposition Northern Alliance at that time. It is evident that there is an apprehension amongst the governments in Dushanbe and Tashkent that a more prominent role for the Taliban in Afghanistan, could polarize the country, leading to a situation where they would have to step in to guarantee the interests of their ethnic minorities in the country, and to

40 Author interview: Joshi, Nirmala, India Central Asia Foundation, New Delhi. 2014.
41 Confidential author interview: Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy, New Delhi. 2014.
42 Author interview: Joshi, Nirmala. 2014.
A Taliban return to power would not be inimical to the interests of all the countries in Central Asia. If their first regime was a yardstick to go by, the Taliban enjoyed a productive economic relationship with the Turkmens, and the Taliban being in power did not overly affect the small Turkmen minority in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, who do not a share a border with Afghanistan, too, will not be impacted directly by a Taliban return to power, having neither a minority nor significant economic relations with the country. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, India’s most significant security partners in Central Asia, will be impacted the most if the Taliban return to power. Given that India’s closest partners amongst the Afghan elites are of Tajik origin, and that Tajikistan plays an important role in the Afghan political matrix currently through the Tajik minority, the country’s second largest – a Taliban return to power could have an incendiary impact in Tajikistan’s own precarious domestic political situation, raising the stakes in the game for India as well.

While India has little to fear from the Taliban itself (it would be moot for a Taliban led Afghanistan to go to war with India), there is the matter of India’s significant investment in the country, and the security of the numerous assets it has on the ground. A Taliban return to power would almost certainly mean an Indian exit from Afghanistan and the end of its developmental and economic cooperation. Also, a Taliban return would mean that a government sympathetic to Pakistan’s cause and beholden to the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) would reign in Kabul, giving Pakistan the strategic comfort and space it so desires (discussed later in this section). This scenario, when combined with the Taliban’s previous track record of providing succour and shelter to a host of jihadi and fundamentalist groups (discussed in the next paragraphs) – including those specifically targeting India – is one that every

43 Confidential author interview: Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy, New Delhi. 2014
45 In fact the Taliban praised India’s involvement in the country to spite the Pakistan, see, Taliban praises India for resisting U.S. pressure on Afghanistan,. 'The Hindu'. 2012. Web. 1 Aug. 2014.
46 Author interview: Chandra, Vishal, Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. 2014.
policy-maker in India dreads, according to strategic guru C. Uday Bhaskar. The memory of the 1999 hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC 814, which was diverted to Kandahar, and the subsequent negotiations India had to enter into with the hijackers, with the Taliban serving as interlocutor, remains fresh in Indian minds and is evidence to the potent threat that a mixture of the ISI, the Taliban and various jihadi groups form to India’s security.

Perhaps the most significant threat that a Taliban-led government in Kabul poses to both the CARs and India is the shelter and succour that the Taliban could provide to the radical Islamist causes to which it is sympathetic. Coalesced with the ancient Pashtun code of Pashtunwali and the concept of Melmastia, which obliges Pashtuns to provide hospitality and asylum to those who entreat for it, the Taliban’s past sympathies and support for Al Qaeda and other groups are well known. There is also evidence that the Taliban supported various other radical Islamic groups, like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and its splinter cell the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LET), the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HUM) and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JEM), either by providing asylum or allowing Afghan territory to be used for training and logistical purposes.

At this stage, it is cogent to make a distinction between two different types of Islamist groups that operate in the region. The first has a more localized focus, where they intend to take on regimes that they believe are anti-Islamic, and whilst they are sympathetic to a global Islamic cause, they do not expressly make it their agenda. The second has a broader Islamic civilizational agenda, aim toward the creation of the caliphate, and have a global approach, emphasizing Jihad not just at the local level, but also against the West, the Jews and all those they consider enemies of Islam.

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47 Author interview: Bhaskar, Chitrapu Uday, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi. 2014. in person
51 ibid.
52 ibid.
The following paragraphs provide an examination of both types, and the threats they pose.

The IMU is the most relevant Salafist radical group in Central Asia. Based in its formation from the Adolat movement in Uzbekistan in the early nineties, it is focussed on local politicians and regimes, and has close links with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Forced to move south, into Peshawar and northern Pakistan, after the US invasion in 2001, it remains committed to largely local aims, hoping to impact the Fergana Valley and other parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with its radical agenda. Other groups focussed on the region include the Jhund-ul-Khalifah and its ally Ansar-al-Din, which are focussed on Kazakhstan, and the Jamaatt Ansarullah, which targets Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. While all of the groups have maintained a low profile in the region, there is fear amongst the countries that they could become more active, especially as the West withdraws from Afghanistan.53

The IJU split from the IMU after the death of founder Juma Namangani in 2004 and espoused a broader civilizational agenda, collaborating closely with Al Qaeda and recruiting amongst Arabs to support its cause.54 Also based in the porous border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, it recently reunited with the IMU to focus on Central Asian targets, after considerable successes abroad, especially in Europe.55 While Al Qaeda has been on the back foot after the assassination of Osama Bin Laden, the recent arrival of the Islamic State in Afghanistan has serious implications for both Central and South Asia, bring the “Sunni Arc of Instability” to the doorsteps of both India and the Central Asian republics with potential Taliban support.56 Former US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates said in 2010 that Afghanistan “is increasingly an unholy syndicate of terrorist groups working together: al Qaeda, the Haqqani network, the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban and groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba. A success for one is a success for all.”57 His words confirmed India’s fears – the LET,

54 Balci, Bayram, and Didier Chaudet. 2014.
55 ibid.
the HUM and other Kashmir- and India-centric terror groups were still using Afghanistan as a base to execute attacks on Indian soil, and there was proof that this was occurring in collaboration with a host of other transnational actors, including those from Central Asia.

The final threat that has emerged is the intertwined issue of the proliferation of weapons and the trafficking of drugs in the South-Central Asia border regions. These go hand-in-hand with the rise in prominence of the Jihadi groups, and are both a by-product of increased Jihadi activity, and the very reason why Jihadi groups can afford to operate in the region, despite the many attempts made to stop them.

The mass-scale proliferation of arms fuels the Jihadi violence in region. A result of the involvement of external powers in the region, Joshi traces three specific periods in which a large inflow of small arms took place. The first occurred during the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion, with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and ISI providing the Mujahedeen weapons to prolong the struggle; the second occurred during the Afghan and Tajik civil wars in the nineties, when the Russians and Iranians supported the Northern Alliance and the pro-government forces in Tajikistan; the third took place during the War on Terror, when the West provided weapons to militia and warlords sympathetic to their cause. The proliferation of weapons is of particular concern to India, which has genuine fears that these weapons may be used by Jihadi groups on the ground in India and Kashmir, as has been clearly evidenced by the widespread use of these weapons in the Kashmir insurgency. The same holds true for the CARs, where fears exist about an increasingly precarious law and order situation due to the proliferation of weapons, not just in the hands of Jihadi groups but also mafia and other militias.

The threat from drug trafficking is more severe, although it is less perceptible. Afghanistan is now the world’s largest producer of opium. With record poppy

59 ibid.
harvests in recent years, the country’s dependence on the sale of opium has only gone up, despite Western efforts to the contrary. Recent reports suggest that opium accounts for close to 5% of Afghanistan’s GDP, and the trade is currently valued at close to US$ 1 billion. Given that the trade in opium is entirely underground and controlled largely by militias and groups affiliated with the Taliban, there is a direct correlation between profits from increased drug trafficking and the financial support the Taliban can provide to various Jihadi groups. Additionally while the Taliban is responsible for the cultivation and sourcing within Afghanistan, it is the radical Islamist groups who ensure that the opium transits onward to Russia and Eurasia, through the CARs, making their own profits along the way. While India is not a primary destination for opium (although the border state of Punjab is in the midst of an addiction crisis), the funding drug trafficking generates for the Islamist groups is a prime concern to the Indians, as this support eventually finds its way into the hands of groups that target India specifically, like the LET and the HUM.

The challenges that stem from Afghanistan and the overlapping border regions of South and Central Asia have been identified above, and their relevance to the contemporary India-Central Asia security dynamic suggest a shared geopolitical reading of them by both India and the CARs. While there has been a certain amount of valid criticism from scholars that the threat of radical Islam and instability in Afghanistan has been played up by the oppressive regimes in the CARs, as a populist narrative to justify many of their political excesses, a credible threat, especially to India, does exist, stemming from this volatility. Given the active Pakistani role in redirecting terror and instability from Afghanistan toward India, as illustrated above, India remains wary of threats that emanate from the region, and as often reiterated by policy-makers who were interviewed in the course of research for this work, this security apprehension shapes India’s strategy toward Central Asia – some go so far as to state that it forms the most significant aspect of Indian policy. The next section looks at the interaction between India’s national security objectives and the threats

62 ibid.
63 Author interview: Banerjee, Rana, Special Cabinet Secretary (Retd.) RAW, New Delhi. 2014.
64 A number of people interviewed reiterated this point including, Stobdan, Bhaskar and Sharma.
that have been identified in this section, to provide a better understanding of what drives Indian policy in the region, and to comprehend the current course of action India has chosen to take.

4.3 The Interplay with India’s National Security Objectives

India’s national security objectives in the broader South and Central Asian regions stem from its own domestic considerations, premised on its large Muslim minority, along with deeper strategic interests that concern the role of Pakistan, and its attempt to check India’s own abilities to project influence as a rising power in the region. Both notions are examined in detail below, with reference to the threats that emanate from Afghanistan and Central Asia.

India and Pakistan have shared a troubled relationship since partition, with the major bone of contention being the issue of the state of Kashmir. The issue of India – Pakistan relations, and the subsequent “nuclearization” of the subcontinent that took place during the last decade, has been the subject of much scholarly solipsism, and as such a detailed examination of India – Pakistan relations is beyond the scope of this work. However, what needs to be examined here is how India’s relationship with Pakistan affects its perception of and ties to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and in turn how this impacts India’s security strategy towards Central Asia. In order to do so, it is first prudent to examine the troubled relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan, given their conjoined physical geography; and second, to examine the triangular relationship between India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the challenges this creates for India.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a 2640 km long permeable border that cuts across Baluchistan, the Khyber-Paktunkhwa sub-region, and the Pashtun heartlands. The Durand line, which separates Afghanistan and Pakistan and runs across these regions,

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is extremely porous, and given the topographical constraints (it lies across deep valleys, deserts and mountainous terrain) it is an unenforceable border. The writ of both states is also challenged in the border areas of the Swat valley, Waziristan and Northern Baluchistan as large networks of tribal groups and clans inhabit and operate out of these areas, confronting their authority. The 3 million strong, mostly Pashtun, Afghan refugee presence in Pakistan also serves as a major challenge to the governability of the border regions of both countries. Afghanistan continues to throw up an existential challenge to Pakistan by disputing the Durand line border, and claiming the Pashtun areas in their entirety.\textsuperscript{67} To counter this challenge, Pakistan seeks to control the government in Kabul, often by exercising the agency of its own numerically large Pashtun population, given that the Pashtuns are a majority in Afghanistan. This was seen clearly in the case of Pakistani support for the Taliban government that came to power in the Nineties, and before that to the various Pashtun led Islamic groups that fought the civil war in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{68}

Further, according to some, Pakistan seeks strategic depth in Afghanistan,\textsuperscript{69} in order to ensure its ability to fend off a potential attack from India on its Western borders. While the concept itself entered the Pakistani military narrative in the eighties, it has been proven as strategically unfeasible with the “nuclearization” of the subcontinent. However, it continues to linger within the minds of many in the Pakistani establishment and is the basis of any relationship with Afghanistan. General Ashfaq Kayani, the leader of the Pakistani army, said in 2010 that Pakistan sought strategic depth in Afghanistan, but did not want to control it.\textsuperscript{70} In reworking the concept, Pakistani scholarship later suggested that a modern non-military interpretation of strategic depth meant that Pakistan sought a friendly (and pliant) Afghan state on its northern and eastern borders, so it could concentrate its military muscle in the west

\textsuperscript{67} Afghanistan’s non-recognition of the Durand line as the international border with Pakistan, questions Pakistan’s official existence. For more see, Dalrymple, William. ‘A Deadly Triangle: Afghanistan, Pakistan And India’. \textit{The Brookings Institution}. N.p., 2013. Web. 2 Nov. 2014.


against India and control India’s ambitions northwards.\textsuperscript{71} This concept of a non-military strategic depth in Afghanistan would enable Pakistan to insure its own economic, military and energy-seeking ambitions in Central Asia and Eurasia, while regulating India’s aspirations in these regions by controlling overland access of transport routes and pipelines.\textsuperscript{72} Additionally, it would allow the Pakistani state to continue its practice of supporting cross-border terror in India to achieve its strategic objectives (by placing terror training facilities and camps in the ungovernable border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan – something it cannot do if an impartial or India-friendly regime is in power in Kabul).\textsuperscript{73}

Policy-makers in India view the need to counter Pakistan’s designs in Afghanistan as one of the aims of India’s strategy towards Afghanistan and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{74} A former Indian Ambassador who served in the region confirmed that the need to deflect Pakistan’s strategic overtures towards Afghanistan post 9/11, and prevent it from becoming a safe haven for terror and the Taliban, served as the impetus for India’s US$ 2 billion reconstruction program in Afghanistan in an interview.\textsuperscript{75} While India’s support of the Afghan rebuilding process was visible largely in the developmental, humanitarian and cultural fields, building on the goodwill it enjoyed, it also hoped to create a broad constituency amongst the Afghan elites, many of whom were predisposed to India previously.\textsuperscript{76} India’s recent decision to invest US$ 80 million into the building of the Iranian port of Chabahar was seen as a harbinger of a more decisive Afghan and Central Asia policy under the new administration of PM Modi.\textsuperscript{77} By choosing to support the Chabahar, India aimed to open another vital sea route that allowed for greater trade and resource access to landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran, thus circumventing Pakistan, which restricted Afghan access to its transport corridors and denied the Indians overland transit rights into the region.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{74} A number of people interviewed reiterated this point including, Stobdan, Joshi and Sharma.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{77} See, Sandilya, Hrishabh. 'India, Iran, And The West'. \textit{The Diplomat}. N.p., 2014. Web. 9 Nov. 2014.
\end{itemize}
Finally, there remains residual fear within India’s elite about the threat Pakistan poses to the Central Asian nations themselves. As pointed out earlier in this work, India was accused of being far too Pakistan-centric in its approach to the Central Asian countries in the nineties. This approach cost India its first-mover advantage, as it remained focused on the Pakistani involvement in the Tajik civil war in the nineties, choosing to wait and watch, instead of engaging with the newly formed national entities when they were looking for support from India. While there is an understanding now in India that the ideological and authoritarian underpinnings of the CARs are far removed from the political Islam that shaped Pakistan, there is still concern that Pakistan may attempt to influence an Islamic agenda in those states. Indian scholars remain apprehensive of Pakistan’s ability to support groups like the IMU and other radical groups, as it did in its support of the Taliban, to try and balance out India’s position as the regional hegemon in South Asia, given the interconnectedness of the South and Central regional security architectures.

As a Hindu majority nation, with a significant Muslim population (currently estimated to be the second largest Muslim population in the world), India remains wary about the impact of strife within the broader Islamic world (especially in its extended neighbourhood) on its own Muslim population. Combined with the broader issue of Kashmir, and its delicate and contested position within the Union of India, India sees security threats that derive from Afghanistan and Central Asia as potentially deleterious to the social fabric and unity of the country. From a domestic security perspective, it is this fear that informs Indian decision-making and relations with Afghanistan and Central Asia. A detailed explanation of both apprehensions is provided below.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), India’s only Muslim majority state has been the subject of an international conflict with Pakistan since partition in 1947. India currently controls only a portion of the land, with Pakistan holding on to Azad Kashmir and the Gilgit-Baltistan area, and China controlling Aksai Chin. The Line of Control (LOC)

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78 Author interview: Banerji, Rana, Retired Special Cabinet Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing, New Delhi. 2014.
80 Author interview: Bhaskar, Chitrapu Uday. 2014.
serves as the de-facto border as the countries continue to contest the future of Kashmir. In the nineties, J&K went through a prolonged period of insurgency as Kashmiris, wary of New Delhi’s interference in the political process, took to the streets to support their cause.\(^81\) Pakistan was quick to ensure it got in on the game, by supporting infiltration across the LOC and training militants in numerous camps setup across Azad Kashmir. With the region in flummox after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989, and an abundant number of Mujahedeen, who were no longer needed by the ISI across the Durand line, Pakistan directed them towards the LOC and India. What started as a Kashmiri civil disobedience movement soon became an armed insurgency, and by the mid-nineties, under Pakistani direction, Kashmir was the epicentre of a full-fledged cross-border terror battle.\(^82\) India had to send in the army (at one stage up to 500,000 men were stationed in Kashmir) to address the issue, which to this date remains unresolved as the army continues to be responsible for the security of the state.

The ease, with which radical Islamic groups sympathetic to the Pakistani agenda could potentially setup base in the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, if the historic example of Kashmir in the nineties is a barometer, is a major security concern for India. As previously explained, the free-flow of weapons, jihadists and funds for operations could prove to be a major challenge for Indian policy in the region. India expressly fears the reactivation of terror camps across the LOC and its effects on the polity in Kashmir. Today, as the West departs from Afghanistan, there is a lingering apprehension in Indian policy circles that there could be a movement of jihadists from Afghanistan and Central Asia, echoing what happened in the nineties in Kashmir,\(^83\) as Pakistan increases the ante. India can ill afford another challenge to its unity, especially at a time when its energies should be focussed on economic development and progress, and calls continue for the removal of the army from Kashmir.

The impact of the on-going strife in the Islamic world and the fallout from the ‘War on Terror’ on India’s Muslim minority is yet to be fully comprehended. Whilst largely


\(^{82}\) ibid.

\(^{83}\) Author interview: Banerji, Rana, 2014.
supportive of India’s international positions and foreign policies in the Islamic world,\(^{84}\) there is increasing concern about the impact and popularity of homegrown radical outfits like the Indian Mujahideen (IM) and the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI). The movements, which are seen as isomorphic, have had considerable impact in India over the past decade, allegedly being responsible for a number of high profile terror attacks in the country.\(^{85}\) These include ten bombings between 2005 and 2008, the most prominent of which were the 2006 attacks on Bombay’s suburban railway system, and other explosions in Delhi and Bangalore.\(^{86}\) Scholar Christine Fair notes that the SIMI/IM “rejects Hinduism, secularism, democracy, and nationalism, which are keystones of India’s constitutional establishment.”\(^{87}\) She goes on to say the group embraces the concept of *Ummah*, and the need to create a community of global Muslims within the Caliphate (*Khilafat*), and accepts jihad as an instrument to achieve this.\(^{88}\) The link between the SIMI/IM and transnational terror outfits like the LET, JEM, HUM, as well as Pakistani ISI-backed India mafia syndicates, like that of Karachi-based Dawood Ibrahim, has also been proven.\(^{89}\)

As public intellectual and journalist Praveen Swami notes,\(^{90}\) the group has its origins in “India’s dystopic communal landscape” and sends out the message that democratic politics cannot defend India’s Muslims.\(^{91}\) This is to say that the SIMI/IM feels that it is the duty of the group to seek redressal for India’s Muslims through acts of violence, as often they have not been the beneficiary of the economic development, nor have they been part of the growing middle-class in India over the past decade. In fact the SIMI/IM believes that this growth has come at the cost of India’s Muslims, with the majority Hindu population benefitting instead.\(^{92}\) There is also ideological opposition


\(^{87}\) Fair, C. Christine. 2010. 111.

\(^{88}\) ibid.

\(^{89}\) ibid. 13.

\(^{90}\) An interview with Praveen Swami is cited in the work of C. Christine Fair, above, and the idea to reference his (other) work in this section, was derived from Fair’s original use of his work.


\(^{92}\) ibid.
from SIMI/IM to regional issues like the US involvement in Afghanistan. This, and a complimentary rise in interaction between SIMI/IM and groups like the LET and HUM with Indian operatives being trained in Afghanistan, led chief of India’s Intelligence Bureau to warn the country about the increased threat from a potential collaboration of the groups in South Asia.\(^93\)

India’s ultimate apprehension from the challenge that home-grown Islamic radicalism poses to it, is not just what a group like SIMI/IM could do, but what increased SIMI/IM activity could do to trigger a chain reaction of responses from Hindu fundamentalist groups in return. This scenario has a basis in the recent past, with the fear that a ‘saffron terror’\(^94\) response to incitement from the SIMI/IM could potentially lead to larger communal violence and riots, challenging the social fabric of the country. This was seen in the wake of the Malegaon bombing in 2008\(^95\), and the 2007 bomb attack on the Samjhauta Express train that ran between Lahore and Delhi, both of which were attributed to radical Hindu nationalists.\(^96\) According to scholar Ajay Patnaik, former Director of the Institute of Central Asian Studies at JNU, there remains a real concern within the Indian security establishment that increased linkages between Islamic radical groups in India with those in Afghanistan and Central Asia could accelerate activity within Hindu radical groups in the country, and lead to a reciprocal trail of communal terror and violence throughout the country.\(^97\)

In conclusion, the security and strategic challenges of the broader South-Central Asian region pose for India, have significant interaction with India’s domestic and external security objectives. As shown within this section, India has domestic security concerns that any instability stemming from Central Asia and Afghanistan could pose

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\(^95\) The Malegaon blasts took place on September 28, 2008 in the predominantly Muslim town of Malegaon in Maharashtra. The National Investigative Agency (NIA), which took over the investigation of the attack, found a newly formed right-wing Hindu organization called Abhinav Bharat, behind the attack. While a judgment has yet to be passed, the accused remain in jail, while the case is being heard. For more information, see, Jaffrelot, Christophe. 'Abhinav Bharat, The Malegaon Blast And Hindu Nationalism: Resisting And Emulating Islamist Terrorism'. Economic and Political Weekly 2010. Web. 7 Nov. 2014.


\(^97\) Author interview: Patnaik, Ajay, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. 2014.
serious challenges to its internal stability with reference to Kashmir, and a potential incendiary role in stoking communal Hindu-Muslim tensions. In terms of its external challenges, India is wary of Pakistan’s ability to influence its strategic neighbourhood, and cause harm to India both within and to its greater relations with Central Asia and Afghanistan. Finally, as scholar Stephen Blank suggests, terror and violence in South and Central Asia, and the grander conflict it could cause, is inseparable from the conventional and nuclear theatre scenarios of possible war between India and Pakistan (as shown in the case of Kargil in 1999), and therefore confirms the vulnerability of India’s relations with Central Asia to the India-Pakistan-Afghanistan dynamic.

4.4 Strategic Cooperation between India & Central Asia

The previous chapters provided a descriptive analysis of India’s re-engagement with Central Asia in the post 9/11 world, and the more recent Look North and Connect Central Asia policies it announced. The paragraphs above highlighted the security interaction between India’s interests and the situation in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Keeping this in mind, this section provides a brief description of the recent strategic cooperation between India and Central Asia, focusing on events post 9/11 but limiting this focus to interaction between India and Central Asia bilaterally or at the regional level. A discussion of the security and strategic interactions India and Central Asia have within the framework of multilateral architectures, or as part of an alliance is provided later in this work and as such is not mentioned in this section.

4.4.1 Tajikistan

India’s most significant strategic partnership in Central Asia is with Tajikistan, according to Indian security policy pundit Bharat Karnad. Separated from the northernmost tip of Kashmir by the Wakhan Corridor, a narrow 20 km tract of Afghan land, Tajikistan has a vital geostrategic location between Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, and is of great importance to India. Should India be able to persist with its cultivation of Tajik elites, an Indian military presence in Tajikistan

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would prove vital to its second strike capabilities against China or Pakistan. India also fears creeping radicalism in Tajikistan, given its proximity to Kashmir. Its ties to Tajikistan go back to their shared backing of the NA in Afghanistan, and its use of Tajik bases to support the NA. India setup a military hospital in Farkhor on the Afghan-Tajik border in the mid-nineties, which served as an essential supply and recovery route for the NA.  

India currently operates another military hospital that was opened in 2013 in Southern Tajikistan. Ostensibly setup for humanitarian purposes, some scholars have speculated that this could serve the same purpose as the Farkhor hospital did, if the situation in Afghanistan again deteriorates. India also extensively rebuilt the Ayni airbase in the country in 2008, at cost of over US$ 20 million, in the hopes of placing an IAF fighter squadron there to boost its presence in the region. Scuttled by Russia, which wanted sole access to the base, India currently maintains a military ‘outpost’ in Ayni to monitor activity in the region, though there is little information in the public domain as to what its role is. A recently retired senior official in the MEA confirmed that the military ‘outpost’ even had an aerial ability, hinting that while the IAF base was officially closed, the IAF continued have a residual presence there.

Ramped up after the announcement of the CCA policy, the relationship enjoys high-level political and security contact. The Tajik president has visited India six times in the last two decades, with similar visits from India’s top brass also taking place. A Joint Working Group on security meets annually in Delhi and Dushanbe to discuss issues related to counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, security and defence capacity building. Both countries issued a joint statement on strategic partnership after President Rahmon’s visit to Delhi in 2012, highlighting the importance of the security

101 Author interview: Chandra, Vishal, 2014.
103 Pandit, Rajat. 'India Airlifts Military Hospital To Tajikistan To Strengthen Geo-Strategic Footprint In Central Asia'. The Times of India 2013. Web. 15 Dec. 2014.
relationship amongst wider developmental, humanitarian and economic ties.\textsuperscript{105} India currently provides military training to Tajik military officials, both in Tajikistan and at India’s top military academies, and has conducted joint military exercises with the Tajik army. In April 2013, India gifted two MI-17 helicopters to the Tajik army, with a promise of additional military support in the future.\textsuperscript{106}

4.4.2 Uzbekistan

Ties with Uzbekistan, too, assume significant importance within India’s strategic calculus in the region. Its location on Afghanistan’s border, the fact that it possesses the largest army and population amongst the CARs, and that it maintains control over a large part of the restive Fergana region – a source of much Islamist turmoil, speaks to its importance to any Indian strategy, as confirmed by Ajay Bisaria, Joint Secretary (Eurasia) at the MEA.\textsuperscript{107} Uzbek President Karimov has visited India five times since independence, with return visits from the Indian PM in 1991 and 2008. The most recent high-profile contact was the visit of Indian Vice President Hamid Ansari in May 2013, where counter-terrorism, the future of Afghanistan and economic cooperation were discussed. The visit followed an earlier visit by General VK Singh, Chief of the Indian Army in 2011, also the first of its kind, which focussed on strengthening defence cooperation amongst the two partners.

India and Uzbekistan established a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism in 2003 that meets annually, with a focus on intelligence sharing about Islamist groups that operated in Afghanistan and the region. In April 2005, an Agreement on Cooperation in Military and Military Technical areas was signed during Karimov’s visit to Delhi. The relationship was also upgraded to the level of a strategic partnership in 2012, after India announced the ‘Connect Central Asia’ policy. The countries also hold regular joint military exercises and have bilateral agreements in place to exchange and train military staff at India’s premier military academies and

\textsuperscript{107} Author interview: Bisaria, Ajay, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014.
the Counter-Insurgency Warfare School. India purchased six Uzbek manufactured IL78 mid-air refuelling aircraft and have an agreement on the repair and manufacture of further transport aircraft for the IAF, given the Uzbek’s technical abilities to service Soviet-era aircrafts and technology.

4.4.3 Kyrgyzstan

With Kyrgyzstan, India has had a Joint Working Group on International Terrorism in place for over a decade. Ambassador Stobdan, who served in Bishkek, views defence cooperation as a vital part of bilateral relations, of which the focus on training and support of Kyrgyz military officers in India has been the largest component. With a focus on counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing activities, the countries have conducted joint mountain warfare and commando training exercises, in addition to other military exchanges. High-level bilateral visits occur on a regular basis, with Kyrgyz President Roza Otunbayeva visiting Delhi in 2012, following a visit from the Indian Defence Minister prior to that.

India is also actively involved with the defence and research industries in Kyrgyzstan. The Indian Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) was involved in the joint creation of the Kyrgyz-India Mountain Bio-Medical Research Centre (KIMBMRC), focussed on the physiological effects of high-altitude warfare, in 2011. The DRDO is also actively involved in a research and production project of naval torpedoes with Dastan, a Kyrgyz defence manufacturer with Soviet roots. The Skhval-E torpedo, which can be equipped with both nuclear and conventional payloads, is of particular interest to the Indian navy. In addition to Dastan, the Ulan Torpedo Range (UTR), located on Lake Issykul, is essential to India’s testing ability of new torpedoes including the Skhval class and other indigenous varieties. India’s defence ties with Kyrgyzstan have been of particular interest to other powers in the

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111 ibid.
region, with Turkey and Russia vying for control of the Dastan defence manufacturer, a testament to the strategic competition dynamic that exists in the region.

4.4.4 Kazakhstan

Strategic cooperation with Kazakhstan is a corollary to the importance India attaches to it in the realm of energy security. President Nazarbayev’s presence at India’s 60th Republic Day celebrations in January 2009 were marked by the signing of a number of agreements, including those that focussed on space and military cooperation, and a joint declaration of strategic partnership. The declaration of strategic partnership was followed by a number of high-level visits from India to Kazakhstan. Army Chief General Singh followed his trip to Uzbekistan in 2011 with a visit to Astana to build on already occurring joint training exercises and to offer the Kazakhs an opportunity to train their officers at India’s military institutions. Kazakh Army Chief Colonel General Zhasuzakov Saken Adilkhanovich, visited Delhi in December 2014 to build on bilateral defence and counter-terrorism cooperation.

As with Kyrgyzstan, India has a significant amount of defence industry cooperation with Kazakhstan in the space and naval technology fields. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) is currently in a space technology partnership with the Baikonur Cosmodrome and the National Space Agency of Kazakhstan, which plays an important role given the increasing militarization of space. The Navy currently operates a large number of torpedoes developed in Kazakhstan, and in a Joint Working Group meeting in November 2012, “several new areas of cooperation were identified which includes India’s assistance in the development of Kazakh Navy in the Caspian Sea, cooperation in the manufacture of arms and ammunition, upgradation of Indian torpedoes in India itself and joint military exercises,” says a press release from the Government of India.

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4.4.5 Turkmenistan

Finally, India’s ties to Turkmenistan, though strategic in nature, are limited largely to the realms of energy, trade and developmental aid. Given Turkmenistan’s permanent neutrality and limited access to the outside world, security and strategic cooperation between India and Turkmenistan is currently limited. However, diplomatic ties remain strong. As Minister of State for External Affairs, E Ahamed noted in Delhi in 2012, in his speech to mark the 20th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, India values Turkmenistan’s support at the United Nations (UN), and for India’s candidature for a Permanent Seat on the UN Security Council. Additionally, Ahmed suggested that India was determined to improve relations and take economic and development cooperation forward in the energy, construction, and tourism sectors. In fact, he called upon India’s private industry bodies to support such a move.

4.5 Chapter Conclusions

The internal security environment in Central Asia continues to be as fluid and reactionary as it was two decades ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The continuation of the writ of authoritarian regimes in the region poses complex challenges for the internal stability of the CARs. The ‘crisis of legitimacy’ that affects the governing elites has direct implications for the state building process, and prevents the development of effective political institutions, and of a political opposition. The nature of the regimes, also impacts the socio-economic conditions for the majority of the population of the CARs (with Kazakhstan an exception), compromising human security in the region. Finally, the relations between the CARs continue to be dogged by conflict and limited cooperation. This facilitates an environment where other actors (great and secondary powers) are able to exercise agency in the rapidly evolving geopolitical environment in Central Asia. The difference being that today the CARs are also able to control and facilitate external agency (to an extent), thereby confirming scholarly postulations about simultaneous scenarios of cooperation, competition and potential conflict occurring in the region.

117 ibid.
For India, the Central Asian security environment coalesces with that of the greater South Asian region in the subcontinent’s hinterland of Afghanistan, Kashmir and northern Pakistan. It is this combination of security threats emanating from the South and Central Asia security environments that concerns India’s policy-makers the most. These threats are of three types: First, the possibility of a scenario of ethnic strife and instability in Afghanistan that could end up destabilizing the entire sub-continent and parts of Central Asia should the Taliban return to power after a Western withdrawal; Second, the constant fear of the export of Islamic radicalism and terror across the two regions, from transnational groups like the IMU, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State; And finally, the proliferation and trafficking of weapons and narcotics that is inexorably linked to terror groups that operate in the regions.

When linked with India’s natural security objectives, it is easier to comprehend why security and addressing these threats are fundamental to India’s Central Asia strategy. The delicate interplay between these threats and the dilemmas posed by home grown radicalism (both Hindu and Muslim) challenges India’s overall stability and future. Additionally, the need to prevent Pakistan from using Afghanistan, and a potential Taliban return to power, to seek strategic balance against India, also shapes India’s security interactions with Afghanistan and Central Asia. In response to these compulsions, India has initiated an active security and military cooperation paradigm with the CARs. Therefore, as a determinant of India’s strategy in the region, security remains of paramount geopolitical importance to the country’s elite. This chapter, in explicating this, provides a valuable contribution to answering some of the questions posted in the research hypothesis.
5. Energy Security as a Metaphor for Access to Central Asia

Many in India’s policy circles see the country’s quest for energy resources in Central Asia as a way to gain a foot in the door for greater trade engagement and interconnectivity with the region, which goes beyond the simple economics of hydrocarbon purchases. This, however, does not discount the importance of Central Asia to India’s energy security needs. This chapter explores both paradigms. It begins with an explanation of the geopolitics of energy security, before turning to an overview of India’s burgeoning energy demands, which it then compliments with a summation of the abundant energy reserves of the CAR. It then proceeds to provide a primer on bilateral energy cooperation between India and the Central Asian states, before concluding that energy cooperation is the way forward for India’s greater economic and civilizational ambitions in the region.

5.1 The Geopolitics of Energy Security

The contemporary paradigm of energy security has evolved considerably from its basal understanding of the interaction of the source and supply of oil, and geopolitical tensions. Today energy security has come to be defined in a far more comprehensive manner; the International Energy Agency (IEA) defines it as:

> The uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. Energy security has many aspects: long-term energy security mainly deals with timely investments to supply energy in line with economic developments and environmental needs. On the other hand, short-term energy security focuses on the ability of the energy system to react promptly to sudden changes in the supply-demand balance.¹

The traditional elements of energy security include sources of supply, demand targets, geopolitics, market structures, and the institutions involved at a global and national level. Today that archetype has changed, and now includes other elements such as environmental impact, technological abilities and the existence of several different renewable sources.

Chris Flaherty and Walter Leal Filho define energy security in two ways. They suggest that it can be viewed as an economic concept or as a subset of national security. They also suggest that the notion of energy security takes on additional manifestations and becomes linked to foreign policy, defence, and various trade and investment strategies. It is this notion that this section attempts to explore, in order to suggest that energy policy, as a subset of India’s national security aims, has become a driver and a determinant of India’s Central Asia policies.

The IEA definition above links four separate dynamics of energy security. It considers the supply and demand, availability at reasonable costs, the environmental impact and the use of technology to make energy more efficient, and finally accessibility – the geopolitics of energy. Today scholars argue that while we are seeing increasing progress within the first three dynamics, as additional sources are found energy becomes cheaper, less harmful and more efficient, the geopolitical dynamic continues to be abounded by uncertainty. The crises of the Arab Spring and the subsequent rise of the Islamic State (both of which have affected a large swathe of the energy-producing regions in the Middle East), the on going crisis in Ukraine with Russia exploiting Europe’s energy dependency, and China’s behaviour in the South China Sea are a pointed reminder of the vulnerability of energy security to geopolitics.

The great and rising powers of the world are turning to Central Asia as part of a strategic response to the geopolitical uncertainties that their energy security plans face. This work previously presented the NGG as a conceptual framework for understanding the agency that outside powers exercise in Central Asia. Nowhere does it have more applicability than in the quest for Central Asian energy resources. The fact that external powers, seeking agency in Central Asia, are cooperating and competing within themselves and with the Central Asian powers for energy and

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3 ibid.
natural resources, and using multilateral, regional and bilateral frameworks to achieve this, exemplifies the complicated and nuanced NGG that is occurring today. As highlighted earlier, given Central Asia’s geostrategic location in the midst of energy-hungry regions, access to Central Asian energy resources is as much about securing these resources for one’s own use, as denying these resources (once secured) to others. The geopolitical fault lines that run through Central Asia – oil and gas pipelines and ports of exit – make this feasible, as nations seek to control these to achieve their own ambitions. As scholar Devika Sharma notes:

In the short to medium term, the ability of the great and rising powers of the international system to secure sources and routes to energy resources in the world would be competitive, if not conflictual, and would mean a reformulation (and not necessarily a long-term change or shift) of power equations in the world.  

India is no different in this regard from China, Russia, the West, Japan, Iran and Turkey amongst a whole host of players who cast Central Asia as an important alternative source for their energy security. This chapter first looks at India’s energy imperatives, considering in detail the energy outlook for the country. It further explains patterns of consumption, sourcing, supply, and plots this against India’s projected needs for growth and poverty alleviation, before looking at the geopolitics of India’s energy security, its dependence on the Middle East, and its fear of Chinese encirclement, all of which justify India’s search for an alternative. The second section in the chapter provides a detailed analysis of Central Asia’s attractiveness as an energy source. Divided country-wise, it considers the different types of energy resources available in each of the CARs, from hydrocarbons to uranium and hydroelectric power, and explains the possibilities these open for India. The final section in the chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of India – Central Asia energy and resource cooperation so far.

5.2 India’s Energy Imperatives

Following the liberalisation of India’s economy in 1991, energy security has become a particularly prominent area of interest within policy circles. Lifestyle changes, the creation of a 200 million-strong middle-class, population growth, and the recalibration of industry and the economy to keep with these changes have meant a growing propensity to consume energy. Two decades of robust economic growth, and another planned half century more, underline the importance of energy to India’s national security paradigm. Scholars Ligia Noronha and Anant Sudarshan view India as unique in having a particularly dichotomous energy policy-making environment. They suggest that energy security policy-making in the country has to account for both “economic growth” and “poverty alleviation,” and create policies that are reflective of both concerns.6 What that suggests is that India faces two types of challenges i.e. first, providing energy to promote economic growth and satisfy the pangs of middle-class consumption by powering manufacturing and service industries; and second, providing energy to alleviate poverty, putting India’s majority rural population on the grid, and moving them away from traditional fuel sources.7 With the population expected to grow to 1.5 billion by 2030, the country’s president, Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, on the occasion of India’s 59th Independence Day in 2005, acknowledged energy security as vital to securing the country’s future.8

As an emerging economy, India’s energy concerns are different from those of developed countries or those of least developed countries. Given the dichotomy illustrated above, India’s energy consumption patterns reflect both characteristics of developed economies and those of least developed economies. This dichotomy also means that a world-class energy efficient manufacturing sector coexists with a largely unorganized small and cottage industry sector that is ineffectual in its use of energy.9 The poverty alleviation angle would require that more than 500 million Indians have access to electricity, and transition from using biomass for cooking to more efficient methods. Additionally, India’s per capita commercial energy consumption is only

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7 ibid.
9 Noronha, Ligia, and Anant Sudarshan. 2009. 3-5.
20% of the world’s average, a figure that will rise as a corollary to economic growth. Keeping that in mind, this section proceeds to explicate India’s current growth projections, patterns of energy consumption and supply, and the country’s energy basket, with a focus on imports of hydrocarbons, gas and other sources of energy.

India’s economy is currently the third largest in the world with its GDP standing at US$ 4531 billion in Purchasing Power Parity PPP terms in 2011.\footnote{PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) expects the Indian economy to triple to US$ 13716 billion in 2030 and grow eight times, to US$ 34704 billion, in 2050.\footnote{An annual GDP growth of between 6 to 8% will be needed to sustain this projection and, more importantly, raise 1/3\textsuperscript{rd} of the population out of poverty.\footnote{The growing middle-class and the diversification of the economy towards manufacturing in response to domestic consumption patterns will not only drive GDP growth (see Table 1), but also contribute to a huge rise in energy spending and have an environmental impact.\footnote{Currently the world’s fourth largest energy consumer, India’s energy needs are expected to rise tangentially, making it the third largest by 2035. The following paragraphs provide an overview of India’s energy consumption patterns and imports.}}}}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
 & 2000 & 2010 & 2020 & 2035 \\
 & NPS & EWS & NPS & EWS \\
\hline
GDP ($2011 trillion, PPP) & 2.8 & 4.2 & 8.3 & 8.4 & 19.2 & 19.8 \\
Energy-import bills ($2011 billion) & 42 & 83 & 200 & 180 & 406 & 296 \\
Consumer expenditures ($2011 billion) & 117 & 168 & 327 & 304 & 650 & 511 \\
\hline
CO\textsubscript{2} emissions (Gt) & 1.2 & 1.6 & 2.4 & 2.1 & 3.8 & 2.9 \\
SO\textsubscript{2} emissions (Mt) & 5.9 & 8.1 & 11.4 & 9.8 & 15.4 & 11.5 \\
NO\textsubscript{x} emissions (Mt) & 4.2 & 5.5 & 6.8 & 6.3 & 11.8 & 9.5 \\
PM\textsubscript{2.5} emissions (Mt) & 6.0 & 6.1 & 6.6 & 6.3 & 6.8 & 6.1 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\footnote{PricewaterhouseCoopers, \textit{World In 2050 The Brics And Beyond: Prospects, Challenges And Opportunities}. 2013. 2-10. Print. PwC Economics.}
\footnote{ibid.}
\footnote{ibid.}
India’s energy consumption stood at 691 Million Tonnes of Oil Equivalent (MTOE) in 2010, the base year for all current projections. McKinsey & Company’s estimation for India’s energy consumption in 2030 currently stands at 1508 MTOE or a little more than double 2010 numbers.\(^\text{15}\) This figure, which is arrived at with a ‘business as usual’ scenario projection, is similar to that of the World Energy Outlook released in 2012, which projects India’s energy consumption at around 1400 MTOE in 2035, averaged between the ‘new policies scenarios’ and ‘efficient world scenarios’.\(^\text{16}\)

India’s energy production patterns based on data from 2012 from the United States’ Energy Information Administration (EIA) indicate that 44% of India’s energy supply comes from coal, 22% from hydrocarbons, 7% from gas, 22% from biomass and 5% from renewable and nuclear sources (see Figure 5). Of this, McKinsey currently estimates that India imports more than a third of primary energy requirements, with this figure expected to rise to greater than 50% in 2030 and beyond (see Figure 5.4). McKinsey suggests that in 2030, India’s dependence on coal is set to grow to over 60%, with liquids accounting for 24%, gas at 7.5%, with the rest being made up by greater efficiency in the nuclear and renewable energy fields.\(^\text{17}\)


Figure 5 – Total Energy Consumption in India, 2012

The IEA’s World Energy Outlook of 2012, projecting the “energy world scenario”, suggests that India’s energy consumption in 2035 will grow to 1229 MTOE, with 463

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MTOE coming from coal, 322 MTOE from oil and 137 MTOE from gas as the significant contributors to India’s energy basket (see Table 2).

Table 3 – India’s Primary Energy Demand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EWS total primary energy demand</th>
<th>Mtoe 2010</th>
<th>Mtoe 2035</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other renewables</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bioenergy</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydro</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oil</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the above figures that India has a high dependency on fossil fuels, with currently over 90% of its energy production coming from such sources. British Petroleum expects this figure to evolve slowly with dependency on fossil fuels reducing slightly to 87% in 2035. Given this high dependency on fossil fuels, and India’s relative paucity of indigenous sources of fossil fuels, India’s energy imports are set to increase substantially by 2035 (coal is an exception – yet coal imports are expected to rise). McKinsey estimates that India’s imports will rise from 30% in India’s current energy production to over 51% in 2030 (see Figure 7), the highest proportion for a major world economy at that stage, raising serious questions about India’s energy security and dependence – questions about resource availability, deliverability and technology, the risks of sudden disturbances, and existence of geopolitical fault lines and ‘choke points’, all of which become of primary importance to the energy security of the country.

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Given India’s projected fossil-fuel energy import dependence and the risks it poses to India’s energy security, it is, at this stage of the paper, cogent to provide a deeper understanding of the specificities of India’s fossil fuel dependence and its relevance to Central Asia. The following paragraphs explicate India’s dependence on Liquid (Oil) and Gas energy, areas that are germane to its cooperation with Central Asia. Further, they expand on attempts by India to adequately address challenges to its energy security.

India was the fourth-largest consumer and net importer of oil and petroleum products in the world in 2013. India’s current demand for oil is 3.7 Million Barrels per Day (MBD), while domestic production is currently below 1 MBD (see Figure 8). India currently imports about 71% of its oil. EIA projects India’s demand will increase to 8.2 MBD by 2040, while domestic production will remain stagnant, at around 1 MBD. India is expected to import up to 90% of its oil by that time.

Figure 7 – India’s Energy Import Dependence

![India's Energy Import Dependence](image)

Given India’s projected fossil-fuel energy import dependence and the risks it poses to India’s energy security, it is, at this stage of the paper, cogent to provide a deeper understanding of the specificities of India’s fossil fuel dependence and its relevance to Central Asia. The following paragraphs explicate India’s dependence on Liquid (Oil) and Gas energy, areas that are germane to its cooperation with Central Asia. Further, they expand on attempts by India to adequately address challenges to its energy security.

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23 U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 'India - Analysis'.

Figure 8 – India’s Oil Production and Consumption 2000-15

Given this import dependency, it is logical to analyse the source of India’s imports and the amount of crude oil India receives from various parts of the world (see Figure 9). Today, Saudi Arabia is India’s largest oil supplier, with a 20% share of crude oil imports. Close to 62% of India’s imports originate in the Persian Gulf. Other major sources of crude include the Western Hemisphere (19%) and Africa (16%). The impact of the Arab Spring and turmoil in the region and in Africa was felt on India’s import basket, as it diversified away from traditional sources like Iraq, Sudan, Libya and Nigeria. Western sanctions on Iran have resulted in India’s imports from Iran dropping to as low as 6%, from a high of 16% in 2009. Notwithstanding the recent decline in oil prices, cost has also been a major reason for India’s diversification away from the Persian Gulf, given the higher cost of Middle Eastern crude. The other substantial implication of India’s oil import dependency is its use of the Indian Ocean and tankers as its primary means of transportation of crude, significantly raising the risks for India, as these means are known as a geopolitical ‘choke point’.

24 Source: ibid.
25 ibid.
Given that India’s economy continues to have a significant agrarian component, natural gas, due to its role in the fertilizer industry, remains vital to the economic growth of the country. It also plays an important role in electricity generation as a substitute to coal. India was the fourth largest Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) importer in the world in 2013, and is expected to grow to be the second largest. Self-sufficient till 2004, after which it began to import LNG, India imported 29% of its LNG requirements of 2.1 Trillion Cubic Feet (TCF) in 2012 (see Figure 10). This demand is expected only to increase, with some projections estimating a need of close to 5 TCF in 2035.\textsuperscript{28} India’s domestic production is not expected to be able to keep up with the increased demand, and data from the McKinsey report suggests that India will have to import up to two-thirds of its LNG requirements (see Figure 10). An analysis of the source of India’s imports of LNG, Qatar is the dominant provider (providing over 80% of India’s LNG imports), with the rest coming from Nigeria, Yemen, Egypt and Algeria (see Figure 11). Given the perils over dependency, diversification away from Qatar and increased domestic production are essential steps. LNG suffers from a similar threat perception as oil, with all of India’s imported LNG being transported by tankers via the Indian Ocean.

\textsuperscript{27} Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 'India - Analysis'
\textsuperscript{28} ibid.
In addition to fossil fuel, India imports a significant amount of nuclear fuel and uranium to support its growing nuclear energy program. In 2012, 19 nuclear reactors produced 4780 Megawatts (MW) of electricity annually; the government aims to boost production significantly to 17,000 MW in 2024 and over 50,000 MW in 2050.  

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29 Source: ibid.
Given the impetus behind nuclear energy, and the fact that India uses a significant amount of its domestic uranium resources for its nuclear weapons program, according to scholar Shebonti Ray Dadwal, it has been forced to import uranium for its energy needs. The World Nuclear Association (WNA) claims that from 2008 to July 2014, India imported 4458 tonnes of uranium, with a significant portion coming from Kazakhstan. Given the manifold increase in nuclear energy projection targeted by the government over the next few decades, uranium imports will play a vital role in ensuring India’s energy security.

Having identified and explicated India’s energy import dependencies, the next paragraphs analyse the impact of this dependency on India’s energy security and the geopolitical issues that emanate from this, with reference to the fault lines and ‘choke points’ highlighted previously. This is then contrasted with India’s energy diplomacy and the attempts the government has made to ensure the security of India’s long-term energy future.

Scholar Ligia Noronha believes that India can take a number of steps both domestically and externally to secure its long-term energy future. Domestically, she postulates that the focus should be on an extensive search for new sources, greater reliance on renewables and nuclear power, and greater energy efficiency. Externally, she believes that India should strategically diversify sources, make large overseas investments, enter into larger energy collaborations and partnerships, and finally secure Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOC). India’s conceptualization of Central Asia as a potential target for energy diversification, investment, partnership and as an alternative land source that does not need SLOCs, should be seen in this very light, as India expands its energy diplomacy in the region and other parts of the world.

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33 World Nuclear Agency,. 'Nuclear Power In India | Indian Nuclear Energy'.
35 ibid.
India’s signing of the landmark Civil Nuclear Agreement with the United States in 2005 exemplified the government’s renewed energy diplomacy mind-set. The government expressed similar interest in Central Asia with Minister of State for External Affairs, E Ahmed, who launched India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ policy, acknowledging the vitality of Central Asia’s energy exports to India’s plans to diversify imports.\textsuperscript{36} Secretary (East) Sanjay Singh of the MEA stated in March 2013 in a speech at a conference on Central Asia:

> An important facet of our relations with Central Asia is related to hydrocarbon resources. India is one of the largest importers of oil in the world and demand for gas is growing. Indian companies are in active discussions with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan for upstream, midstream and downstream activities in the oil and natural gas sectors.\textsuperscript{37}

This is a view that is also shared by scholars and experts who focus on India’s energy security. Scholar Shebonti Ray Dadwal acknowledges the role of the Central Asian states, not only for hydrocarbon resources, but also states that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, as sources of uranium, are integral to India’s nuclear energy plans.\textsuperscript{38} She also adds that there exists sufficient potential to consider linking hydroelectric power generation capabilities in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to the South Asian electricity grid in the future.\textsuperscript{39} Scholar Devika Sharma confirms that India is indeed taking concrete steps towards diversification, investment, technological improvement, and the search for alternative routes, and concurs that the Central Asian countries are seen as targets for this by India’s government.\textsuperscript{40}

### 5.3 Central Asia’s Energy Reserves

The previous section provided an explanation of India’s energy security imperatives, highlighting why securing India’s energy future is a major determinant of its strategy in Central Asia. This section now considers the other dimension: Central Asian


\textsuperscript{38} Author interview: Dadwal, Shebonti Ray

\textsuperscript{39} ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Sharma, Devika. 2012. 287-288.
energy reserves (see Tables 3 and 4) and the inclination of the CARs to supply India. The following paragraphs provide a country-wise breakdown of the different types of energy reserves available, and their applicability to India’s quest for energy security. This section also seeks to explain why the Central Asian states are willing to supply India, and argues that beyond securing a trading partner for energy resources, the Central Asian states also use India as a way to balance their own interests with other powers in the region.

**Table 4 – Central Asian Oil Reserves, 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Proven Oil Reserves 2011 (bbl)</th>
<th>Worldwide Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>30,000,000,000</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>600,000,000</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>594,000,000</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>40,000,000</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CIA World Factbook

**Table 5 – Central Asian Gas Reserves, 2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Proven Gas Reserves 2010 (m³)</th>
<th>Worldwide Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>7,504,000,000,000</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>2,407,000,000,000</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1,841,000,000,000</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>5,663,000,000,000</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>5,663,000,000,000</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: CIA World Factbook

5.3.1 Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, the largest of the CARs, is energy-rich and has a diverse number of energy options including oil, natural gas, coal and uranium reserves for nuclear fuel. Its domestic consumption needs are met through a mix of coal, gas and oil reserves. Coal provides the majority of the energy for domestic needs, with surplus oil and gas

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42 Source: ibid.
production being exported. Kazakhstan’s oil reserves are estimated by the EIA to be at 30 billion barrels\textsuperscript{43}, located onshore in the Western part of the country and offshore in the Caspian Sea. The Kashagan oilfield in the Caspian is currently thought to be the largest in the world, with its estimated reserves at 9 billion barrels.\textsuperscript{44} Kazakhstan currently produces over 1.6 MBD annually and exports about 1.4 MBD as per 2013 data. By 2040, Kazakhstan is expected to be producing 4 MBD, with a corresponding increase in export numbers (see Figure 12). A number of Indian firms currently have an interest in Kazakh oilfields.

Kazakhstan’s dry gas reserves are estimated to be 85 trillion TCF. Domestic production is currently 1.4 TCF, with a majority of it being pumped back into the oil fields for enhanced oil production.\textsuperscript{45} Given the disconnect between the gas fields in the west and the domestic centres of consumption in the centre and east of the country, Kazakhstan is forced to import gas for domestic consumption. However, projections suggest that once adequate pipeline infrastructure is in place, Kazakhstan could become a major exporter of natural gas in the near future, and thus of interest to India in this light.

Kazakhstan’s other major energy natural resource is uranium. As the world’s leading producer of uranium since 2009, accounting for nearly 28\% of world production at that time, it has continued to expand production to 33\% in 2010, 36\% in 2011, 36.5\% in 2012, and 38\% in 2013, as estimated by the WNA.\textsuperscript{46} Kazakhstan is home to 12\% of the world’s uranium resources and an expanding mining sector, producing about 22,550 tonnes in 2013, with on-going expansion being projected in the future.\textsuperscript{47} The WNA also suggests that the country aims to supply 30\% of the world fuel fabrication market with the production of nuclear fuel pellets, moving on from only being a provider of uranium.\textsuperscript{48} As a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), it

\textsuperscript{42} ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} ibid.
remains vital to India’s attempt to seek diversification in its uranium supply, and, as explained later, India has actively engaged Kazakhstan on this front.

**Figure 12 – Kazakhstan, Projected Oil Production**

![Kazakhstan oil production graph]

Turanistan currently has the sixth-largest natural gas reserves in the world, and the largest in Central Asia. EIA estimates that Turkmenistan’s gas reserves are 265 TCF, with several of the world’s largest gas fields in the Amu Darya and Caspian basins, including the Daulatabad field with a reserve of 60 TCF, and an annual production of 1.2 TCF in 2012. Turkmenistan is the leading gas exporter in the region and currently exports over 1.6 TCF every year, with the EIA estimating that this figure will rise to 3.18 TCF by 2035 (see Figure 13). With a majority of exports going to Russia, China and Iran, Turkmenistan is actively seeking other export markets for its gas, given the lower demand from these countries. It is currently involved in a number of negotiations to build additional pipelines, given the limited exit access routes for its resources, including the TAPI pipeline, which is discussed in detail in the next section. Turkmenistan also has moderate onshore oil reserves estimated to be at 600 million barrels in 2012; however, it has a claim to offshore, unexplored oilfields in the

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49 Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 'Kazakhstan - Analysis'.
Caspian, which are estimated to contain 80.6 billion barrels of oil, rendering it of potential interest to India.\footnote{Bhadarkumar, M.K. 'The Great Game For Caspian Oil'. \textit{The Hindu} 20 Apr. 2005. Web. 16 Aug. 2014.}

\textbf{Figure 13 – Turkmenistan Natural Gas Production and Consumption} \footnote{Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)., 'Turkmenistan - Analysis'.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure13.png}
\caption{Turkmenistan's Natural Gas Production and Consumption, 1992-2010}
\end{figure}

\subsection*{5.3.3 Uzbekistan}

Uzbekistan, though not endowed with the magnitude of natural reserves of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, has oil and gas stores of interest to the international market. Its natural gas reserves are estimated to be at 65 TCF. It produced 2.2 TCF in 2013; much of it focussed on the domestic market, and exported 0.4 TCF.\footnote{U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)., 'Uzbekistan - Analysis'. Eia.gov N.p., 2015. Web. 19 June 2014.} It has a confirmed 594 million barrels in oil reserves. Despite this, Uzbekistan is a net importer of oil, given its relatively low production capacity due to aging infrastructure, and the fact that a majority of its oilfields remain underexplored.\footnote{ibid.} Indian interaction with Uzbekistan, though not concentrated on exports, is focused on the development and exploration of oilfields, as it is with Kazakhstan.

Uzbekistan is also home to significant uranium reserves. The WNA estimates vary for Uzbekistan’s actual reserves but some state that they go as high as 185,800 tonnes of...
uranium. It is currently the seventh largest producer in the world with estimated production being 2400 tonnes in 2013,\textsuperscript{55} much of it being aimed at the export market. India sees Uzbekistan as a vital partner to its attempts to diversify its nuclear fuel sources, and has entered into negotiations with Uzbekistan to do so.

5.3.4 Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with limited known hydrocarbon and gas reserves, are blessed with abundant water bodies, and the ability to generate large amounts of hydroelectricity. Kyrgyzstan has access to 73\% of the water resources in the Syr Darya basin, and an estimated 25\% in Central Asia. It currently generates 3640 MW of hydroelectricity, which supplies the country with 30\% of its energy needs. There is a serious geographic imbalance in Kyrgyzstan’s ability to generate hydropower and transmit it to its population centres.\textsuperscript{56} 90\% of Kyrgyz hydropower comes from plants located downstream in the South of the country, whereas a majority of its population lives in the north, necessitating a complicated transmission procedure through an Uzbek grid, which burdens Kyrgyzstan with additional tariff costs.

Tajikistan similarly has massive hydropower potential, with an estimated 4\% of the Eurasia’s hydro-energy reserves, second only to Russia. The Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimates the country’s reserves to be 527 billion Kilowatt Hours (KWH), at an annual average capacity of 60.67 KWH, of which only 5\% is currently being used.\textsuperscript{57} Much of the production takes place in the Vahsh, Panj, Amudaria, Syrdaria and Zeravshan river basins, the west and the north of the country. It has a similar problem to Kyrgyzstan in getting the electricity generated to population centres on the other side of the country, and is forced to use an Uzbek grid to do so.

Both countries suffer from a lack of developed hydropower capacity, thanks largely to inefficient and aging Soviet-era infrastructure, which has not been modernised in the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{56} Ministry of Energy of the Kyrgyz Republic., \textit{Fostering Investment In Electricity Generation In Central And Eastern Europe And Central Asia}. UNECE-e8-EBRD-WEC, 2010. Web.
\end{thebibliography}
last three decades. Additionally, given the lack of cross-country transmission lines, population centres in the countries do not receive adequate power, and are forced to import additional energy from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Both governments have indicated interest and solicited bids from international players to modernize their energy sectors, which is of keen interest to India, given the steps being taken to establish the CASAREM. In addition, there remains speculation that Tajikistan has a vast amount of untapped uranium reserves, which are of relevance to India. Mining of uranium was put on hold after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the estimated amount of the reserves remain a state secret.

5.4 India – Central Asia Energy Cooperation

This chapter, so far, has provided an overview of India’s energy security imperatives and Central Asian energy reserves. It now proceeds to explain the exact nature of India’s energy related overtures to Central Asia, and support the hypothesis that the region provides the much-needed diversification for India’s energy security future. Echoing the classification of the previous section, it does so with a country-by-country breakdown of India’s energy relations with the Central Asian states, and also addresses ideas that have been propagated for greater energy cooperation by other scholars.

5.4.1 Kazakhstan

India’s attempts at energy cooperation with Kazakhstan can be traced to the evolving post-Soviet order in South and Central Asia. While India remained aloof for most of the nineties, its re-assertive foreign policy, which emerged post-1998, led it to identify Kazakhstan as a potential source for oil exploration and energy cooperation.

To this extent, ONGC Videsh, the international arm of the state-run gas and oil exploration company, put in a joint bid with the private Indian multinational, Mittal, for PetroKazakhstan Inc. in 2005. India lost the bid for the Canadian registered firm,
when the Kazakh government awarded it to the China National Petroleum Corporation International (CNPCI), instead. Although initially discouraged, India has been pro-active in Kazakhstan ever since, realising the importance of Kazakhstan’s uranium and oil reserves to its energy security, and the need to counter the growing Chinese presence in the region.  

India’s access to the NSG post the 2005 nuclear agreement with the US provided a major fillip to India-Kazakhstan ties. Talks on uranium supply began almost immediately afterwards, culminating in a series of agreements signed during President Nazarbayev’s historic visit to India, as Chief Guest at the Republic Day celebrations in January 2009. An agreement between ONGC Videsh and KazMunaiGaz on the Satpayev oil block was amongst the biggest outcomes of the visit. Negotiations ensued and ONGC finally purchased a 25% stake in the Satpayev block on the Caspian Sea with an estimated total reserve of 1.75 billion barrels for a US$400 million commitment in April 2011, during PM Singh’s visit to Astana. ONGC Videsh was rebuffed in its attempts to buy Conoco Philips’ 8.4% stake in the mammoth Kashagan oilfield in July 2013. Its offer of US$ 5 billion was rejected by the government, which then acquired the stake and resold it on to CNPCI. As one former diplomat suggested, it showed how India still had to learn how to play the game with Kazakhstan’s elites. Notwithstanding that hiccup, Kazakhstan made ONGC additional compensatory offers in May 2014 for fields in the North Caspian and it seems that the relationship is back on track. While India’s share of the production of the Satpayev field is not being exported to India, its sale on the open market contributes to India’s ability to increase its crude purchases from its regular suppliers. Further, it gives ONGC access to valuable technological knowhow and operating experience, given the dissimilar environment for drilling in the Caspian.

63 ibid.
66 PTI. 'Kazakhstan Offers Oil Field To ONGC Videsh'. The Mint 04 May 2014. Web. 27 May 2014.
In the field of nuclear cooperation, a memorandum of understanding between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Kazatomprom, envisaging cooperation that includes the supply of uranium to India among others, was signed during Nazarbayev’s visit in 2009. Singh’s visit also saw the signing of an additional civil nuclear agreement in 2011. As a result of the 2009 and 2011 agreements, India has received 2100 tonnes of uranium from Kazakhstan as of July 2014. The civilian nuclear agreement has been continued past 2014, and India is exploring the option of building reactors in Kazakhstan. India’s uranium requirements for nuclear fuel are expected to rise tenfold by 2020, and analyst Katherine Foshko believes that Kazakhstan will play a major role in supplying India the estimated 8000 tonnes it will need annually. As Kazakhstan’s official line suggests, “Kazakhstan’s foreign policy is built on diversification of international partners and a similar principle has informed its energy exports.” It is this very thinking that drives India’s increased engagement with the country.

5.4.2 Turkmenistan and TAPI

Turkmenistan has figured in India’s energy imagination since the mid-nineties, when US-owned Unocal and Argentine-owned Bridas first proposed the creation of pipelines across Afghanistan that would tap into the Dauletabad gas field and provide South Asia with a source of much-needed gas. Though the initially proposed CENTGAS pipeline was delayed at the end of the decade due to the prolonged conflict in Afghanistan, the idea remained within Indian policy circles, as it supported various Asian Development Bank (ADB) initiatives that sought to engage with the Turkmen, Afghan and Pakistani government to take forward the proposal. In 2002, after the overthrow of the Taliban government, the Afghans, Pakistanis and Turkmens signed an initial agreement to explore the construction of a pipeline. This was backed

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67 World Nuclear Agency. 'Nuclear Power In India | Indian Nuclear Energy'. 2014.
68 World Nuclear Association. 'Uranium In Kazakhstan | Nuclear Power In Kazakhstan'. 2014.
by eager support from the US, which was keen to encourage regional solutions to the redevelopment of Afghanistan. India was formally brought into the picture in 2005, with the ADB’s final project design incorporating an end to the pipeline at India’s western border with Pakistan. In 2008 all three purchasing countries signed an agreement with Turkmenistan for the purchase of gas, with an intergovernmental framework coming into place in 2010.\(^{72}\)

However, disputes over transit fees in Afghanistan and Pakistan between the two countries and to India led to major delays in progress over the pipeline with a resolution only occurring in January 2012, when all three countries agreed to a uniform transit fee.\(^{73}\) As of December 2014, the project had made significant progress with the creation of the TAPI Pipeline Company Limited that would build, own and operate the pipeline, owned equally by Turkmengas, Afghan Gas Enterprise, Pakistan’s Inter State Gas Systems Limited, and the Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), all nationally owned energy companies.\(^{74}\) The ADB estimates that the pipeline will be able to function from 2019 onwards provided that the countries are able to agree to a suitable price for the gas with Turkmenistan, and that the Turkmen government is willing to share ownership of the fields with the drilling companies. More importantly, as a recently retired senior bureaucrat at the MEA confirmed in an interview, the TAPI project is back on track, and figures decisively in Indian policy and energy security considerations in the region.\(^{75}\)

The TAPI pipeline is planned to extend over an 1800 km stretch from Turkmenistan (originating in the Dauletabad or the South Yolotan-Osman gas fields) via Herat, Helmand and Kandahar in Afghanistan to Quetta and Multan in Pakistan ending in Fazilka in India (see Figure 14). An estimated 90 Million Standard Cubic Metres per Day (MSCMD) of gas is expected to flow through the pipeline with 38 MSCMD or 42% going to India and Pakistan respectively, and the remainder going to

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\(^{75}\) Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014.
Afghanistan. Analyst Madhura Joshi estimates that the TAPI pipeline could provide India between 12.5-16.5% of its future gas needs, at full capacity after it is brought online,\textsuperscript{76} echoing the view of the India’s policymakers that TAPI could be a game-changer.

Figure 14 – The TAPI Pipeline \textsuperscript{77}

Notwithstanding the serious security concerns that the long-term survivability of TAPI faces (traveling through the most unstable and dangerous regions in the world, among other challenges, which are addressed in later chapter), TAPI remains the most significant aspect of Indo-Turkmen energy ties. Other energy cooperation that has been discussed includes potential gas swap arrangements between India, Iran and Turkmenistan; The idea being that Turkmenistan supplies northern Iran given its geographic proximity, and India receives gas from southern Iran in the form of LNG shipments or an undersea pipeline.\textsuperscript{78} While this remains a feasible idea, the lack of


Iranian liquefying technology and Western sanctions have prevented this from going forward.

5.4.3 Uzbekistan

India-Uzbek energy cooperation also dates back to the mid-nineties when India first indicated that it was interested in exploring Uzbek oil and gas reserves. Given the large domestic population, much of Uzbekistan’s hydrocarbon production over the last two decades has been consumed by domestic demand. Building on intensified politico-military cooperation after 9/11 and increased security cooperation, as highlighted previously, energy issues came to the forefront of Indian PM Manmohan Singh’s visit to Tashkent in 2006. Two accords on energy cooperation were signed during that visit: a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Indian ministry of petroleum and the state owned Uzbekneftgas, to explored cooperation; and another between GAIL and Uzbekneftgas, where GAIL subsequently identified four blocks for exploration. A third agreement was signed between the Indian ministry of coal and mines and the state committee of Uzbekistan for cooperation in the field of geology and mineral resources, the scope of which extended to exploring potential uranium reserves. Singh’s trip in 2006 was followed by an additional visit by Minister of Commerce Jairam Ramesh in 2007; further cementing trade and energy ties.

Building on these visits, India and Uzbekistan signed a number of breakthrough energy cooperation deals in 2011 when President Karimov’s visit to New Delhi resulted in the relationship being raised to a strategic partnership. Under the conditions of the new deal, ONGC Videsh would be allowed to prospect for gas and oil in Uzbekistan’s unexplored Karakalpakistan region in cooperation with Uzbekneftegaz. In addition to this, both countries cooperated in Afghanistan, linking Kabul and the north of Afghanistan to the Uzbek power grid at Pul-e-Khumri,

80 ibid.
with India being responsible for the construction of a 220 Kilovolt double circuit transmission line between the countries in that period.\textsuperscript{83} Talks on the transfer of shale gas drilling technology from Uzbekistan to India, and extended discussions on the sale of uranium also took place during the 2011 visit.\textsuperscript{84}

Building on the discussions in 2011, and a negotiating process where the countries met multiple times, an additional agreement declaring Uzbek intent to supply India with uranium was signed when External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visited Tashkent in 2013. Finally, in August 2014, India and Uzbekistan agreed to a groundbreaking deal on the actual supply of uranium to India from Uzbekistan. State-owned Navoi Mining & Metallurgy Combine (NMMC) agreed to supply India with up to 2000 metric tonnes of uranium ore over a four-year period from 2014-2018.\textsuperscript{85} A recently retired senior official at the MEA confirmed that deliveries of Uzbek uranium were expected to start in early 2015, with the belief that if there were no problems with the initial supply of 2000 tonnes, India would actively engage the Uzbeks for additional agreements on the supply of uranium.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{5.4.4 Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan}

India-Tajik energy relations remain a function of India’s greater developmental assistance program (which is discussed later) and security cooperation with Tajikistan. Though relations between the two have been upgraded to the level of a strategic partnership, following President Rahmon’s visit to New Delhi in 2012, energy cooperation remains largely limited to Indian support for the development of Tajik hydropower assets. India committed about US$ 20 million to Tajikistan between 2006 and 2012 towards the modernization of the Varzob-1 Hydro Power Station. State companies, Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and the National

\textsuperscript{84} Dikshit, Sandeep. 'India To Prospect For Oil, Gas In Uzbekistan'. The Hindu 19 May 2011: Web. 27 Mar. 2014.
\textsuperscript{86} Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014.
Hydroelectric Power Corporation (NHPC), carried out the redevelopment. The upgraded plant, which was reopened in 2012, had an increased capacity of over 25%, from 7.34 MW to 9.5 MW. The long-term development of Tajik hydropower capacity to its full potential could lead to a supply for South Asia and Afghanistan in the future.

India’s willingness to work with Tajikistan on the development of its hydropower capabilities is a function of India’s acceptance of the fact that it needs to support Tajikistan in its attempts to wean itself away from Russia, and Russia’s heavy involvement in Tajikistan’s economy. If and when Tajikistan is energy sufficient, and less reliant on outside powers like Russia and Uzbekistan, it is more likely to accede to Indian wishes on key security and strategic issues like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additionally, India recognizes the potential of Tajikistan’s uranium reserves, and must do its utmost to compete with China and Russia for these (and hence uses cooperation in the hydropower and its developmental assistance to make it a more level playing field against China and Russia).

India-Kyrgyz energy cooperation, too, has been restricted to the realm of exploring potential avenues for cooperation, and has been limited in comparison to India’s strategic and security engagement and development assistance in Tajikistan. There remains sufficient interest in India about the hydropower potential of Kyrgyzstan, and its relevance to a future common Central Asian - South Asian energy grid, as evinced by Indian interest in a Pakistani deal with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to construct power lines linking the countries to Afghanistan and South Asia. Other avenues for energy cooperation between the two countries that have been discussed in the past include infrastructure development in the wind and solar energy fields.

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88 ibid.
5.5 Chapter Conclusions: Energy as the Foot in the Door for India’s Greater Aspirations in Central Asia

The complex geopolitical uncertainties that accompany India’s energy security concerns, and its related push toward Central Asia as part of a greater diversification strategy to mitigate the risks posed by these uncertainties only represent a dimension of India’s greater energy engagement with Central Asia. As is evident from official Indian discourse and behaviour in Central Asia – while it may remain unsaid – it is clear that India sees energy cooperation with the CARs as the best way to get the ball rolling on greater overall economic and trade engagement, and as a way for India to realise its global aspirations as an emerging power.

While security and strategic cooperation between India and the CARs is stepped in the tangible reality of the tumultuous political environment that engulfs the region, deeper analysis of the reality of Central Asia’s viability as an energy security alternative to India, shows that energy cooperation is more aspirational in nature. Scholar Meena Singh Roy believes that the simple sourcing of energy resources from Central Asia was never the singular aim of India’s increased energy overtures, given the existing barriers that exist in the form of a lack of direct access, India’s limited spending power, and the existence of strong competition for these resources from China and Russia.91 There is therefore an alternate reading of India’s involvement that needs to be considered – one that emphasises India’s search for greater economic and trade involvement with the greater Eurasian region, built on interconnectivity and access through Central Asia, which rides on the back of energy cooperation.

This alternate reading does not overshadow the very real steps India has taken to diversify its energy resources as highlighted in this chapter. The narrative of Central Asia as an important source of raw materials, be it hydrocarbons or uranium, is not apocryphal. It will remain an important source for years to come. However, to overestimate its importance in the scheme of things, and to compare it to the Middle East or Africa as a source, is also foolhardy. What then explains this sustained and serious attempt by India to engage with the region on energy issues, given its limited

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importance as an absolute source? After careful consideration, the only answer that seems logical is the one suggested above. India’s engagement with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan is based on tangible resources that the countries possess and India covets. However, when one factors in its engagement with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which goes well beyond the limited energy goods on offer, it seems to point to the existence of an Indian grand strategy for the region.

Keeping this in mind, India’s economic gambit focusing on the development of trade ties with Central Asia and the use of the region as a bridge, building on connectivity and transport access to Eurasia, is explored in detail in the following chapter.
6. Trade, Connectivity and India’s Soft Power Play in Central Asia

In its account of the determinants of Indian strategy in Central Asia, this work so far has explained the politico-security nature of India’s engagement with the region and shown how the CARs are increasingly viewed as an integral part of India’s energy security future. Now this work turns to an explanation of the two other determinants of Indian strategy in the region, namely, the economic imperative for trade and connectivity with Central Asia and beyond; and India’s aspirations to gain great power status as it takes its place in the world order, exploiting its cultural and civilizational capital in its extended neighbourhood.

In explicating the economics of India’s trade and connectivity overtures to Central Asia, the work explains the drivers of India’s economic expansion before turning to an overview of current levels of Indian economic engagement with the individual CARs. The first part of the chapter concludes with a look at Central Asia’s importance to India’s aspirations in the greater Eurasian landmass as a geostrategic base through which key trade corridors (and proposed ones) pass through. The second part of this chapter provides a detailed explanation of India’s great power status aspirations, explaining how this drives India’s use of its soft power in the CARs. It then provides a detailed overview of India’s soft power outreach before concluding with an evaluation of India’s aspirations to greatness and linking it to the final chapter in the work that parallels India’s agency in the CARs with that of other great powers.

6.1 Central Asia and the Economics of India’s Trade and Connectivity

India’s trade with the Central Asian region dates back thousands of years, and formed the mainstay of relations between the two regions till the 20th century. Today, many within India’s elite believe that reactivating these ancient trade links is the key to any viable future engagement that India seeks in the region. They argue that it is only through sustainable and scalable economic integration that India can recover lost
ground in the region, and hope to counter the influence of China and other powers.\(^1\)

Today, however, the biggest barrier to this is India’s lack of direct geographic access to Central Asia, forcing it to seek Pakistan’s cooperation for transit access for its goods (which, so far, has not been forthcoming). Instead most Indian trade with CARs now takes a circuitous sea route via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, before entering Central Asia over land from Turkmenistan, rendering it less competitive. For India to build a long-term and sustainable trade relationship with the CARs and greater Eurasia, it will have to work assiduously to cultivate better ties with Pakistan, and simultaneously explore alternative trading options with the CARs. The following sections detail India’s motivations to trade, identify the conditions that make this conducive, and explain India’s alternative options in the region.

6.1.1 Understanding Indian and Central Asian Economic Desires to Trade

With the end of central planning and economic liberalization in the early nineties, India’s economy has seen a spiral of growth in the last two decades. Following the adoption of a market-oriented approach, the Indian economy has almost grown 9 times in size, expanding from US$ 274 billion in 1991 to an expected US$ 2.4 trillion in 2014, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).\(^2\) This has been accompanied by consistent average annual growth, where it emerged as the second-fastest growing major economy in the same period, weathering the recent global economic crisis in its stride. India’s economic growth has come largely as a consequence of its increased economic linkages with the outside world, which has facilitated the free flow of capital and trade in goods and services. India’s exports for the year 2013-2014, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), stood at US$ 312 billion and the corresponding figure for imports was US$ 450 billion, with both figures at approximately 20 times their values in 1991.\(^3\) India’s major exports are refined petroleum, jewellery, organics, pharmaceuticals, rice and cars. Its primary imports are crude oils, coal, diamonds and natural gas.

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\(^1\) Author interview: Panda, Jagannath P. Institute of Defence Studies & Analysis, New Delhi. 2015.
Apart from greater merchandise trade, India’s economic expansion has ridden on the back of structural reforms, increased economic globalization and a greater diversification within the economy and its destination markets. In terms of diversification within the economy, much of India’s growth has come from the services sector and India’s knowledge industries, with their value additions in the Information Technology (IT) and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industries, which account for up to 55% of the Indian economy. While India’s manufacturing sector has had a limited contribution to the economy since the nineties, India’s infrastructure remains largely inadequate, and the manufacturing sector has seen manifold growth as the government leads investment into infrastructure and production to keep up with the growing economy. As Director of the Centre for European Studies at JNU, Professor Gulshan Sachdeva suggests that India’s other significant diversification has been in its turn away from the West, and toward its extended neighbourhood as a destination for trade. Sachdeva also states that with the success of the Look East policy, India’s trade with China, Japan and South East Asia has more than doubled, when compared to its trade with the West. Using the same reasoning, he argues that a similar trend will be seen with Indian trade in the Middle East, and in the extended neighbourhood, especially with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Sachdeva also points to the existence of an emerging Asian economic architecture, led by China and Japan, which India seeks to play a greater role in, as its economic ambitions expand. This evolving regional economic framework is vital to India’s greater strategic interests and is construed within India’s extended neighbourhood concept. As scholar David Scott suggests, geo-economic considerations are primordial for India in the extended neighbourhood, largely because the immediate neighbourhood of South Asia is seen as “too small an economic space for India.”

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6 ibid.
7 ibid
This suggests that as the Indian economy expands it is only natural that the country seeks a larger marketplace for its goods – and where better to do that than in an extended neighbourhood in which it has considerable influence. In turn this trade increases the level of Indian influence. Both Scott and Sachdeva refer to the existence of the *Manmohan Doctrine*, a philosophy elucidated by former Indian PM Manmohan Singh, which “emphasizes economic development as a driver for foreign policy, in shaping India’s strength, interests and relationship.”

Other commentators, too, underline the increasing use of trade and economic engagement as a tool of Indian foreign policy. Strategic guru C Raja Mohan, writing in *The Hindu* in 2003, talks about a “new trend transforming the nation’s foreign policy – economic diplomacy.” He notes that while the popular debate on Indian foreign policy continues to focus on political aspects, India’s foreign policy is no longer compartmentalized between political and economic elements, and these two elements go hand-in-hand. Stating that with economic growth, India’s increasing economic multilateralism through the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its signing of preferential and free trade agreements (PTA & FTA) with groupings like the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), India is now adapting to the Asian and global balance of power.

Similarly Arvind Virmani, India’s Chief Economic Advisor, writing in 2014, stressed the role of technology within India’s economic objectives, and stated “economic relations can complement international security relationships by influencing the behaviour of non-ideological, economically rational players in the global system….” Scott, Sachdeva and Raja Mohan all identify India’s energy security needs at the forefront of India’s economic aspirations and foreign policy imperatives. Similarly, they place Central Asia amongst the key regions in India’s extended neighbourhood, in which India must succeed economically to secure its energy interests and broader foreign policy goals of gaining influence as a rising power.

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9 ibid.
11 ibid.
12 Virmani, Arvind. 'Recalibrating India’s Foreign Policy'. *The Hindu* 2014 Web. 1 Nov. 2014.
While India’s energy security imperatives have been covered in detail in the previous chapter, the other major imperative that drives India’s trade aspirations with the CARs is the positive benefit it will derive if it is successful in building sustainable regional economic integration in South and Central Asia that brings about stability to AF-PAK. As intellectual Kanti Bajpai has pointed out, the neoliberal school within Indian grand strategy and foreign policy thinking has had great influence on India’s relations with Pakistan, stressing economic primacy where “trade, investment flows and technology are the keys to economic growth, internal social and political resilience, as well as relative national power.” It is precisely this thinking that drives Indian engagement with CARs, given that the most direct trade routes between India and Central Asia run through AF-PAK. Most Indian elites interviewed agreed with this view and suggested that building South – Central Asian regional economic integration that involved Pakistan through mechanisms like the CASAREM and TAPI pipeline, would benefit India in the immediate neighbourhood and achieve its greater strategic objectives beyond.

From a Central Asian perspective, much like India, all of the CARs were forced to undertake a drastic restructuring of their economies in the post-Soviet period. No longer centred on Moscow, the economies of the CARs were shocked, with falling levels of industrial output and income, and increasing levels of poverty and inequality. Within the Soviet Union, the CARs were largely sources of raw materials, with little refining or value-addition capabilities. With the loss of the common market, the reinstatement of national borders and tariffs and the disruption of supply chains, the CARs were extremely vulnerable in the nineties, as their limited resource exports could not make up for the imports needed to sustain their individual economies. The most prominent example of this is Uzbekistan, which, in the eighties, produced up to 70% of the Soviet Union’s raw cotton, but did not have any textile manufacturing capabilities. Instead raw materials were sent across the Soviet Union to Belarus, who produced textiles, echoing the complexities of a supply chain in which consumer goods went one way and raw materials, the other. Other factors that hampered

growth included the loss of skilled labour as many ethnic Russians left the CARs, ethnic conflict and civil war, environmental disasters, and the loss of the Soviet social security system.

For much of the nineties the CARs showed overall declines in economic growth, as their economies adapted and began to develop their own competencies and advantages. Sachdeva notes, interestingly, that unlike many of the European former Soviet states, Central Asia’s relatively authoritarian regimes experimented with both Asian and European approaches to development, but chose a less fractious path of delayed economic reform over shock therapy, which could have politically destabilized the nascent states. With rising crude oil, gas, cotton and gold prices; increased FDI, growing domestic consumption and larger remittances, the CARs were able to return to growth toward the end of the nineties.

Yet growth in the CARs has been neither consistent nor comparable given the different macroeconomic conditions prevalent in each country. In Kazakhstan, the largest and most developed of the CARs, its relatively advanced oil and gas sectors, large uranium reserves, and buoyant agricultural market, has ensured relatively consistent growth since 1998, placing it amongst the middle-income countries of the world. Similarly in Turkmenistan, the second most developed of the CARs, its reliance on natural gas exports and limited population density, has ensured a fairly consistent living standard and economic growth. Uzbekistan, the largest of the CARs, though poorer than Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, too, has seen a period of relative economic stability since the end of the nineties. It has been able to leverage its population (the largest in Central Asia) to provide cheap labour for its resource extraction industries (copper, gold, natural gas, and cotton) and has benefitted from consistently strong economic growth in the last decades. However, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan both remain relatively poor, with GDP per capita levels lower than that of India, thanks largely to political turmoil and civil unrest, which continued into the new millennium. (See Table 6.1).

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16 Sachdeva, Gulshan. 2010. 118.
17 ibid
Table 6 – Average Economic Growth in the CARs and India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Kazakhstan</th>
<th>Kyrgyzstan</th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Turkmenistan</th>
<th>Uzbekistan</th>
<th>India</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991-1999</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
<td>-4.4</td>
<td>-10.2</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>-4.7</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the CARs, increased economic linkages and trade with India make geopolitical sense. Largely dependent on China and Russia for their hydrocarbon exports, the emergence of India as a viable economic counterweight enables them to diversify their markets and become less dependent on China and Russia, who at times have been able to use this dependence to their advantage. As one commentator notes, “an invigorated and engaged India augurs a more benign geostrategic partnership for economic and political development in Central Asia than China, Pakistan, Iran or Russia.”

India’s experience with information technology and the services sector, and its large labour force, provide the CARs with an opportunity to build ties around India’s knowledge economy, allowing them to move away from their dependency on commodity exports. Finally, as with India, given the politico-security dynamic within the AF-PAK region where the CARs too face threats from radicalism, transnational terror and other security pressures, greater economic integration between South and Central Asia, that can both pacify AF-PAK and bring prosperity to the regions, is of great interest to the CARs. Having provided commentary on Indian and Central Asian motivations to trade, the next section provides an overview of India’s actual economic engagement with the individual CARs.

6.1.2 An Overview of India’s Economic Engagement with the CARs

Historically trade between India and Central Asia along the Silk Routes centred on textile, indigo, pepper and slaves, all of which travelled northward from India to Central Asia upon horses and camels. Dry fruits and silk were transported in the reverse direction. Commerce was facilitated by the nomadic movement of trading

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18 Source: Agrawal, Pradeep, and Seema Sangita. 2013.5.
20 Confidential Author interview: Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy, New Delhi. 2014.
classes such as the “Powindas” from the Pashtun heartlands, who moved seasonally across India and Central Asia.\textsuperscript{22} As scholar Angira Sen Sarma notes, their seasonal migrations from Bukhara in the winter to Banaras and Calcutta in the summer for entrepreneurial activities, accounted for a substantial amount of trade in commodities between the regions. She estimates that at the time of the Burnes expedition to the Khanates in 1832, the total value of this trade was at Indian Rupees ₹ 5 million.\textsuperscript{23} With the reorientation of the colonial economies of Central and South Asia away from each other, and the subsequent closing off of borders in Soviet times, Indian economic interaction with Central Asia reduced substantially and was brokered through Moscow.

The Soviet Union was India’s trading partner of choice and at one time accounted for over a third of India’s total mercantile trade. Facilitated by a Rupee Trading System (as explained earlier), Indian trade with the Soviet Union and Central Asia was robust. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India’s trade with its successor states and the CARs declined considerably, as both partners struggled to revive their economies and re-establish trade links. While Indian trade with the CARs in the nineties was negligible (at around US$ 30 million in 1997), a revival was seen in the new millennium as the impact of the Look North policy began to be felt. Current overall trade, though insignificant when compared to India’s and the CARs’ trade with other regions in the world, stood at over US$ 1.2 billion in 2014, buoyed by large Indian imports of Kazakh uranium ore earlier in the year. (See Table 6.2).

According to the Export Impart (EXIM) Bank of India and the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) of India, the largest Indian exports are pharmaceuticals, coffee and tea, readymade clothes, heavy machinery, cars and trucks, surgical instruments and meat. Imports from Central Asia include minerals and natural resources, rare earths, construction materials, inorganic chemicals, gold, dry-fruits, steel and zinc.\textsuperscript{24} Currently the CARs also offer a viable and previously un-accessed market for Indian

\textsuperscript{22} ibid. 13.
\textsuperscript{23} ibid. 13.
manufacturers whose goods could be a valuable alternative to cheap Chinese imports and highly priced Western products.\textsuperscript{25}

### Table 7 – Total Indian Trade with the CARs 2013-2014 in US$ Million\textsuperscript{26}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2013-2014</th>
<th>Exports</th>
<th>Imports</th>
<th>Total Trade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>261.51</td>
<td>656.33</td>
<td>917.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>34.54</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>35.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>54.27</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>55.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>73.62</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>87.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>114.07</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>145.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>538.02</td>
<td>703.42</td>
<td>1241.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bilaterally, India’s trade with Kazakhstan, the largest and most economically developed of the CARs, is worth more than its trade with all of the other CARs combined. In 2014, it stood at US$ 918 million (see Table 6.3), and looks set to increase in the near future. Apart from robust Indian economic involvement in the energy sector, trade relations have piggybacked on the politico-security cooperation between the two countries in the last two decades. Both sides, however, acknowledge the lack of actual trade, when compared to the immense potential that exists for trade between the nations, and trade has been the focus of much of recent negotiations. According to Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar at the MEA, who previously served in Kazakhstan, following President Nazarbayev’s visit to Delhi in 2009 and the signing of the SPA, and PM Manmohan Singh’s return visit in 2011, energy and economic ties between the two countries have been fast-tracked and prioritized.\textsuperscript{27} In addition to agreements on gas purchases, Singh’s visit yielded an agreement on peaceful atomic energy cooperation, which apart from fuel supply and exploration, talks about cooperation in the fields of nuclear medicine, the exchange of technologies, and cooperation on the joint construction and operation of power plants.\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{26} Source of Data: Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.


\textsuperscript{28} ibid.
Table 8 – India’s Trade with Kazakhstan in US$ Million

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exports</strong></td>
<td>136.54</td>
<td>172.16</td>
<td>244.39</td>
<td>286.23</td>
<td>261.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>41.95</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>-8.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Total Export</td>
<td>178,751.43</td>
<td>249,815.55</td>
<td>305,963.92</td>
<td>300,400.58</td>
<td>314,405.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>39.76</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>-1.82</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imports</strong></td>
<td>154.91</td>
<td>138.42</td>
<td>191.86</td>
<td>139.99</td>
<td>656.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>-10.64</td>
<td>38.60</td>
<td>-27.04</td>
<td>368.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Total Import</td>
<td>288,372.88</td>
<td>369,769.13</td>
<td>489,319.49</td>
<td>490,736.65</td>
<td>450,199.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>28.23</td>
<td>32.33</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-8.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Trade</strong></td>
<td>291.44</td>
<td>310.59</td>
<td>436.25</td>
<td>426.22</td>
<td>917.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>6.57</td>
<td>40.46</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
<td>115.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Total Trade</td>
<td>467,124.31</td>
<td>619,584.68</td>
<td>795,283.41</td>
<td>791,137.23</td>
<td>764,605.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>32.64</td>
<td>28.36</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>-3.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade Balance</strong></td>
<td>-109,621.45</td>
<td>-119,953.58</td>
<td>-183,355.57</td>
<td>-190,336.07</td>
<td>-135,794.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of bilateral trade, Kazakhstan is a valuable source of iron, steel, zinc, salt, sulphur, limestone and other raw construction materials, which account for a major portion of India’s imports. India sends pharmaceuticals, textile and apparel, coffee and tea, and spices as its main exports to Kazakhstan. According to Daulat Kuanyshev, the Kazakh Ambassador in Delhi, the establishment of joint chambers of commerce in Delhi and Astana in 2013 have facilitated the forward movement of trade and economic ties.

From an industry perspective, there is substantial cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector between Indian and Kazakh companies, with a joint venture in place between India’s State Trading Corporation and Eke Pharma in Kazakhstan. Kuanyshev adds that, since 2010, Kazakhstan’s KazStroyService, an engineering firm, has been involved in infrastructure projects in India worth over US$ 600 million, and another Kazakh firm, Azimut Energy Services, is working with Indian gas major Cairn India.

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29 Source of Data: Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.
30 ibid.
32 Sen Sarma. 2010. 36.
Ltd. on a seismic survey in Rajasthan.\textsuperscript{33} Both Kuanyshev and Sajjanhar also point to the existence of several large Indian companies having a significant presence in Kazakhstan such as Arcelor-Mittal, Punj Lloyd, KEC International Ltd, Tata Consultancy Services and others. Indian billionaire Lakshmi Mittal acquired the Karmet steel plant in Temirtau in 1996, with an overall investment of over US$ 500 million. His company, Arcelor-Mittal, remains a major player in the Kazakh steel industry, employing over 50,000 people and outputting 5.5 million tonnes annually.\textsuperscript{34} Punj Lloyd, which has offices across the country, has setup joint-ventures (JVs) in the production of oil pipelines and a sulphur processing plant. Its most successful projects so far have been the construction of pipelines in the Kashagan and Tengiz oilfields for large companies like AGIP and Petrokazakhstan.\textsuperscript{35} Other areas of Indian involvement include infrastructure and development projects in railway construction, power transmission and distribution, telecommunications and power generation. Kunayshev also suggests that out of the over 500 Indo-Kazakh JVs signed, 190 are fully funded by Indian capital.\textsuperscript{36} Other sectors that have shown economic promise include tourism and information technology.

India’s second largest bilateral trading partner amongst the CARs is Uzbekistan. Both countries signed a Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement in 1993, which was supplemented by agreements on Double Taxation avoidance and a Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection treaty in 1999. The treaties involve the promotion of economic, industrial, scientific and technical cooperation; support for the role of SMEs in bilateral economic cooperation; and counter-trade.\textsuperscript{37} Trade, however, between India and Uzbekistan has been disappointing like with the rest of the region, with a total trade of US$ 145 million in 2014. (See Table 6.4). According to the MOC, India’s main exports to Uzbekistan include pharmaceuticals, garments and textiles, medical equipment, consumer goods and tea. And in exchange India gets

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Kaunyshev, Daulat. 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Sachdeva, Gulshan. 'Indo-Central Asian Economic Relations'. \textit{Mapping Central Asia: Indian Perceptions And Strategies}. Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse. 1st ed. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. 134. Print.
\item \textsuperscript{35} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Kaunyshev, Daulat. 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Embassy of India, Tashkent, 'India-Uzbekistan Relations'. N.p., 2014. Web. 29 Dec. 2014.
\end{itemize}
beans, dry fruits, vegetable extracts, fertilizers, cotton, silk and non-ferrous metals from the Uzbeks.\footnote{Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.}

**Table 9 – India’s Trade with Uzbekistan in US$ Million\footnote{Source of Data: Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.}**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2009-2010</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
<th>2012-2013</th>
<th>2013-2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exports</strong></td>
<td>54.03</td>
<td>60.42</td>
<td>89.39</td>
<td>124.90</td>
<td>114.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>47.94</td>
<td>39.73</td>
<td>-8.67</td>
<td>-11.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India’s Total Export</td>
<td>178,751.43</td>
<td>249,815.55</td>
<td>305,963.92</td>
<td>300,400.58</td>
<td>314,405.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>39.76</td>
<td>22.48</td>
<td>-1.82</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Imports</strong></td>
<td>29.97</td>
<td>20.63</td>
<td>37.04</td>
<td>31.85</td>
<td>31.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>-31.18</td>
<td>79.61</td>
<td>-14.02</td>
<td>-1.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India’s Total Import</td>
<td>288,372.88</td>
<td>369,769.13</td>
<td>489,319.49</td>
<td>490,736.65</td>
<td>450,199.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>28.23</td>
<td>32.33</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>-8.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Trade</strong></td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>81.05</td>
<td>126.43</td>
<td>156.75</td>
<td>145.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>-3.51</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>23.98</td>
<td>-7.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India’s Total Trade</td>
<td>467,124.31</td>
<td>619,584.68</td>
<td>795,283.41</td>
<td>791,137.23</td>
<td>764,605.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Growth</td>
<td>26.64</td>
<td>32.86</td>
<td>-0.52</td>
<td>-3.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%Share</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trade Balance</strong></td>
<td>24.06</td>
<td>39.80</td>
<td>52.34</td>
<td>93.05</td>
<td>82.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India's Trade Balance</td>
<td>-109,621.45</td>
<td>-119,953.58</td>
<td>-183,355.57</td>
<td>-190,336.07</td>
<td>-135,794.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From an industry perspective, Uzbekistan is the fifth largest cotton producer in the world, with much textile production occurring under the aegis of the state behemoth Uzbeklegrprom. According to Sen Sarma, the textile industry holds much promise for Indian firms looking to invest in Uzbekistan, with the government creating favourable investment conditions.\footnote{Sen Sarma. 2010.} The Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council of India signed an agreement with Uzbekistan in 2006 to facilitate Indian participation in the textile industry. Accordingly, Spentex, an Indian company, acquired two mills in Tashkent at a cost of US$ 81 million.\footnote{ibid.} Further collaborations include tie-ups with the Tirupur Exporters Association, India’s largest garment manufacturing lobby. Additional Uzbek industries in which Indian companies have been involved include recreation and automotive manufacturing. Minda Industries an Indian firm has a joint venture with an Uzbek company to manufacture automotive products, and more
recently the Polo Group established an amusement theme park “Fun and Food Village” in Tashkent in 2011.\textsuperscript{42} Other sectors that have seen engagement include tourism, construction and collaboration on resource extraction.

India’s overall trade with Turkmenistan was valued at US$ 88 million in 2014. Significantly lesser than its trade with Uzbekistan, India maintains a positive trade balance with Turkmenistan, with its exports significantly outweighing its imports. India’s demand for inorganic chemicals and raw cotton from Turkmenistan accounts for almost all its US$ 14 million imports, and its significant exports include pharmaceuticals, meat products, and nuclear reactors and components.\textsuperscript{43} Though India signed multiple trade and economic agreements with Turkmenistan in the nineties, the Turkmens’ inward looking stance meant that their engagement with India was limited. While much of India’s diplomatic energy and focus remains centred on the TAPI pipeline and the promise Turkmen gas holds, certain sectors have seen strong Indian engagement. In 1998, the Ministry of Health of Turkmenistan signed a JV with Ajanta Pharma, an Indian firm, which led to the establishment of Turkmenderman Ajanta Pharma manufactures 70 different types of essential medicines in the country.\textsuperscript{44} Both governments realize the importance of economic engagement, and have taken the necessary steps to put in a regime that facilitates trade and investment. There are currently 35 international agreements in place, with the most recent being an agreement between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Turkmenistan and the India-CIS Chamber of Commerce and Industry to facilitate further engagement.\textsuperscript{45}

Similarly, economic engagement with India’s most important security partner, Tajikistan, has been limited, with much focus on political collaboration, and Indian development cooperation. Total trade in 2014 stood at a paltry US$ 55 million, almost entirely driven by Indian exports of pharmaceuticals, textiles, garments, and meat

\textsuperscript{43} Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.
\textsuperscript{44} Sen Sarma, 2010. 52.
products.\footnote{Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.} Much of India’s economic engagement in Tajikistan has come cloaked in different purposes. Its rebuilding of the Ayni military base and the Farkhor hospital served ostensible strategic objectives (as explained), and its involvement in the reconstruction of the Tajik power sector, through its development partnerships and aid, serve its soft power agenda (explained later). The government though is prescient to the importance of trade and investment as a tool in Tajikistan, and has ensured that many of the same facilitative international agreements it has signed with other CARs, have been endorsed by Tajikistan as well.

Finally, Kyrgyzstan remains India’s smallest trading partner of the CARs. Overall trade between the two was US$ 34 million in 2014, on the back of Indian exports of pharmaceuticals, yarns, textiles and raw hides.\footnote{ibid.} Kyrgyzstan’s economy continues to be driven by agriculture, lacking the sophistication and innovation that the bigger CARs possess. This has limited Indian participation, but avenues do exist, especially in the fields of power production and weapons production and testing (as explained earlier). An Indo-Kyrgyz Joint Commission for Trade was setup in 1992, as were other trade facilitative regimes. The Indian government remains cognizant of the value Kyrgyzstan holds for India in a politico-security sense as a strategic partner, and perhaps more importantly in a normative sense, as the only real democracy in the region that has sought significant inspiration from India.\footnote{Author interview: Stobdan, Phunchok. Institute of Defence Studies & Analysis, New Delhi. 2015.} This fact is reflected in India’s development cooperation with Kyrgyzstan, which is the second largest recipient of Indian aid in the region (discussed in detail later). As the Embassy of India notes, Kyrgyzstan offers much prospect for economic engagement and there is renewed interest by Indian firms seeking opportunities in the mining, agro-food, construction, pharmaceutical, and IT sectors.\footnote{Embassy of India, Bishkek. 'India-Kyrgyzstan Bilateral Commercial Relations'. N.p., 2014. Web. 22 Dec. 2014.}

On evaluation, Indian economic engagement with the CARs is limited, and has been a consistent source of disappointment when compared to the potential opportunities that exist. The reasons are plentiful, but most scholars and economists agree that the
biggest issue remains a lack of connectivity and direct access. Without a border to Central Asia, India must seek transit rights for its trade from Pakistan, and then Afghanistan, if it seeks to access the CARs in the most direct manner. While the Afghans have been forthcoming, the Pakistanis have not, forcing India to use a circuitous sea route via the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, and then overland into Turkmenistan. Other routes that Indian trade currently takes are via China and Russia. These circuitous routes not only drive up transportation costs for the two-way flow of goods, but also encounter additional national transit tariffs and barriers, serving as psychological barriers as well. Other reasons include India’s reliance on private enterprise to be the flag-bearers of its economic diplomacy (like it has in Africa and South East Asia), combined with a lack of state-led investment abroad (unlike that of China’s). However, without governmental support and investment guarantees, many Indian firms remain apprehensive about entering closed Central Asian markets that require extensive collaboration with local elites who want their piece of the pie. There are signs though that these things are changing, with the Modi government’s focus on economic diplomacy and its willingness to support Indian firms abroad.50

If the reality of India’s economic engagement is so dismal, what then explains the optimism of Indian elites who continue to reinforce the notion of increased engagement with the CARs?51

One obvious answer according to Sachdeva and others is the “investment potential” of the region.52 They believe that this potential has been seen by the Indian government and has led to the requisite institutional framework that has been put in place to facilitate trade and investment. Sachdeva points to the existence of various bilateral Inter-Governmental Commissions (IGCs) between India and the CARs that focus on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, along with JWGs in areas like IT, Science and Technology, hydrocarbons and military-technical cooperation, as evidence of this.53 In addition to this the presence of private Indian

51 This was a recurring theme in interviews with both policymakers and elites in New Delhi.
52 Sachdeva, Gulshan. 2011. 132.
53 Sachdeva, Gulshan. 2010. 141.
enterprise (as highlighted above), which continues to look for more opportunities for investment, and the untapped trade potential as highlighted by several studies on Indian trade in the region, also serve as drivers of Indian optimism in the long-term.

According to a study conducted by the Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) in New Delhi there is “huge potential for enhancing trade and investment relations” between India and the CARs. The comprehensive study, which uses a Gravity Model to analyse trade potential between India and the CARs, finds that there exits a large amount of untapped trade potential within India and the CARs, largely due to the use of inefficient routes for transit and the security issues in Afghanistan. Using trade data from 1996 to 2010, the study finds that with the exception of Kazakhstan, where actual trade has broadly kept up with GDP increases in India and the CARs, trade potential has increased exponentially with other states (See Figure 15). In the figure below, the lower the graph lines (converging towards 1) the more they show that actual trade is close to potential trade. However, if the lines move higher (diverging away from 1), it indicates a difference between actual and potential trade.

Similarly, another study conducted by Central Asian scholars using an augmented Gravity Model found Indian trade to be way behind benchmarks predicted by the model in comparison to China, Russia and Turkey, indicating much room for improvement. To their surprise, India’s Trade Complementarity Index with the CARs were amongst the highest of all countries surveyed (higher than China and Russia), indicating a “high degree of similarities between the export from India and the import baskets of the CARs,” underlining the potential. Both the IEG and the

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55 The gravity model of trade in international economics estimates bilateral trade flows based on the economic sizes of and distance between two trading units or blocks. For more on the gravity model see, Bergeijk, Peter A. G. Van, and Steven Brakman. The Gravity Model In International Trade. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Print.
57 According to the World Bank, a trade complementarity (TC) index provides useful information on prospects for intraregional trade showing how well the structures of a country’s imports and exports match. For more see, World Bank WITS Online Help, 'Trade Indicators'. N.p., 2010. Web. 15 Jan. 2015.
58 Suvankulov, Farrukh, and Yunus Guc. 2012. 39.
Central Asian studies found many opportunities to increase trade and investment and their suggestions, along with those from interviewed elites, are discussed below.

Figure 15 – Trade potential Index between India and the CARs

Keeping in mind the existing transit issues, the IEG study suggests that the trade of “high value, low volume” commodities by air as a yet untested opportunity to facilitate engagement. With daily direct flights from Delhi to most of the CARs’ capitals, this could be used to supplement Indian trade in pharmaceuticals, meat products, coffee, tea and spices, and other less resource intensive commodities; in terms of imports to India, gold, silver and gemstones could make up the reverse flow. Another area of potential involves increased Indian FDI in the CARs. With Indian companies amongst the world’s largest, investment in Central Asia, facilitated by the Indian government’s economic diplomacy and guaranteed by its political relationships with Central Asian elites, would shore up Indian engagement in the region, reflecting similar initiatives in Africa and South East Asia. Additionally, as a number of interviewed elites in Delhi suggested, other opportunities for India exist in the “knowledge economy,” built on its expertise in the service sector. India’s extensive development cooperation and collaboration in the IT, innovation and medical sectors with the CARs (discussed in the next section), too, present

61 ibid.
opportunities for economic engagement, as they pave the way for India’s service exports. Additionally, the immense potential of cooperation in the tourism sector remains largely untapped, especially considering the existence of direct flights (as mentioned) and the governments’ agreement to facilitate visa regimes.

Finally, what remains unsaid and yet is most apparent in India’s courtship of the CARs is the potential the region offers for economic engagement with the greater Eurasian sphere. The CARs remain an attractive destination for economic investment themselves with their abundant natural resources and largely untapped markets, yet, as Indian scholars concede, what is equally important is the access the CARs provide in trade routes and markets, both in Europe and Northern Asia. This access to Europe, the world’s largest economic area, is premised on connectivity and transport links from South Asia via the CARs, and has been a focal point of Indian thinking on the potential of the CARs.

6.1.3 Connectivity, Corridors and Transportation Linkages

India’s attempts to create new connectivity and transportation links throughout Eurasia fit in with the New Silk Road narratives propounded by its elites. In the revival of ancient trade routes, it seeks to not only capitalize on wealth generation and trade but, as this work argues, it also seeks to create “highways of influence,” using its capabilities in the knowledge and innovation industries to build its legacy as a modern power. The stakes in Eurasia are high. India’s total trade with Europe, the CIS Region, the CARs, Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan was US$ 160 billion in 2014, and it is expected to rise to US$ 300 billion by 2025. Currently, nearly all this trade takes place through the high seas, with little use of land connectivity options (the shortest and quickest option available). Given the size of its trade with these regions, and the opportunities that will be afforded to India if it is able to spread the tentacles of its knowledge economy, it makes immense sense for India to actively engage in the creation of new infrastructure, transportation linkages and corridors that brings it closer to the Eurasian sphere. The additional benefits of prosperity generated by these investments and increased trade with South and Central Asia would contribute immensely to the relaxation of security tensions in AF-PAK and other restive regions,

63 Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Government of India. 2015.
given that almost all the routes envisaged would involve substantial infrastructure investments in Afghanistan and the north of Pakistan.

The seriousness of India’s intentions in this sphere is evinced by their reinforcement in official Indian narratives in the recent past. When explaining India’s CCA policy, in 2012, Minister of State for External Affairs, E Ahamed stated:

As for land connectivity, we have reactivated the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). We need to join our efforts to discuss ways to bridge the missing links in the Corridor at the earliest and also work on other connecting spurs along the route.64

Similarly his successor, VK Singh, speaking at the SCO meeting in Astana in December 2014 added:

As we are connected by a common vision and approach for rapid economic development of our region, we need to improve connectivity in the region to boost trade and investment in the region. India, on its part, has been exploring the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to integrate the region for better connectivity.65

According to Ajay Bisaria, Joint Secretary (Eurasia) at the MEA, India’s ambitions for greater connectivity in the region are premised around the INSTC project and the network of feeder corridors that are envisaged, serving as a communication artery between South Asia and Europe via the Eurasian heartland.66 India was one of the founder members of the INTSC project in St. Petersburg in September 2000, along with Russia and Iran. The project aims to connect the Indian Ocean to Northern Europe using a multi-modal combination of land and sea routes across the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, and much of Iran, Central Asia, the Caucuses and Russia.67 As of 2015, other members of the INSTC project include Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkey and Ukraine. The following paragraphs provide a description of the INTSC project and its related transport corridors and their relevance to India and Central Asia.

64 Ahamed, E. 'India’s ‘Connect Central Asia’ Policy'. 2012. Keynote address at the First India-Central Asia Dialogue, Bishkek
The primary route in the INSTC projects envisages a sea route from Mumbai to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, then across land to the Iranian Caspian port of Bandar-e-Anzali, then across the Caspian to Astrakhan in Russia, and finally across Russia and to Europe via rail. As scholar Meena Singh Roy notes, the route is more than a simple trade link, and, when operationalized, it will be one of the true arterial links that connects Europe and Asia’s myriad internal networks running vertically across the Eurasian landmass. She adds further that it will be the first viable surface transport connection between India and Eurasia, noting that studies have shown that the INSTC is projected to be 40% shorter and 30% cheaper, than current sea routes across the Suez Canal or through China. (See Figure 16)

Two other major routes have also been discussed: a westerly route through the Caucuses overland, from Bandar Abbas to Baku and then northward into Russia, with other feeder connections toward Armenia, Georgia and Turkey; and a Central Asian route through the CARs. Given that the second route is more germane to the topic of this work, it is now discussed in detail.

The Central Asian route aims to connect Finland with Iran, via Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan continuing on the seas from Bandar Abbas providing access to India. Premised upon the vast Soviet-era railroad infrastructure in place, parts of this corridor are already in service, and a vital link between Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran was inaugurated in December 2014. The link, which bypasses Uzbekistan and the eastern population centres of Kazakhstan, runs from Ozen in western Kazakhstan across Turkmenistan to Gogan in northern Iran. At 930 km, it is the shortest route between the three countries, and has already contributed significantly to boosting trade in the region. For India, it presents an additional opportunity to engage with the CARs, given its recent pledge to support the Chahbahar port project in southern Iran, as the new gateway for its access to the

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69 ibid.
70 Sen Sarma. 2010. 81.
71 ibid. 82.
region. With Iran committing to the creation of transport infrastructure from Chahbahar onward to Afghanistan and northern Iran, the route presents a viable and quicker alternative to Bandar Abbas, which is further away from India.

**Figure 16 – Primary INSTC Route**

The Chahbahar port lies in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province in the South East of the country. Located at the tip of the Indian Ocean at a short distance from Pakistan’s massive Gwadar port project, it is envisaged as the beginning of a key new route to sea access for the landlocked CARs and Afghanistan. As Iran’s only deep-sea port, its location also avoids the strategic pitfalls of Bandar Abbas and other ports on the Straits of Hormuz, and cannot be blocked easily. India, Iran and Afghanistan first discussed its use in 2003, with Iran committing to facilitate overland access to Chahbahar from the city of Zaranj on its eastern border with Afghanistan. In return, India, as part of its development package for Afghanistan, built the 215 km long Route 606, connecting Zaranj to the city of Delaram in 2009. The road leads on to

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75 ibid.
the garland shaped Highway A01, which drapes the country and links its major cities to the capital Kabul, feeding into border roads that link onward into Central Asia via Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{76} India’s recent US$ 85 million commitment to the development of the Chabahar port itself was seen as one new Indian PM Modi’s first significant strategic decisions, and according to the \textit{Hindustan Times}, “will also allow Indian goods into Central Asia using the existing north-south corridor to counter Beijing’s domination in the region….”\textsuperscript{77} Additionally Iranian and Uzbek plans to develop a rail link to Termze via Zahedan, Mashhad, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif will aid India’s engagement with the CARs.\textsuperscript{78} (See Figure 17)

Sachdeva also suggests that India’s involvement in the INSTC and its infrastructure building engagements in its extended neighbourhood should be seen through the prism of its involvement in two larger trans-Asian projects; the Trans-Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway.\textsuperscript{79} Both projects, which run under the aegis of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), are aimed at creating transcontinental networks between Asia and Europe. They fit in with India’s plans to use “infrastructure diplomacy” as a tool to achieve its objectives of greater economic and regional integration in its immediate and extended neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{80} With planned road and rail linkages that start from the south of India, across Pakistan and Afghanistan, through the CARs to China and Europe, the trans-Asian projects, when completed, will include corridors like the INSTC and other regional infrastructure projects, and can form the backbone of India’s economic engagement with Eurasia.

\textsuperscript{76} ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Gupta, Shishir. 'India All Set To Ink Deal To Develop Chabahar Port In Iran'. \textit{Hindustan Times} 2015. Web. 4 May 2015.
\textsuperscript{79} Sachdeva, Gulshan. 2011. 138.
Figure 17 – Gwadar vs Chahbahar

In summary, this section has provided commentary on the geo-economic conditions that facilitate trade, and the drivers of India’s economic engagement with the CARs. In doing so it offered a comparative overview of India’s bilateral economic engagement with the CARs, highlighting the yet untapped potential the region offers to India’s aspirations as a rising power. Finally, it explained India’s involvement in the development of transport corridors infrastructure through Central Asia and its extended neighbourhood in terms of its need to reach Eurasian markets as its expands its global ambitions, and, as a tool to promote regional economic integration. In the next section, the work attempts to provide an explanation of India’s rising power ambitions (the final determinant of its Central Asian strategy), and expel on how it plans to use its cultural and civilizational legacy and its soft power to achieve these.

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6.2 India’s Soft Power Play to Achieve its Rising Ambitions

As explained earlier, the fourth major determinant of India’s Central Asia strategy is its great power ambitions and the need for global recognition of its rise. These aspirations, and its complementary use of soft power to achieve these ambitions, form the subject of exploration in this section of the work. Scholar Harsh Pant, writing in his seminal 2010 paper, viewed Afghanistan as a “test case” for India’s status as a rising power.\(^{82}\) This work posits that India’s strategy in Central Asia is in some ways a continuation of the same thinking that drives India’s Afghan strategy, and its success or failure has similar implications for its emergence as a great power – a view that is also shared by elites in Delhi.\(^ {83}\) India’s use of traditional hard power in security and economic terms in Central Asia has already been discussed. Now the work attempts to understand its great power ambitions and its use of non-traditional (soft) influence to achieve this. The following sections identify India’s great power ambitions (vis-à-vis Central Asia), explain the basis of Indian soft power with relevance to the CARs, and present an overview of India’s bilateral soft power cooperation in the region.

6.2.1 Contextualizing India’s Great Power Ambitions and its Use of Alternative Influence in Central Asia

Before this work provides an explanation of India’s great power ambitions, it is important to relate this section to the questions posed in the introduction. India’s great power ambitions were identified as one of the four determinants of its Central Asia strategy, in addition to its geopolitical (security) concerns, its energy security concerns, and its need to economically engage with the CARs. As suggested earlier, while not explicitly mentioned in contemporary literature on the subject, it was soon apparent from interviews with policymaking elites in Delhi, that its strategy in Central Asia (or for that matter, its entire extended neighbourhood) was premised on its great power ambitions. In addition to this, its use of soft power in the region (especially after the elucidation of its CCA policy in 2012) also pointed to ambitions that went


\(^{83}\) Author interview: Behuria, Ashok. Institute of Defense Studies & Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi. 2014.
beyond simple politico-security cooperation, energy security guarantees, and trade, and fit into the narrative of an Indian grand strategy. While security and energy cooperation and economic linkages do indeed play an important role in any great power ambitions, as scholars Klaus Julian Voll and Kamakshi Nanda note, great power ambitions are increasingly about the institutionalization of status and global acceptance.\footnote{Voll, Klaus Julian, and Kamakshi Nanda. \textit{India - Great Power On Shaky Feet?}. New Delhi: Foundation for European Progressive Studies, 2012. 3. Print.} India is achieving this through its soft power in Central Asia, and this therefore points to a need to explore this as a separate determinant of its strategy. Simply put, Indian strategy in Central Asia might have been driven by security, energy and economic concerns even if it did not aspire to great power status; however, this work argues that India’s attempts to leverage its soft power should be construed as what differentiates India as a great power aspirant, rather than just a regional partner, and hence should be identified as a determinant for study.

India’s great power ambitions, as scholar David Brewster notes, date back to Jawaharlal Nehru and his nascent foreign policy goals for a newly independent India.\footnote{Brewster, David. \textit{India As An Asia Pacific Power}. Oxon: Routledge, 2012. 1. Print.} Noting that India’s elites have always believed in a destiny for the country as a great power, differentiating it from other regional powers like Indonesia and Brazil, Brewster insinuates that elites see India’s ambitions as “exceptionalist,” and suggest an alternative moral and civilizational understanding of great power ambitions in contrast to more traditional realist perspectives.\footnote{ibid. 2.} This “exceptionalist” framing of great power ambitions by Indian elites plays down conventional notions of power premised upon military strength and economic muscle, and instead postulates India’s abilities to lead the world based on its ancient Hindu and Buddhist civilizational roots, its status as the democratic multi-ethnic poster child of post-colonialism, its principled non-interventionist foreign policy, and its scientific and cultural temper – all tenets of its soft power.\footnote{Author interview: Mohan, Raja C. Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi. 2014.} Similarly, scholar John Ciorciari acknowledges India’s rise in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, driven by its economic expansions and suggests the following:

To India and other rising powers, the material might and political influence that define great powers are not simply teleological ends—they are means by which governments pursue their interests and foreign policy objectives. India
has sought to build capabilities and influence not simply for the sake of being
strong, but also to advance more specific national aims.  

Both Ciorciari and Brewster understand India’s great power ambitions as being
intricately linked to its own domestic imperatives. Basing his conclusions on speeches
from former PM Atal Behari Vajapayee and External Affairs Minister Yashwant
Sinha in 2004, Ciorciari suggests that India has four main goals that motivate its great
power aspirations. According to him the need for “policy autonomy, securing the state
from internal and external threats, raising the living standards of its vast population,
and winning diplomatic recognition as one of the world’s leading nations” drive
India’s rise as a great power.

Using Ciorciari’s framework for the comprehension of India’s great power ambitions,
it is important at this stage to relate the goals as expounded by the framework to
India’s agency in Central Asia, and the methods it uses to achieve them. The first
goal, according to Ciorciari, is India’s need to maintain policy autonomy. The policy
autonomy he refers to stems from the legacy of colonial India under the British, and
the need to ensure forever the ability of Indian foreign policy to act autonomously
without compromising the country’s independence in any manner. In terms of
Central Asia, this is seen in a number of practical ways, as India inculcates the same
policy autonomy in its strategy in the region. India’s policies in the region have been
largely self-directed without any serious alliances or partnerships with other powers.
Though ostensibly a close partner on defence and security issues of Russia, India has
taken an individual path in Central Asia, and at times has even been at loggerheads
with Russia in its strategic backyard. Additionally if one considers India’s
diplomatic rhetoric on its ties with Central Asia, references to the relationship are
always made in terms of a partnership where India seeks to assure the CARs that it

88 Ciorciari, John. 'India’s Approach To Great-Power Status'. The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs 35.1
89 ibid.
90 ibid
91 India and Russia were at loggerheads over Russia’s refusal allow India a strategic airbase in Ayni,
Tajikistan, after India had completed its reconstruction. For more see, Blank, Stephen. 'Russian-Indian
Row Over Tajik Base Suggests Moscow Caught In Diplomatic Vicious Cycle'. EurasiaNet.org. N.p.,
has a “benign” presence in the region, and the CARs are equal partners.\(^{92}\) This indicates India’s encouragement of the policy autonomy of the CARs, and as Bisaria at the MEA said, “India is not in the business of proselytizing,”\(^{93}\) indicating that although India was a democracy it was not going to be normative in its approach to the more authoritarian CARs.

Both the second and third goals as identified by Ciorcari are evidently seen within the objectives of Indian strategy in Central Asia. As explained earlier in this thesis, India and the CARs share tangible security threats and issues, and this forms the basis of a strong political and military relationship. India’s ability to deal with these threats successfully is a vital part of its great power ambitions. Similarly, it is through economic cooperation with the CARs and guaranteeing its energy security through their abundant resources, that India hopes to assuage and improve the living conditions of its vast population. Attempts to achieve these goals are exercised through more traditional hard power influences, as India must display its military might and its economic muscle, to compete with other powers who hope to do the same with the CARs.

Finally it is in the achievement of the fourth goal of being accepted internationally, as a claimant to global power, that India’s soft power come into great use in Central Asia. In its claim to great power status, India has tried to co-opt the CARs using a whole range of non-military and non-economic incentives. While these are discussed specifically in the next section, what is stressed here is what this need for global recognition constitutes in pragmatic terms. This work posits that this is done in two ways, first in a traditional manner where it presents its advantages to the CARs as a great power stressing its values (democracy, multi-ethnic, innovative etc.) and contrasts them directly with the other great powers in the region, China, Russia, and the US, indulging in a power game to make its point. And second, when it seeks support from the CARs for its greater global institutional aims, where India hopes to be a rule maker in the international system, given the link between institutionalization and power status (India’s request for support for a Permanent member’s seat the UN

\(^{92}\) See, Ahamed, E. 2012.
\(^{93}\) Author interview: Bisaria, Ajay. 2014.
Security Council, which all the CARs support, is a good example of this). Having contextualized India’s great power ambitions in relation to Central Asia, this work now turns to an explanation of India’s soft-power facets, and its cooperation with the CARs.

6.2.2 The Different Facets of India’s Soft Power and Central Asia

Before an exact overview of India’s soft power outreach is provided, it is germane to explain the concept of soft power and its use by India as a tool to achieve its objectives in Central Asia. The idea of soft power is associated with scholar Joseph Nye, who coined the term in 1990 writing to explain power relations in a post-Cold War world. To Nye, soft power is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment,” and this attraction can include “culture, values and foreign policies.”\footnote{Nye, Joseph S. \textit{Soft Power}. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. 11. Print.} In contrast hard or traditional power according to Nye is “the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will.”\footnote{Nye, Joseph S. 'Propaganda Isn't The Way: Soft Power'. \textit{International Herald Tribune} 2003. Web. 12 Oct. 2014.} These definitions have formed the basis for the understanding of Indian soft power, which has been the subject of much academic scholarship in recent times and is now discussed with relevance to Central Asia.\footnote{While the work sticks to a discussion of Indian soft power in Central Asia, for more on the agency of Indian soft power, See, Blarel, Nicolas. \textit{India’s Soft Power: From Potential To Reality?}. London: LSE Ideas Special Report, 2012. Print. India: The Next Superpower. or Mukherjee, Rohan. 'The False Promise Of India's Soft Power'. \textit{Geopolitics, History, and International Relations} 6.1 (2014): 44-62. Print.}

Shashi Tharoor former UN Undersecretary General and India’s Minister of State for External Affairs, writing in 2009, states that in a world, where the concept of “leadership” is now archaic, definitions of power need to be expanded to cognize the rise of great powers like India.\footnote{Tharoor, Shashi. 'Indian Strategic Power: 'Soft'”. \textit{Global Brief}. N.p., 2009. Web. 17 Aug. 2014.} To him, like Nye, soft power “emerges from the world’s perceptions of what that country is all about,” and is increasingly relevant to understanding the story of India’s rise, despite all its contradictions (and hard power failings).\footnote{ibid.} According to Tharoor, who answers the question what does India’s soft power potential mean:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \footnote{Nye, Joseph S. \textit{Soft Power}. New York: Public Affairs, 2004. 11. Print.}
\item \footnote{ibid.}
It means acknowledging that India’s claims to a significant leadership role in the world of the 21st century lie in the aspects and products of Indian society and culture that the world finds attractive. These assets may not directly persuade others to support India, but they go a long way toward enhancing India’s intangible standing in the world’s eyes.\(^\text{99}\)

Tharoor’s contentions are similar to Nye’s, and are predicated upon Nye’s assertion that the sources of soft power are the culture of a country (as a tool of attraction), its political values (or functioning system of governance), and foreign policy (that is legitimate and moral).\(^\text{100}\) These three elements are now explored in detail with relevance to India’s Central Asia strategy.

Tharoor considers India’s cultural heritage to be the biggest source of its soft power. Similarly scholar Nicholas Blarel suggests that importantly India “offers one of the most dynamic alternatives to Western cultural values,” making it a vital aspect of its soft power.\(^\text{101}\) India’s cultural soft power attributes are both historical and modern. According to author Daya Thussu, they stretch from Buddha to Bollywood,\(^\text{102}\) as India leverages both its ancient civilizational legacy, and its modern societal and technological progress to generate the soft power it exercises today. In terms of Central Asia, Indian cultural offerings date back to ancient times, as the land from which Buddhism emerged. Relatedly, the flow of information, goods, ideas, and people across the ancient Silk Route, saw the establishment of Indian trading communities, languages and architecture across the ancient cities of Central Asia.\(^\text{103}\) Generations later India’s influence on Arab and Islamic thought via Central Asia, in the fields of mathematics, astronomy and other sciences has also been observed, as was the influence of the Mughal empire in the region. The value of this cultural history as a soft power tool cannot be underestimated, and as proven earlier, serves as the ideological bedrock upon which both India and Central Asian elites base contemporary relations.

\(^\text{99}\) ibid.


\(^\text{101}\) Blarel, Nicolas. 2012. 29.


India’s modern cultural attributes too have great impact in Central Asia. These most prominently include music, Bollywood and India’s other exports in the field of popular culture. Bollywood made its impact in Central Asia in Soviet times. Starved of western popular culture, people in the Soviet Union were given access to popular culture from friendly states. Bollywood with its vast production of movies, and social and cultural themes that resonated with the native Central Asian populations, soon emerged as the entertainment of choice (as explained earlier). Indian music, telev novellas and soap operas with their escapist themes and fairy-tale endings continue to resonate with populations in the CARs, many of whom continue to struggle with economic and social hardship.104

Similarly to Indian popular culture, India’s diaspora serves as a major source of soft power abroad. With the success of qualified Indians abroad, the country’s image is boosted. While the number of Indians in the CARs remains low, due to the region’s seclusion in Soviet times, the newly facilitated visa regimes and the movement of skilled labour and entrepreneurs to Central Asia,105 indicates that it will not be long before the diaspora will play an active part in Indian soft power in the region. Closely related to the success of its diaspora, is India’s emerging ability as a technological, innovation, and education powerhouse, and the attraction this serves for the CARs. India’s successes in the IT, BPO, medical, training, television, and according to Thussu the revolution the country has witnessed “in the production, distribution and consumption of images and ideas” has ensured that “Indian media reaches all corners of the globe.”106 To this list of modern Indian soft power cultural attributes, another commentator adds yoga, Indian cuisine, Indian diplomats and intellectuals, sporting success and even spirituality.107

Nye views foreign policy as having soft power capability when others perceive it as being “legitimate or having moral authority.”108 Tharoor argues that this is indeed the

104 Confidential Author interview: Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy, New Delhi. 2014.
case for India, and that thanks to Nehru at the time of independence, India developed a world standing based on its civilizational attributes and moral standing. Scholar Uma Purshothaman concurs, and states that the impact of Indian foreign policy on its soft power can be traced even further back to the Indian National Congress and the effect it had on other colonial freedom movements in Africa and abroad (all though she does not mention it, a parallel can be drawn her to Indian revolutionary activity in Bukhara and the Khanates of Central Asia, as pointed out earlier). She adds that India’s foreign policy served as a moral rallying point for much of the third world, built around its trenchant criticism of the bipolar world order and its support of the NAM a legacy, which continues to have an impact today.

More recently, India’s foreign policy has been reflective of the country’s economic and security needs, but continues to maintain its moral and holistic traditions. With the economic liberalization in nineties, India’s foreign policy has been less normative and more pragmatic, but continues to hold onto a strong ethical tradition, which inspires moral authority. India’s immediate international recognition of the CARs in the early 90’s, the fact that it opened an embassy in Tashkent in March 1992, and it hosted a visit from President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan (his first to a state outside the CIS) later that year, is testament to this pragmatic moralism. Purshothaman also identifies the Gujral Doctrine, that emerged in the mid-nineties as an example of this, explaining that through the nineties India offered a more selfless approach to its neighbourhood, where it did not seek reciprocity, and instead had a bigger responsibility to its smaller neighbours. The doctrine also expounded the external neighbourhood concept, which shaped India’s interactions with the newly formed CARs. Its development cooperation and aid (explained in the next section) support of the poorer CARs of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan should be seen in this light.

110 Purshothaman, Uma. 2010. 7.
111 On a negative note, a mention must be made here of Indian foreign policy, and its support for (or lack of criticism of) the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the early eighties. The link between Afghanistan and the CARs has a already been explained – and in some ways India’s contemporary efforts in Afghanistan and the broader region, are hampered by the haunting spectre of its past failure to support the Afghans when needed. For more on this, See, Yadav, Vikash, and Conrad Barwa. 'Relational Control: India's Grand Strategy In Afghanistan And Pakistan'. India Review 10.2 (2011): 93-125. Web.
112 Purshothaman, Uma. 2010. 8.
Similarly the Look North and the CCA policies towards Central Asia should be viewed as foreign policy stratagems that have a moral legitimacy and indeed do contribute to Indian soft power in Central Asia. The CCA policy was especially focussed on connectivity, technology and innovation in the fields of medicine, education and tourism, highlighting its emphasis on soft rather than hard power. As scholar Joshua Kucera notes, that even in the field of defence cooperation with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Indian focus on training and innovation should be seen as Indian soft power in action, especially after Russia’s rebuke to its presence in the region. Reading between the lines, it is easy to draw the connection between the legitimate moral authority of Indian soft power, and Tajik and Kyrgyz acquiescence to India’s request for cooperation in spite of Russian objections. As a senior Central Asian diplomat confirmed in an interview in Delhi:

Indian soft power is not in doubt amongst the people of Central Asia. Its cultural capital and policies in the region are viewed positively. India has always been a friendly and respectful partner of our nations, what is unfortunately missing is its ability to match this with funds.

According to Purshothaman, Afghanistan remains India’s most successful recent foreign policy success, which has contributed to enhancing its soft power. India’s on-going contribution to the Afghan redevelopment process should also be seen in terms of its overall policies in the South and Central Asia regions, and contributing immensely to its soft power clout. As the largest non-western bilateral donor with US$ 2 billion in development cooperation and aid, India’s contribution has been without a military presence on the ground focussed entirely on objectives that support the civilian population – infrastructure development, healthcare, communication, education and community development. According to M. Ashraf Haidari, the Deputy Afghan Ambassador in Delhi, this has earned India an immense amount of goodwill from the Afghan people, and has shown the CARs that India is a long-term partner committed to staying its ground in the future.

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114 Confidential Author interview: Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy, New Delhi. 2014.
115 Purshothaman, Uma. 2010. 9.
Nye traces the final source of a country’s soft power to its political values (and its functional model of governance) and “whether it lives up to them at home and abroad.” As a successful multi-ethnic democracy that emerged from the dark shadows of colonialism, India’s political value system has proven to be sustainable in an extended region where authoritarianism and sham democracy is the norm. Blarel suggests that its “unprecedented” democratic record is indeed a strong source of soft power, adding that, “the new international consensus following the Cold War around democracy, human rights and market-oriented economic reforms has reinforced the appeal of India’s political achievement.” On the subject of Indian values as soft power, Tharoor delves into a skilful exploration of the subject noting, that the free press, respect for human rights, civil society debates and regular elections contribute to India’s standing abroad.

Blarel adds that, in India’s democratic, secular and federal governance structure constitutes a codified dispute redressal mechanism, through which the needs and ambitions of various ethno-linguistic and religious minorities are adjudicated. This work takes the line that in a broader pan-Asian region where states are often presented the choice of Western liberal democracy, or the alternative of a more authoritarian line reminiscent of the successes of Russia and China, India’s model of governance has currency as a complementary institutional model that is more reflective or cultural and regional biases.

India though has never outwardly promoted itself as a model for the CARs to emulate; yet much of its official discourse has hinted to its potential as an example for the CARs. It was quick to jump on the bandwagon of countries seeking agency in Central Asia in the nineties, willing to offer its experience in nation and state building to the nascent CARs with similar multi-ethnic constituencies. Yet when regional security and stability needs triumphed those of democracy and open societies, it did not hesitate to establish long-lasting links with the Central Asian dictatorships that emerged, playing up the fact that it was not in the democracy promotion game. The CCA policy is a good example of this. E Ahamed in his speech stated:

118 Nye, Joseph S. 2006.
120 Tharoor, Shashi. 2009.
121 Blarel, Nicolas. 2012. 30.
122 This duality of Indian policy is exploited as one of the major faults of Indian policy in the region in detail in the next chapter. According to certain scholars India arouses the suspicions of the
It is also important to remember that India has never been prescriptive in its political approach. We represent our unique liberal democratic values, particularly in the Asian context. We believe in a nation-building model based on participatory democracy, economic growth, building civil societies, pluralistic structures, ethno-religious harmony and the rule of law.\(^\text{123}\)

Yet as many Indian and international commentators argue, India’s political system whether presented or not as a model enjoys immense potential as a way forward that the CARs can emulate in the future. This is apparent in the case Kyrgyzstan more so than any of the CARs given its multiparty parliamentary political system, and multi-ethnic societal makeup. As former Ambassador to Bishkek, Phunchok Stobdan attests, India’s model of democracy is potentially an attractive way forward for Kyrgyzstan, a country that is in the thick of great power games, given its strategic location on the Chinese border, and the fact that both Russia and US have military bases on the ground, and use these bases to propagate their own political agendas.\(^\text{124}\)

Having explained the facets of Indian soft power and its effectiveness in Central Asia, the work now turns to an explanation of the various devices Indian soft power employs in the region, and an overview of the soft power cooperation Indian has undertaken with the CARs.

### 6.2.3 Soft Power Tools and Indian Development Assistance in Central Asia

While India’s expansive culture maybe the source of its soft power across the world, the tools and devices it employs in Central Asia, are largely elements of its foreign policies in the region. This is not to say that Indian culture and its political system do not have a role in the furthering of its soft power agenda. This work takes the position that India’s soft power agenda though executed through its foreign policies, developmental cooperation and technological expertise rides on the back of the strong cultural and civilizational values it represents, hence presenting a more “benign” face, which is acceptable to the authoritarian regimes in the CARs. As commentator Ilan Greenberg notes, “Central Asia provides multi-ethnic and democratic India, still

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\(^\text{123}\) Ahamed, E. 2012.

\(^\text{124}\) Author interview: Stobdan, Phunchok. Institute of Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), New Delhi. 2014.
reticent to promote itself as a model to anyone, a platform on which India can further build out its own legitimate economic, military and geopolitical interests.\textsuperscript{125} In return he states India offers the CARs an opportunity to create a multi-vectored foreign policy, and perhaps more importantly the economic knowhow and innovation to transform their economies away from energy and agriculture, given its recent economic track record.\textsuperscript{126} Both these aspects represent the potential of Indian soft power in the region, and are supportive of the line this work takes.

India’s most obvious soft power tool is the development cooperation policy that it has employed successfully across the CARs since the early nineties. Largely focussed on the three poorest states Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, its assistance serves strategic purposes as well and is aimed at cementing security cooperation and preventing radicalism in the region. As scholars Sumit Ganguly and Rani Mullen note:

India’s assistance effort is clearly enmeshed into a larger set of foreign-policy goals: ensuring secure sources of energy for an expanding economy, opening markets for India’s increasingly export-oriented industrial and service sectors, and bolstering geostrategic ties with key neighbours.\textsuperscript{127}

The Indian Development Cooperation Research (IDCR) initiative identifies two types of Indian developmental cooperation – assistance (or aid) and scientific/technological training activities, that have taken place in Central Asia since 1992.\textsuperscript{128} Assistance programs have consisted of Lines of Credit (LOCs) and grants; its training activities have taken place under the aegis of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme. IDCR notes that LOCs were extended to the CARs from the early nineties till 2004, focussing on development and manufacturing projects with a total disbursement of approximately US$ 50 million.\textsuperscript{129} According to the MEA, Uzbekistan received three LOCs since 1993 each valued at US$ 10 million – to finance the import of Indian electronics and the creation of JVs, and one LOC remains unused.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{125} Greenberg, Ilan. 2013.
\textsuperscript{126} ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} Shivkumar, Hemant et al. 2014.
\textsuperscript{129} ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ministry of External Affairs, India. 'India-Uzbekistan Relations'. N.p., 2012. Web. 9 Nov. 2014.
Similarly Turkmenistan received two LOCs, the first for US$ 10 million in 1997 for food and wool processing units, and the second worth US$ 5 million and was used to setup a pharmaceutical plant in 1998.\textsuperscript{131} Both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also received LOCs in 1995 worth US$ 5 million, which were used to setup factories for the manufacture of pharmaceutical products amongst other things.\textsuperscript{132} Finally as the IDCR notes, in 2004, the MEA switched its focus to grants and other forms of development cooperation and very limited further LOCs were issued by the EXIM, which assumed responsibility for the program.\textsuperscript{133} (See Figure 18)

With the change of focus to grants as the preferred form of developmental assistance, Tajikistan emerged as the major recipient of Indian largesse in the region post 2004. IDCR estimates that Tajikistan received a total of US$ 27 million in the period from 2007 to 2013, focussed on the energy sector (the reconstruction of the Varzob-1 Hydropower plant, as discussed earlier), capacity building and skill development and humanitarian assistance for famines.\textsuperscript{134} Kyrgyzstan was the second largest recipient with US$ 6 million in aid focussed on the creation of potato processing factories and the creation of IT centres across the country.\textsuperscript{135} Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan too received funds of a total worth of US$ 3.5 million from India in this period aimed at development of entrepreneurial activities, the computerization of post offices, and the creation of IT centres for skill development.\textsuperscript{136} (See Figure 19)

Apart from its aid and grants, Indian development cooperation is seen in action through its ITEC programme, which it operates at bilaterally with all the CARs. The ITEC programme was setup in 1964, and is focussed on technical and economic cooperation, as was one of the earliest forms of aid it provided as an international actor. The MEA, which runs the programme, identifies the following components of

\textsuperscript{131} Shivkumar, Hemant et al. 2014.
\textsuperscript{132} ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} ibid.
ITEC, Training (Civilian & Defence), Projects and Feasibility Studies, Study Tours, Deputation of Indian Experts Abroad, Gifts on Request and Disaster Relief.\textsuperscript{137}

**Figure 18 – Indian Budgetary Loans and Lines of Credit extended to the CAR’s between 1990-2013\textsuperscript{138}**

**Figure 19 – Percentage Distribution of Indian Grants to the CARs 2008-2013\textsuperscript{139}**


\textsuperscript{138} Source Image: ibid

\textsuperscript{139} Source Data: ibid
Each year the MEA provides a certain number of slots for applicants from the CARs to apply for ITEC training in India, with the long-term objective of capacity building in the region. Currently Tajikistan, India’s key security partner and Uzbekistan, with the largest population, are granted 150 slots annually, the most in the region. According to the MEA, ITEC cooperation with Tajikistan started in 1993 and till January 2013 and 728 training opportunities had been provided for Tajik students. Similarly with Uzbekistan, India provides training in IT, English, management skills; journalism, diplomacy and banking with over 1500 Uzbeks have availed of opportunities in India since 1993. Kyrgyzstan receives 60 slots annually, with a focus on human resource development, and over 700 Kyrgyz students have been trained since 1992. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan receive 55 and 35 slots respectively each year. Training is focussed on technical and IT skills with over 1000 recipients from both countries since 1992.

Another recent endeavour by the Indian government to exercise its soft power in Central Asia has been to attempt to showcase India’s prowess in the knowledge, healthcare and innovation sectors. Though driven by the government, these initiatives also involve private Indian businesses, and leverage India’s scientific advancement and large pool of English-speaking technical graduates. Announced as part of the CCA policy in 2012, on the back of the execution of a similar initiative in Africa, India offered to build a pan-Central Asian e-network focussed on the delivery of telemedicine and tele-education with a hub in India, and spokes in each of the CARs. Work on the e-network continues according to schedule as evidenced by the planned establishment of an IT Centre of Excellence in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and recent meetings in 2014 between the Uzbek Ministry of Education, and the directors of India’s largest hospital chain, the Apollo group to discuss the role out of telemedicine services. Other commitments announces as part of the CCA policy in these fields include, the setting up of a Central Asian University in Bishkek focussed on...
on education in IT, management, philosophy and languages, and the creation of civil and military hospitals and field clinics across the region.\textsuperscript{145}

Finally it is through the exercise of cultural diplomacy does the Indian government capitalize on India’s cultural and civilizational legacy, and put its soft power to great influence in Central Asia. To this effect the governments uses the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) to enact various programs and grants in the region. One of the most prominent of these has been the establishment of an India Chair at University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent since 1996. In Uzbekistan, other major cultural endeavours include the establishment of the Lal Bahadur Shastri Indian Cultural Centre under the aegis of the ICCR, the support of Hindi language radio programming, Kathak and yoga classes, and cooperation in the film and television sectors, given the mass appeal of Indian popular culture in the region.\textsuperscript{146} In Kazakhstan too, the Indian Cultural Centre conducts classes in Yoga, Hindi and Kathak dancing and has afforded over 160 Kazakhs students the opportunity to study in India.\textsuperscript{147} Similarly in Kyrgyzstan, ICCR supported the creation of a Centre for Indian Studies at Osh State University in 1997, and more recently an India Study Centre at the National Library in Bishkek in 2014, along with support for various dance workshops.\textsuperscript{148} Similar initiatives continue through Indian embassies in Dushanbe and Ashgabat.

In summary, this section has shown the link between India’s great power aspirations and its consequent use of soft power as one of the major drivers of its Central Asia strategy with the aim of ensuring international recognition for India as a leading player in the global system. This work argues that India therefore sees its success or failure in Central Asia in this light and it is this understanding that should drive any interpretation of Indian strategy in the region. Soft power thus emerges as a key to India achieving its great power ambitions in Central Asia and being recognized.

\textsuperscript{145} Ahamed, E. 2012.
\textsuperscript{146} Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India. 'India-Uzbekistan Relations'. 2012.
6.3 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has provided an explanation of the final two determinants that shape Indian strategy in Central Asia – India’s imperative to trade and seek greater connectivity, and India’s need for global recognition of its great power ambitions. In its exploration of India’s economic imperatives to trade with Central Asia, the chapter highlights the macroeconomic conditions in place that facilitate trade between India and the CARs, and explain the motivations of both partners to do so. India’s burgeoning economy and the movement of its trade flows away from the West toward its extended neighbourhood has contributed to the increase in trade between India and Central Asia. Similarly the CARs attempts to restructure their economies away from energy exports, contribute to their interest in India as an economic partner. The benefits of increased trade with the CARs are tangible, and given the increasing prominence of Indian multinational companies this is an important driver of Indian interest in the region. There is yet another motivation for India to trade with Central Asia – the potential benefit such trade if conducted overland through Afghanistan and Pakistan can bring to a broader region that is in search of stability and prosperity.

Potential and motivation cannot belie the fact that overall Indian trade with Central Asia is minimal and currently only amounts to US$ 1.2 billion annually, a pittance when compared with Chinese trade that amounts to over US$ 50 billion in the region. What then explains the tremendous positivity that interviewed Indian elites espoused about trade and economic relations with Central Asia? As this work has shown, this is due to two things. First, as one commentator has deemed it, is the incredible “investment potential” of the region. This is based on the fact that since actual trade figures are so low, it seems inevitable that there will be manifold growth in overall trade as India is able to approach the CARs in more a direct manner, with the creation of new trade routes. And second, is the fact that Central Asia is not in fact seen only a destination for Indian economic engagement, instead it is seen as a bridge to the markets of greater Eurasia, as newer connectivity and infrastructure links are created. India’s support of the INSTC and various other transport infrastructure projects including the Chahbahar port in Iran, should be seen in this light, as India seeks more efficient access to the CARs and greater overland connectivity to Europe and Russia,
all the while hoping that the benefits of greater regional economic integration can stabilize the broader South and Central Asian regions.

The work approaches India’s great power ambitions and its arising need for recognition of these as the final determinant its strategy in Central Asia. This is largely achieved through it soft power in the region. India’s rising ambitions and the need for international recognition of these has been the subject of much scholarly solipsism in the recent past. This work posits that India’s failure or success in Central Asia will go a long way in cementing its great power status and the consequent recognition of its aspirations by other, and hence Indian motivations in Central Asia should also be seen in this light. Given that its hard power abilities in Central Asia are limited in the economic and politico-security fields, its great power ambitions are therefore largely serviced by its soft power in the region. This soft power, which rides on the back of its cultural and civilization legacy, is also derived from its foreign policies and the political values it espouses in the region. Its development aid, technical cooperation, innovation and knowledge sharing and cultural diplomacy are all employed as devices of its soft power, as it attempts to level the playing field against other players in Central Asia.

Having explained the final two determinants of Indian strategy in Central Asia, the next logical step would be to understand Indian agency in comparison to that of other powers in the region, if the work is to be able to provide an evaluation of Indian strategy in Central Asia. This is done in the last chapter which explores India’s interplay with the international system and other major powers in the region, before appraising Indian agency in the region.
7. India’s Interplay with the International System and Understanding India’s Limited Success in Central Asia

This dissertation, so far, has framed Indian motivations and agency within a geopolitical and grand strategic reading that is reflective of its great power ambitions. Having provided a deep exploration of Indian strategy in Central Asia premised on the dynamics of its broader security, energy, trade and connectivity concerns in the previous chapters, the work now turns to an evaluation of the very strategy this work has sought to comprehend. While not an express objective of the study, the information obtained from the research provides a valuable base to measure the success of Indian strategy in the region so far, and aids in drawing conclusions. This ancillary objective assumes significance, because by all measures and counts, India has achieved limited success with its strategy in the region,¹ and if this study is to have any practical implications, an evaluation and understanding of faults, and suggestions for the way forward are necessary.

As scholar David Baldwin notes, the literature and scholarship on the evaluation of foreign policies is “characterised by analytical and conceptual anarchy.”² He adds that, in order to effectively evaluate a foreign policy or strategy, it is important to have a complete grasp of the relevant knowledge, and develop a set of concepts and analytical criteria that permits a comparative comparison of policies.³ Using this as a base, this work develops its own measurement criteria and evaluates Indian strategy in iterative steps in the next parts of this chapter. First, it provides commentary on India’s interaction with the two dominant powers in Central Asia, namely, Russia and China. In doing so, it both compares India’s agency with the two powers in Central Asia and explains India’s competition and cooperation with them in the region. It also does this within a multilateral perspective and covers Indian involvement in the SCO and the EEU – regional organisations that have emerged as fora for interaction between external powers and the Central Asian states. Second, it evaluates Indian

³ ibid
achievements in Central Asia on the basis of the stated (and unstated) objectives that India has attempted to achieve through its own policies in the region, and explains the reasons for their minimal success.

7.1 India, Russia, and China in Central Asia

This part of the chapter explores India’s interplay with Russia and China in bilateral and multilateral terms within the milieu of Central Asia’s geopolitical environment. The section provides commentary on India’s cooperation; competition (and conflict) with these “status-quo” powers in the region, and compares India’s presence to theirs. In addition, it focuses on India’s involvement in organisations like the Russian-led EEU and the Chinese-led SCO.

7.1.1 India and Russia in Central Asia – All-Weather Friends or Transactional Partners

In explaining India’s interactions with Russia in Central Asia, this section will seek to shed light on the following: First, an explanation of the broader significance of India’s relationship with Russia beyond Central Asia; second; Russia’s interests in Central Asia; third, Indian and Russian interplay in Central Asia and a comparison between the agency of the two; and, fourth, potential areas of divergence and cooperation between the two in the region.

The durability of Indian ties to Russia date back to the bonhomie that India and the Soviet Union enjoyed during the Cold War years. As scholar Ramesh Thakur notes, warm relations with the Soviet Union were a “constant in Indian foreign policy.”


the Soviet regime, served as intercessor with the West, and provided support for major facets of Soviet diplomacy.\(^6\) The signing of the twenty-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in 1971\(^7\) cemented relations between the two, which, according to scholar Rajan Menon, were centred around security policy and economic development.\(^8\) In terms of security policy, both parties saw each other as counterweights in an alliance against a US – China rapprochement, which had been brokered by Pakistan. And, in the words of scholar BM Jain, the 1971 treaty acted as a “psychological deterrent against direct military involvement by China and/or the United States on behalf of Pakistan.”\(^9\) In addition, the Soviets played a vital security role as the largest suppliers of Indian military hardware. In economic and political terms, India’s socialist orientation and non-aligned status played an important ideological role in the binding of the two partners,\(^10\) and would come to the Soviet’s aid internationally following the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

The reworking of Soviet policy toward India in the Gorbachev years, which was later echoed within a nascent independent Russian foreign policy, caused much disconcertion in India in the early nineties. As Thakur notes, in July 1990, there was an imminent sense of “the end of an era” in Delhi, as Indian elites struggled to comprehend the new dynamics of Russian foreign policy in a unipolar world.\(^11\) An increasingly inward looking Russia aimed to reduce its involvement in the third-world as it struggled to deal with an economic liberalisation process centred upon shock therapy, voucher privatisation, democratic reform and integration into the capitalist world economy. The resulting “de-ideologisation” of its foreign policy,\(^12\) and loss of its economic primacy in the Yeltsin years ended the security and economic dimensions of the Indo-Soviet propinquity, with ties being limited to military supplies for the rest of the nineties. It was not until the new millennium and the arrival of

\(^6\) ibid. 166.
\(^8\) Menon, Rajan. 'India And The Soviet Union: A New Stage Of Relations?'. *Asian Survey* 18.7 (1978): 733. Print.
\(^9\) Jain, B.M. 'India And Russia: Reassessing The Time-Tested Ties'. *Pacific Affairs* 76.3 (2003): 376. Print.
\(^10\) ibid. 377.
\(^12\) Singh, Anita Inder. 'India's Relations With Russia And Central Asia'. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 71.1 (1995): 72. Print.
Vladimir Putin as President of Russia that ties began to recover. With the signing of the Strategic Partnership agreement in 2000, and the intensified focus on greater defence collaboration, nuclear technology exchanges and trade, both countries re-emerged from their inward orientations and intensified cooperation.¹³

Today, almost a decade and a half later, India and Russia face many of the same questions that affected their relations in the nineties, as it seems things have gone full circle. While defence cooperation continues and India remains the largest buyer of Russian military hardware, strategic ties continue to be in a limbo. With India’s increasing diversification of its arms imports away from older Russian technology (and toward newer American and Israeli technology), and its own growing great-power ambitions, ties have naturally acquired a new dynamic.¹⁴ Similarly, Russia’s growing proximity to China and its recent willingness to talk to Pakistan, has not been music to Indian ears.¹⁵ However, if President Putin’s visit to Delhi in December 2014 is anything to go by, the measured success the visit enjoyed, in terms of deals signed, as well as the far-ranging discussions that took place, may still augur a bright future for India and Russia ties, especially on issues like the BRICs, Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Russian influence in Central Asia waned in a similar manner to its ties to India in the nineties under President Yeltsin: “shifting tact” and often “appearing rudderless.”¹⁶ Scholar Roy Allison adds that, under Yeltsin, Russian policy was seen as passive or reactive instead of proactive,¹⁷ and was seen as the cause for its strategic retreat from the region. This was visible from several “jolts” to Russian foreign policy in the region. The first concerned Russia’s failure to quell the civil unrest in Tajikistan for much of the nineties, as Tajik elites fought internecine clan wars for control of the country. This inability to quell unrest in its strategic backyard raised fears for Russia’s own internal stability, especially when the ugly face of Islamic radicalism reared its

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¹⁵ ibid.
¹⁶ Allison, Roy. 'Strategic Reassertion In Russia's Central Asia Policy'. International Affairs 80.2 (2004): 281. Print.
¹⁷ ibid.
head across the Caucuses, and Russia confronted other “jolts,” such as a rebellion in Chechnya and the Taliban’s rise to power in Afghanistan. Putin, who replaced an ailing Yeltsin as president in 2000, was quick to spot this, and realised that a reassertion of Russian strength in Central Asia and the Caucuses was necessary.

Russia embarked on a process of “internal balancing” and of “regaining a hold on Central Asia and the former Soviet republics,”18 as Putin presided over “a more proactive, hard-headed and effective Russian policy” in the region.19 Additionally, Putin’s urge to reassert Russian primacy coincided with the game-changing events of 9/11 and the subsequent NATO invasion of Afghanistan, which radically altered the geopolitical milieu of the broader Central Asian region. According to Allison, the events of 9/11 dramatically changed Russian strategic thinking on Central Asia. He notes that after 9/11, Russian policy in the region was framed within a domestic political context to reduce Russian strategic displacement from the region, as the US and NATO significantly increased their presence.20 However, as scholar Dmitri Trenin notes, faced with little choice over the matter, Putin cooperated with the West to secure the removal of the Taliban, what it viewed as one its major objectives in region.21

In addition to addressing the threat posed by radical Islam, Russian scholar Alexander Lukin identifies several other Russian interests and objectives in Central Asia, which are now discussed.22 First, Russia’s fears of non-traditional security threats like terror and drug trafficking, which fuel separatism and extremism; Second, Russia’s economic interest in the region, which is closely linked to its historic control of energy pipelines and outlets of Central Asian hydrocarbon reserves; Third, Russia’s role as a cultural and ideological monolith, given that Russian continues to be the lingua franca of the region and that significant Russian minority in many of the CARs

19 Allison, Roy. 2004. 277
20 ibid.
continues to exist. This holds special significance today considering Russian action in Ukraine in 2014, and its annexation of Crimea, to secure the interest of its diaspora; Fourth and finally, Russia’s interest in ensuring political stability in the region (read as continuation of authoritarian regimes in the CARs), again a point of interest given the chaos in the Middle East following the Arab Spring of 2011. In addition to Lukin’s perspective, scholar Charles Ziegler suggests that, at an overarching level, Russian interests in Central Asia are guided by its need to display its great-power status in its own backyard, and ensure that it can fend off competition from China, the US, the EU and other powers. Its attempts to further the EEU project should be seen in this light. However, as he notes, Russia has “few levers beyond energy ties (which are gradually eroding), migrant labour, Russian compatriots, and limited military forces” to try and achieve this.

Russia and India have historically seen eye-to-eye on issues concerning Central Asia. As scholar Anita Inder Singh notes, their cooperation on the unravelling situation in the CARs dates back to 1992, and their collaboration on the Tajik civil war. She adds that India and Russia discussed the issue at three separate ministerial meetings that took place between 1992 and 1994. Their shared fear of Islamic radicalism and of Pakistan’s increasing influence in the region also saw them work together on the sticky issue of Afghanistan, as they backed Ahmed Shah Masood and the Panjshir Tajik-led Northern Alliance. The fact that the Northern Alliance eventually lost out to the Pakistan-backed Taliban in 1996 only increased their fear of spreading Islamic radicalism, and, as a former MEA diplomat confirmed, led to covert cooperation between India and Russia in the late nineties in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. This “convergence of interests” between India and Russia in Central Asia continued after 9/11, as scholar Meena Singh Roy notes. Writing in 2003, she identified political stability, strategic cooperation against terror, energy security, increased trade with the

24 ibid. 612.
26 Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi. 2014. in person
CARS and greater regional cooperation as the commonalities in their interests.\textsuperscript{28} Similarly, as scholar Emilian Kavalski notes, Indian commentators often emphasise these convergences and argue that, given past ties, a lack of common border (and therefore no arising disputes), and a need to balance China and the West, India and Russia are natural allies in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{29}

Given these “convergences of interests,” the lack of actual cooperation between India and Russia in Central Asia in the recent past is surprising. As the situation in Afghanistan has abated with the relative success of the West-led reconstruction process, so has cooperation between India and Russia in the country. Apart from reports and coverage about joint discussions and official statements on security and terror-related issues in the broader Central Asian region, there is little public evidence that India and Russia are cooperating on the ground in Central Asia on other strategic, economic or cultural issues. On the contrary, some reports suggest that Russia played a spoiler role in India’s attempts to secure its first international airbase in Ayni, Tajikistan after India spent an estimated US$ 70 million on its reconstruction after 2012.\textsuperscript{30} The reasons for this continue to be the source of much speculation, but are also attributed to the cooling of Indo-Russian ties over the last decade, and Russia’s growing suspicion of Indian propinquity to the US.

Another possible reason for Russia and India’s limited engagement in Central Asia in the past, despite the previous convergence of interests, is the disparity between the extent of Indian and Russian involvement in the region. Russia is still the key net security provider of the region as the initiator of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO),\textsuperscript{31} and continues to maintain military bases or a troop presence in all of the CARs. In contrast, India has limited security cooperation with the CARs on issues that concern terror and Islamic radicalism and cannot boast of military presence in the region. Similarly, in economic and energy terms, India’s presence is

\textsuperscript{28} ibid.


miniscule compared to that of Russia’s. Russian bilateral trade with Central Asia was close to US$ 35 billion in 2013, which was sixty times India’s, at approximately US$ 750 million. Russia continues to be the major outlet for Central Asia energy, with some estimates suggesting that it accounts for 75% of Central Asian energy exports. India, while actively seeking diversification from the region, directly imports hardly any hydrocarbons from Central Asia (preferring swap deals and investments in fields), and only a limited amount of uranium. Also, culturally while a strong argument can be made for Indian cultural and civilizational influence, it can hardly compete with Russian culture and language, which remains dominant amongst the elites of the region.

Finally, Kavalski suggests that another reason for limited Indo-Russian cooperation in Central Asia could be what he identifies as “divergences of interest” between the two. Again based on observations from other Indian commentators, he suggests that perhaps the “convergences” identified are less valid, given the changing dynamics of Indo-Russian ties. Moscow’s perceived weakness in Central Asia and its fading glory, combined with the overall cooling of Indo-Russian ties due to the uncertainty of Russian foreign policy, has seen Delhi shy away from working with Moscow as part of its Look North policy. In addition to this, he adds, the movement away from bilateralism in the joint relationship to multilateralism, and the increasing role of China in the region has furthered divergences between the two. As suggested earlier, India’s mounting propinquity to the United States, combined with the West’s increasing isolationism of Russia, is driving a closer bond between Russia and China. While Russia continues to be weary of China in Central Asia, it cannot afford to antagonise it, given the larger stakes, by openly allying with India in Central Asia – as some analysts have previously suggested. Finally, Kavalski suggests that even in economic and energy terms, Russia may not be interested in a greater Indian role in Central Asia, since it seeks to maintain the dependence of the CARs on its energy pipelines as an exit route for their resources.

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34 ibid.128.
35 ibid. 131.
Irrespective of the convergences and divergences of interests, which remain a subject of much speculation for commentators, Indian elites across the spectrum see Russia as playing a key role in India’s current and future Central Asian strategy. This is evident both from the interviews conducted and the official rhetoric on the subject. PM Manmohan Singh, speaking in Moscow in 2013 stated, “As India revitalizes its historic links with Central Asia, we look forward to working more closely with Russia in the region.” 36 He added that the coordination of policies in this shared neighbourhood on issues of combatting terror and ensuring stability had served both partners well and should be closely pursued in the future. Interviewed elites in Delhi and Mumbai shared the same sentiment. Scholar and former Ambassador PS Stobdan stated in an interview that India had not done enough to secure joint Russian economic collaboration, and that it would serve as a vital cog in the future for India in Central Asia.37 Scholar Katherine Foshko, writing in a 2012 report on India-Central Asia ties for Gateway House, an influential Mumbai think-tank, identifies cooperation with Russia as the best way forward for India in the region. She highlights regional commercial cooperation through the EEU, collaboration on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, and private-sector cooperation on economic development in the fields IT, aerospace, education, and infrastructure development, as avenues to further Indo-Russian ties in Central Asia.38 Her views were echoed by the director of the institution, Ambassador Neelam Deo, who in a recent interview suggested that this was still India’s best bet in the region.39

7.1.2 India, the CARs and the Eurasian Economic Union

Having covered India’s interplay with Russia in Central Asia, this section explains Indian involvement with the Russia-led EEU in the context of its relationship with the CARs.

39 Author interview: Deo, Neelam Singh. Gateway House, Mumbai. 2014. in person.
The EEU emerged from the Eurasian Economic Community (EURASEC) and Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) in January 2015. Traced back to a proposal by Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1994 for the creation of a regional trade block, the EEU emerged iteratively as the states of the erstwhile Soviet Union grew increasingly economically integrated. After the signing of several treaties in the nineties, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established EURASEC in 2000, creating a single economic space, with the addition of Uzbekistan in 2006. In a similar vein, the next step in their integration involved the creation of the EACU, with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia creating a customs union with the ultimate goal of the creation of a single market in 2010. Finally, with impetus from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was keen to drive forward Russia’s economic agenda (in response to the Ukraine crisis which was threatening Russia’s economic interests in the West), the EEU came into existence in January 2015, with Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Armenia as members, and Kyrgyzstan set to join shortly.

The EEU has been seen by commentators, in India and abroad, as Russia’s response to the EU, acting as a bridge between Asia and Europe and as a “counterweight to Western integration processes.” Initially seen as cool to the idea of reinvigorating the former Soviet zone, Russia warmed to the idea of greater Eurasian integration quite rapidly in the new millennium, in response to its changing relations with the West and the rise of China. On its Western flank, the EU’s announcement of its “Eastern Partnership” program and subsequent attempt to begin talks with a long-term goal of accession with six former Soviet republics – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – drove Russia to respond with its own initiative. In addition, NATO’s expansion into the region, and the US’s plans for missile bases in Poland and the Czech Republic, along with China’s enormous energy and infrastructure investments in Kazakhstan made “Eurasian integration a priority in [Russia’s] foreign policy.” Finally, as Russian scholar Timofei Bordachev notes, the

43 ibid.
tangible economic benefits, derived from a barrier-free trade bloc in its extended neighbourhood, also bring immense benefit to Russia.\textsuperscript{44}

From a Central Asian perspective, only two of the CARs are currently members of the EEU – Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. As Bordachev notes, however, they will probably be amongst the biggest gainers once economic integration takes place.\textsuperscript{45} Kazakhstan will benefit from greater labour mobility and less tariffs for its goods in the region, given its export-oriented economy. Kyrgyzstan will be amongst the largest recipients of subsidies from the EEU, given its status as the poorest in the bloc, and will also benefit from increased access for its citizens to labour markets, given that a bulk of its GDP is driven by remittances. With accession talks in progress with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the EEU could slowly emerge as another comprehensive regional architecture through which the CARs are represented.

From an Indian perspective, the emergence of the EEU as an alternate regional framework through which it can interact with the CARs is particularly useful given the limited success of its own bilateral and multilateral initiatives in that direction. India has been in active talks with Moscow about the possible creation with a free trade zone with the EUCA since 2013, with the focus now on doing the same with the EEU.\textsuperscript{46} While initially sceptical, Indian elites acknowledge the potential of the organisation as a “game changer” for its relations with the former Soviet countries and Central Asia. According to Russia expert Nandan Unnikrishnan at the ORF, India’s involvement in the EEU should be seen as a function of its overall engagement with Russia.\textsuperscript{47} He argues that, given Russia’s dominance in the bloc (unlike in the SCO, where China to some extent is countered by Russia), India should factor in Russian objectives in Central Asia and work alongside these, if it is to use the EEU to reach the CARs.\textsuperscript{48} This would insure that Russia was not threatened by India’s presence, and in some ways contribute to Russia’s strategic dominance in the


\textsuperscript{45} ibid

\textsuperscript{46} Russia Today,. 'Moscow Confirms India Considering Free Trade Zone With Eurasian Economic Union'. N.p., 2015. Web. 10 Mar. 2015.

\textsuperscript{47} Author interview: Unnikrishnan, Nandan. Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. 2014. in person.

\textsuperscript{48} ibid.
region, staving off the threat from an impervious China. This dissertation concurs with this assessment, and argues that this is already occurring in the case of India’s major infrastructure initiatives in Central Asia as explained below.

Russia has already voiced its support for the long-awaited TAPI pipeline, and sees a major Russian role in its execution. Russsia’s Deputy PM, Arkady Dvorkovich, recently reconfirmed Russia’s intentions of participating in the project, and said the country would use its influence in Ashgabat to take things forward. Similarly, the INSTC was a Russian idea, co-founded with the Indians. Russia remains strongly committed to its execution and sees it as a vital counter to China’s Silk Route Economic Belt (SREB) strategy and its grand plans for infrastructure building in Central Asia. The fact that the INSTC was one of things on the discussion table during Putin’s Delhi visit in December 2014 is testament to Russian thinking on the subject. Finally, India’s durable ties to Iran and its commitment to the Chabahar port project and the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, have gathered Russian support in the recent past. Russia sees the Chabahar port as vital to the full functioning of the INSTC, and as a way to offer India, the CARs and Afghanistan a vital alternative route to Pakistan and China for trade in energy and goods, and sees the IPI as a viable commercial investment opportunity for Russian gas companies.

In summary, the EEU offers India a remarkable opportunity to interact with the CARs through a multilateral arrangement that is currently outside the purview of China and Pakistan, its rivals in South and Central Asia. In addition, it offers India the opportunity to work with improving relations with Russia, its long-term ally, in a manner that is beneficial to both. However, until the EEU expands its presence in Central Asia with the addition of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and India and Russia are able to invigorate their relationship and return it to its previous glory, the EEU will have a limited impact in India’s dealings with the region.

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7.1.3 India and China in Central Asia – The No Comparison Scenario

Much intellectual solipsism has been dedicated to the study of the rise of India and China in international relations today. Africa, South-East Asia, and the Indian Ocean are all theatres in which analysts have conjectured the clash of the dragon and the elephant, the two great Asian rising powers. Central Asia has been no different, and if the current trend is anything to go by, the interaction of India and China in the region will remain a subject of much attention in the future.\(^50\) However, to compare their agency in the region is foolhardy, as the next paragraphs will show. Taking on a similar approach as the previous section, this section examines the broader outlines of Indo-Chinese engagement, Chinese persuasions in Central Asia and their interactions in the region.

As third world nations emerging from the yoke of colonialism, independent India and China shared a lot in common in their first decades of existence. Addressing the needs of a largely agrarian populace, both countries adopted their own varieties of collective socialism and market regulation as they sought economic progress. Initially partners on the international stage, things quickly came to a head, as they fought a brief border war in 1962. Pre-empted by the invasion of Tibet and the subsequent flight of the Dalai Lama into India, economic stagnation, the communist divide with the Soviet and fears of encirclement, China took a hard stance on Indian provocation and precipitated the war of 1962.\(^51\) Ties barely recovered in the decades that followed as India drew closer to the Soviet Union, and allied itself against a potential China – US – Pakistan nexus, which developed after the Islamabad-brokered rapprochement between Nixon and Mao in 1968. As scholar Surjit Mansigh notes, “the dynamics of a U.S.-Soviet-China strategic triangle aggravated mutual mistrust in India and China and militated against repairing the relationship.”\(^52\) With the arrival of Deng Xiaoping as de facto leader of China after Mao’s death in 1977, China’s economic liberalisation would radically alter its development path from that of India, functioning under an


\(^{52}\) ibid.
increasingly authoritarian and populist Indira Gandhi, who persisted with her socialist agenda.

It was not until the internal changes in the late eighties within the USSR did the Sino-Soviet, and subsequently the Sino-Indian, relationship begin to improve, as Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi made a first visit to Beijing in 1988.\textsuperscript{53} Gandhi’s visit saw the creation of a joint working group on the border issues and aimed to improve bilateral relations. By the early nineties, in a post Cold War global order, both countries began working on the normalisation of relations, as they “yearned for a multi polar world.”\textsuperscript{54} India’s economic liberalisation in 1991 set the tone for greater trade and fiscal cooperation, as both partners treaded lightly, focussing on development and pushing their differences to the background. The relative gains of the nineties and the “sunshine period” came to an abrupt end in 1998 after India’s nuclear tests, which were ostensibly aimed at containing the Chinese threat, in the words of the Indian PM Atal Behari Vajpayee.\textsuperscript{55} Scholar BM Jain argues that these were an unwanted provocation on the part of the Indians and set back relations by a few years, and diplomatic relations did not resume normalcy until 2002.\textsuperscript{56}

In recent years, the economic relationship has burgeoned and China has emerged as India’s largest bilateral trading partner. Bilateral trade stood at US$ 70.59 billion in 2014, with a massive deficit of US$ 57 billion in China’s favour.\textsuperscript{57} The overall trade figure, which is set to soar to over US$ 100 billion in 2016, underlines how integrated the two economies are. Yet trade and economic ties do not set the tempo for the political relationship, which continues to imbibe a different hue. Despite several high-profile visits, on an almost annual basis between the two, political relations remain cool and characterised by a “trust deficit” between the elites of both nations.\textsuperscript{58} The trust deficit is in part fuelled by Indian suspicions of Chinese intent in South Asia.

\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Aljazeera. 'India's Modi Arrives In China For Trade Talks'. N.p., 2015. Web. 10 June 2015.
\textsuperscript{58} Acharya, Alka. 'The Strategic Stasis In The India-China Relationship'. \textit{Economic and Political Weekly} XLVIII.26-27 (2013): n. pag. Print.
since the 1962 war, and Chinese suspicion of India’s growing closeness to the US and Japan. This mistrust manifests itself in other ways as well. According to scholar Tanvi Madan, the long-standing boundary dispute, which was one of the causes of the 1962 war, remains a constant thorn in both sides, with both alleging constant incursions across the border by the other.\(^5^9\) She also identifies the issue of Tibet, and the long-term presence of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan Government in Exile in India, as a significant contributor to tetchy political relations. This view is echoed by scholar Jagannath Panda, who adds that continued Chinese support of India’s nemesis, Pakistan, and its position on cross-border river-water sharing also contribute to the trust deficit between the two.\(^6^0\)

Beyond the bilateral flaws in their political relationship, the India – China dispute is also characterised by their suspicions of each other’s rise to great-power status. These suspicions too manifest themselves in different forms. As Madan notes, Indian elites are apprehensive of long-term Chinese intentions and ambitions as a world power, viewing its rise as unfavourable.\(^6^1\) In the same vein, they are suspicious of Chinese involvement in India’s strategic neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean littorals. China’s attempts to build naval bases in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and in parts of East Africa have been met with great alarm within Indian strategic thinking. Similarly, China is cautious of India’s involvement with the US, Japan, Vietnam, and other Southeast Asian nations as it sees India reach into its zone of influence. The bottom line remains that for India, China is a behemoth and a vital economic cohort, one that it must partner with, though with much apprehension. The colossal difference in their current economic prowess and military capability ensures that no real comparisons between the two can be made. Yet, in the long run, both will have to tread cautiously, if they are unable to resolve their differences.

Chinese interest in Central Asia and its relationship with the CARs is markedly different from its relations with India. Quick to perceive the changing dynamics in the region in the early nineties, it granted official recognition to the CARs as it sought to


\(^6^1\) Madan, Tanvi. 2013.
cement its place in a new world order that was being shaped by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Gulf War. For China, this was a significant departure from the past, as it opened up its Western borders and broke centuries of isolationist tradition and its dependence on its Eastern front as its only conduit to the outside world. This new involvement in Central Asia was premised on its own needs for stability and to project itself as a power to the outside world. To the Chinese elite, the split of the USSR presented both strategic benefits and disadvantages. As scholar Richard Walsh points out, the emergence of a multipolar world order, the elimination of a threat from the North and various economic opportunities that presented themselves, were seen as a benefit by Beijing. On the other hand, he adds, the Chinese elite feared that emerging pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic ethno-nationalism would have an impact across national borders in Central Asia, and could potentially destabilize the autonomous Xinjiang province, with its large Uighur population. They also feared a further spread to China’s other restive provinces, Tibet and Inner Mongolia, sparking a wave of minority ethno-nationalism across the country that could threaten Han China’s stability.

Unlike India, China also saw the emerging order in Central Asia in the nineties as a competitive game where “Great Power chauvinism” was at work, and one in which other powers that bordered the CARs like Turkey and Iran would try to influence the region. Turkey’s attempt to revive a pan-Turkic cultural identity in the region, Iran’s endeavour to portray itself as an Islamic political model to the CARs, and the US’s interest in the region’s resources when combined with Russia’s temporary isolation from Central Asia, attested to the Chinese view. In response, according to Walsh, the Chinese premised their strategy on “classical geopolitical concepts-i.e., divide and rule and revival of the Silk Road,” both of which continue to be applicable today. The “divide and rule” approach to Central Asia, was employed both on the interior and the exterior as the Chinese played different cultural elites against each other to prevent a unification of purpose and ideology across the lines of political Islam.

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63 ibid.
64 ibid. 278.
65 ibid. 275.
revival of the Silk Road continues to be the basis of a Chinese economic master plan for the region.

According to scholar Russell Ong, China sees Central Asia as vital to its comprehensive security agenda across political, military and economic lines.66 This “comprehensiveness” is reflective of China’s changed perceptions of Central Asia’s economic and resource vitality. As China’s economy doubled through the nineties, China no longer thought of Central Asia as a politico-security issue, and, instead, a far greater role emerged for the region within Chinese grand strategy – as a source of energy and hydrocarbons for China’s behemoth economy.67 The region’s strategic location on China’s western land border provided multiple advantages, allowing for permanent pipelines to be built into China, reducing long-term transportation costs, increasing speed of delivery and, most importantly, they remained strategically secure and far less susceptible than SLOC, through which China received a majority of its hydrocarbons. In addition to the pipelines, the financial value generated would centre on the most-troubled regions of the Chinese West, creating an economic solution to the political troubles of the region. Central Asia expert Niklas Swanstrom, who noted in 2005 that the most important reason for Chinese involvement in the region is “an effort to dominate Central Asia in order to secure China’s growing need for oil and natural gas”, confirms this view.68 He adds that China attempts to create a “vassal relationship” with the CARs through investment, trade and military cooperation, in order to pacify and develop the greater region (including Xinjiang), and secure China’s future.69

The veracity of these claims is ascertained from grasping the extent of Chinese engagement in the region in the recent past. In 2006, the first China – Kazakh oil pipeline began carrying crude from Atasu on the Caspian to Dushanzi in Xinjiang. Construction on the pipeline started in 1997 and finished in 2009 with an annual

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69 ibid.
capacity of 20 billion tonnes.\textsuperscript{70} Supplemented by this, construction on the Central Asia–China gas pipeline began in 2007 with four planned lines across Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan leading into Western China at total cost of US$ 7.3 billion and supply of 2.3 TCF annually.\textsuperscript{71} As of 2014, three of the lines were operational with the fourth line expected to commence operation by 2016. In addition, Chinese involvement in the construction of an extended road and railway network from its western border into Central Asia, the development of a regional hydroelectric project, and its support of the reconstruction and development of Tajikistan and Afghanistan should be viewed in the same light. As evidenced above, it is clear that the motivations Swanstrom identifies continue to be the driver of Chinese strategy in the region even today. In October 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the SREB strategy, the latest version of its iterative grand economic plan for Eurasia. Focused on the synchronisation of the economies of the CARs, with that of the Chinese, and politically supported by the increasing role the SCO is playing in the region, it is clear, according to scholar Kemal Toktomushev, that China will be the paramount player in the years to come.\textsuperscript{72}

Unlike India’s durable relationship with Russia, which has manifested itself in the form of several joint projects in the region (the INSTC for a start), India and China have had limited direct interaction within the Central Asian space. This does not mean though that Indian strategy in the region is not shaped by its “encounter” with China. As Kavalski notes, Indian policymakers either see China as a model to emulate, as an opportunity through which India can access Central Asia by paring with China, or as a threat to Indian agency in the region.\textsuperscript{73} This was also echoed within the interviews done for this work, as Indian policymakers took tantalisingly different positions on India and China in Central Asia. Before these positions are explored in detail, it would be cogent to provide a comparison of the effects of Indian and Chinese agency in the region. China shares a natural border with three of the CARs, and its bilateral trade with Central Asia for 2013 stood at over US$ 50 billion, seventy times India’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} Hydrocarbons-technology.com., 'Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, Turkmenistan To China - Hydrocarbons Technology'. N.p., 2015. Web. 10 Jan. 2015.
\item \textsuperscript{71} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Kavalski, Emilian. 2010. 153-165.
\end{itemize}
trade which was valued at close to US$ 750 million.\textsuperscript{74} In addition to this, China has active trade and communication links with its bordering CARs, has committed to invest billions of dollars into strengthening road and rail links and promoting trade (in comparison to India’s paltry commitment of millions).\textsuperscript{75}

India’s inability to compete with China economically or strategically, however, has not dented the hopes of many of Delhi’s elites who see the Chinese way as a model for India to emulate, and believe that India can eventually catch up with China in the region. They argue that elites in the CARs see India as a “legitimate stakeholder” in the region and as a natural counter to China (and hence support its calls for increased engagement).\textsuperscript{76} Other commentators build on this, and argue for “out-of-the-box” thinking, urging cooperation with China and enlarging regional connectivity and trade.\textsuperscript{77} To them, India and China’s historical convergence of interests and current shared politico-security fears in the form of Islamic radicalism and terror are the perfect ground from which to build a long-standing partnership for economic benefit. They point to the first India – China Dialogue on Central Asia that took place in Beijing in 2013 as evidence of the growing recognition within the Indian establishment that this is the way forward.\textsuperscript{78} Yet opposed to this camp of pragmatic cooperationists, are thinkers within Delhi’s elite who view China as a serious threat to India, and see its behaviour in Central Asia as yet another example of how China seeks to limit India’s influence in their shared neighbourhood and dampen its rise within Asia.\textsuperscript{79} Strategic guru Bharat Karnad, in an interview, argued that Chinese strategy in Central Asia is aimed at cementing its place as the “status-quo” power in the region, and that India’s attempts to collaborate with China would compromise its own abilities in the region and in South Asia. He feels that India would be better off partnering with Russia.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{77} Author interview: Stobdan, Phunchok. 2014
\textsuperscript{78} Krishnan, Ananth. 'Amid Energy Competition, India, China Hold First Central Asia Dialogue'. \textit{The Hindu} 2013. Web. 11 May 2015.
\textsuperscript{79} Kavalski, Emilian. 2010. 159-161.
\textsuperscript{80} Author interview: Karnad, Bharat. Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi. 2014.
7.1.4 India and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

While actual Indian interplay with China has been limited to the occasional battle of economic one-upmanship, India seeks active involvement within the China-led SCO to further its engagement with Central Asia, and address its greater strategic disputes with Pakistan and China. As the following paragraphs will show, it is possible to discern the entire gamut of Indian thinking on its encounter with China in Central Asia when viewed through the lens of Indian involvement in the SCO.

The SCO emerged from the Shanghai Five, which was created as a regional grouping of China, Russia and three of the CARs – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan in 1996, to demilitarise the border between China and the former Soviet states. With the addition of Uzbekistan in 2001, the Shanghai Five became the SCO, as the mandate of the organisation was broadened to include intelligence sharing, military cooperation and counter-terrorism. Initially seen as an anti-NATO/US grouping within the Eurasian space, the SCO came into prominence after the 2005 Astana summit, and the significant internal political turmoil in the region (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). As the organisation evolved to include larger security, economic and political objectives, India, Pakistan and Iran received Observer status in 2005, with membership talks currently in place.

India’s potential membership changes the dynamics of the grouping, in its capacity as the third major power in the region and as a potential counterweight to the other two. As some scholars have noted, for Russia, an India aligned with it could serve as a counterbalance to Chinese dominance in Central Asia – once Russia’s strategic backyard. Similarly for the CARs, India’s presence could have a limited effect on the great-power games in the region, serving to moderate Chinese and Russian influence, and increasing the multi-polarity of the region. For the Chinese, Indian membership to the SCO (which is balanced by Pakistan’s simultaneous entry) serves as a method to draw India into its regional economic and political scheme in a way

that also allows it to keep a watchful eye on India’s attempts to increase its presence in the region. Other commentators note that SCO membership could also be offered as a sop to India, given its burgeoning propinquity to the West and its involvement in Vietnam and the South China Sea. This would essentially entail offering India energy access and greater connectivity into the proposed Russia – China energy pipeline network, in return for compromise on its ties to the West and Vietnam.

What then are India’s motivations for joining the SCO, and why do Indian elites seem so keen to do so? On a broader level, the SCO membership throws up four potential benefits for India. First, as a vital alternative framework through which India can engage China and Pakistan (beyond its bilateral attempts to do so) to address its border (and broader) issues with both countries vis-à-vis its concerns in South Asia, away from a US brokered perspective. Second, a functioning SCO security arrangement will aid in addressing Indian concerns about regional security, the spread of Islamic radicalism, cross-border terror and the trafficking of weapons, all of which assume significance in the wake of the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan. Third, the SCO offers India the potential to step up its trade in energy and goods with the broader region and within the grouping – the assumption being here that the SCO will facilitate the opening of Pakistani and Chinese routes of access to the Eurasian sphere. Finally, as Singh Roy notes, the SCO will lay the ground for an Indian entry to the Eurasian strategic space, as a player in the region, something it has struggled to achieve so far through its own strategies and frameworks for the region.

The benefits of SCO membership from the perspective of India’s ties to Central Asia are slightly more ambiguous. Apart from the increased regional prominence that India would receive in Eurasian affairs, it would offer India the opportunity to engage with the CARs through a functioning, conducive multilateral framework (similar to the EEU), something is has, so far, been unable to access. As senior MEA official Ajay Bisaria confirmed, SCO membership is seen as a strategic opportunity for India to ramp up its involvement in the energy and trade sectors and push its agenda of security cooperation to deal with the threat of terror and extremism. In energy and

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83 Ibid.
84 Singh Roy, Meena. 2014. 65.
trade terms, SCO membership for India, Iran and Pakistan (and eventually Afghanistan) could finally lead to the materialisation of the long-awaited TAPI and IPI pipelines, binding the partners to find a peaceful and amicable solution to the current disputes that hinder them.\textsuperscript{86} Additionally, it could allow for greater access for Indian trade to the CARs through Pakistan (and potentially China) via the INSTC, providing a major boost for India’s economic initiatives in the region. From a security perspective, India could benefit from the SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) and increased military cooperation with the CARs to the level that China and Russia currently enjoy.\textsuperscript{87}

In summary, Indian aspirations for SCO membership represent the recognition within the Indian political elite that China’s “nascent centrality” in Central Asia is only cultivating.\textsuperscript{88} It is also a pragmatic acknowledgement of the limited accomplishment of its own bilateral and multilateral initiatives in the region, and the fact that India needs a strong partner in the region if it is to move forward with its agenda. Whether that partner is China, Russia or the West remains to be seen.

### 7.2 Understanding India’s Limited Success in Central Asia

This second part of the chapter evaluates Indian agency in Central Asia, and investigates the reasons for the limited success of its policies (Look North and CCA) in the region so far. The opinions of interviewed Indian and Central Asia elites and official data are analysed to provide commentary on India’s overall strategy and the problems that afflict it. This section then looks at the success of India’s policies at the level of each of the previously identified determinants in further detail. Finally, as elucidated earlier, it investigates the claim of mythmaking as an alternative view in justifying India’s limited success in the region.


\textsuperscript{87} ibid.

\textsuperscript{88} Kavalski, Emilian. 2010. 153.
7.2.1 Indian Failures in Central Asia

Despite Indian grandstanding and the fact that the country is on an upward trajectory in Central Asia, premised on its omnipresent cultural and civilizational capital in the region, India has seen very limited tangible success in Central Asia over the last two decades. As the following paragraphs will show, even measured across different parameters, Indian success has been checked, and is reflective of a greater malaise within Indian strategic thinking. This deduction is echoed in contemporaneous literature and by many of the interviewed elites, who unanimously agreed that there is a high level of inefficiency within the Indian strategy in Central Asia.89 American strategic guru Stephen Blank, writing in a seminal 2011 commentary, criticised India’s strategic failure in Central Asia, and argued that, “India is failing to keep pace with its rivals, particularly China. New Delhi knows this to be true as does every analyst who observes its efforts in Central Asia.”90 Correspondingly, in 2013, India expert and author Harsh Pant argued that India rests on the fringes of Central Asia, and a continued “lacklustre approach” ensured that it remained there.91 Their views were similarly echoed in Delhi and in Central Asia. As a recently retired senior bureaucrat at the MEA suggested, that Indian strategy in Central Asia was only proving to be marginally effective – a situation even the new CCA policy had failed to remedy.92 A Central Asian diplomat added in private that, while India’s long-term intentions were rarely in doubt, many of the CARs seriously doubted its ability to deliver on them, and were puzzled by Delhi’s sporadic courtship of the region.93

This general sense of misgiving about the efficiency of Indian agency in the region has been prevalent from the late nineties, and continues until today. Many of India’s failures in Central Asia in the nineties were predicated on its own domestic political issues, economic deficits and its obsession with Pakistan in that period. Yet, as India has come into its own as a rising power, no-longer limited by its tribulations in its South Asian neighbourhood, its strategy in Central Asia has not come to fruition in the way that other game plans in its extended neighbourhood have. By most

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89 Author interview: Karnad, Bharat. 2014.
92 Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador. 2014
93 ibid.
yardsticks, India has been relatively successful with its Afghan policy, its “Look East” policy in South-East Asia, its involvement in the Indian-Ocean World and in Africa. Yet Central Asia has been an outlier in this success story, despite Indian attempts to change this. As explained earlier, acknowledging the limits of the Look North policy, India announced the CCA policy in 2012, to address many of the policy’s deficiencies. Today, two years on, the CCA policy too has had a limited effect due to many of the same deficiencies. The next paragraphs attempt to explain these and the historical reasons for India’s limited success in the region.

Historically, as Kavalski and scholar Sebastien Peyrouse have shown (discussed in Chapter 3), India’s inability to seize upon the opportunity as the first foreign-power in a region full of nascent republics is seen as the hallmark of its failure in the nineties. Limited by a domestic economic crisis precipitated by the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, India was forced to undertake emergency reforms and rapid economic liberalisation in the early nineties. The result was an inward looking India, which was simultaneously thrust into a tumultuous domestic political equilibrium as it struggled to recast its foreign policy, thus losing its eminence in regions it once had a solid presence in. Central Asia was no exception. As Stobdan explains, India squandered opportunities by not reciprocating interest from the new leaders of the CARs and failed to live up to its promises on the delivery of infrastructure and investment.94 While there was some attempt to recast ties as early as the late nineties (with the first enunciation of the Look North policy), in the wake of a new Hindu nationalist BJP-led Indian foreign policy, this amounted to little; India remained preoccupied with Pakistan’s role in the region, and could not overcome its own conceptual obfuscation and strategic incapacities.

As Laruelle notes, the initial Look North policy was doomed to failure given India’s strategic obsession with Pakistan, which, according to her, “induced Indian foreign policy [in Central Asia] into error.”95 India viewed its relations with Central Asia through the narrow prism of its own failing ties with Pakistan, misinterpreting the


CARs’ economic aspirations for collaboration with Pakistan as a potential threat of the Islamisation of the region. She evidences her view by stating that India’s conflation of the Tajik Civil War with the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and seeing a Pakistani hand in both quagmires, was unsound and cost India political capital in the region. Stobdan concurs, and argues that India’s flawed strategic thinking and ignorance of the CARs also led to the failure of the Look North policy. Noting, “India has been grossly, and perhaps consciously overlooking its interest in Central Asia,” he contends that India’s lack of economic muscle has also cost it dearly, and it has been unable to create a “strong and meaningful partnership,” in the region.

Today, while India is no longer an inward looking country with the strategic-thinking stasis of the nineties, many of the same tribulations continue to dog its Central Asia strategy. As the next paragraphs will show, while India has addressed some its historical failures in the region, there are other clearly identifiable reasons for its limited success so far. For the purpose of taxonomical pellucidity these are presented in the following manner: First, the overarching and systematic reasons for Indian failure in Central Asia are examined; Second, this process is repeated with respect to each of India’s determinants in the region, i.e. security, energy, trade and soft-power; And, finally, reasons that emerge from situations out of Indian control are explained.

At a meta-level, one of the most obvious reasons for India’s limited success in Central Asia is the fundamental flaws in India’s strategic culture and its ability to think in a manner befitting its rising-power status. Initially identified by scholar George Tanham in his innovatory work on Indian foreign policy and strategic culture in 1992, where he suggests that India is unable to clearly articulate and pursue its strategic goals in a “coherent, disciplined fashion,” scholars and practitioners continue to bemoan this deficit in Indian policy today. Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal argues that India has been inordinately slow in developing its strategic programmes, and Pant, in his exceptional 2010 deliberation on the subject, also notes the
prevalence of a strategic culture deficit.\textsuperscript{100} Pant presents the same argument in his analysis of India’s strategy toward China, noting that India’s strategic culture deficit manifests itself in a more problematic “lack of institutionalisation” in the foreign policy decision-making process, where the failure to develop an effective institutional framework has hampered India’s ability to plot its foreign policy.\textsuperscript{101} In the case of China, he also goes on to bemoan the lack of an effectual wider non-governmental strategic culture, where the media, universities and think tanks have a critical influence on foreign policy. This work contends that the same is applicable in the case of India’s Central Asia policy, a view with which Blank concurs, stating that one of the reasons for India’s failure in Central Asia is its “congenital difficulty in thinking and acting strategically.”\textsuperscript{102}

Peyrouse points out that another major meta-level reason for India’s limited success in Central Asia has been the lack of a “country-specific approach” to the region.\textsuperscript{103} He argues that India’s established broad-based strategy is similar to that of the EU’s and therefore has a limited reach, as it is premised on a regional implementation approach, and does not sufficiently account for the plethora of differences between the CARs. While the CARs do have a shared culture and history, the differences in their socio-economic levels, size, aspiration, resources and utility to India are quite apparent. Kazakhstan, the largest, has the GDP levels of a middle-income country, is resource rich, and is of major economic utility to India. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, on the other hand, the two smallest, are low-income countries (poorer than India), without significant natural resources, yet play an important role in India’s security calculations. To some extent this issue has been recognised by Indian elites and India has begun working on a parallel track of bilateralism to accompany its multilateral initiatives. This is most evident in its relations with Astana and Dushanbe. Despite India’s failures to secure greater involvement in Kazakhstan’s hydrocarbon industry, its attempts to secure uranium ore for its burgeoning nuclear industry from Astana


\textsuperscript{102} Blank, Stephen. 2013.

saw fruition, and its imports of uranium from 2013 nearly doubled the volume of bilateral trade between the countries. And notwithstanding the public speculation that surrounded its inability to secure an overseas airbase, MEA sources confirmed India was engaged in high-level and covert bilateral security cooperation with Dushanbe and it remained India’s key strategic partner in the region. Yet these remain small steps, and India needs to develop an approach analogous to the one it has employed in Afghanistan with each of the CARs, if it is to improve the execution of its agency in the region.

In terms of politico-security cooperation, as Blank notes, despite claims to the contrary, India’s security cooperation with the CARs (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), which it considers vital to its interests, is inadequate, and hardly comparable to the collaboration that China and Russia extend to the region. This dissertation argues that this limited politico-security cooperation is essentially a manifestation of India’s larger strategic ills and the failure to institutionalise India’s national security planning, as well as the limitations that India’s preliminary Nehruvian foreign policy placed on its actions abroad. This Nehruvian legacy, as Pant argues, continues to display itself in a “marginalisation of the military,” where India is unable to efficiently use its “military as an instrument of national power.” Additionally, Pant suggests that this leads to a tendency for India to display an “inability to use force effectively,” and is essentially uncomfortable with power, because it cannot mobilize force effectively nor wield power in an international strategic environment. Given the CARs indirect role in India’s security environment and their delicate interplay with the AF-PAK region, this remains a key issue for Indian engagement in the future.

On the energy front, India has seen both success and failure in Central Asia. As identified earlier, its successes have come in the recent purchases of uranium from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and the part acquisition of the Satpayev oil and gas fields by ONGC on the Caspian. Additionally, it has entered into agreements with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to prospect for gas and with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

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104 Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador. 2014.
105 Blank, Stephen. 2013
106 Pant, Harsh V. 2011. 18.
107 ibid.
on electricity cooperation. Yet its average successes are clearly outshone by its substantial failures on the energy front, where it remains a bit player in the region, significantly behind China and Russia, and engaged at a level equivalent to that of Malaysia and South Korea. It was spectacularly outplayed by China in its attempts to secure PetroKazakhstan in 2005 and the Kashagan oilfield in 2013, and its big-ticket project for the region, the TAPI pipeline, is yet to see the light of day. The reasons for these failures abound; some are within its control and some are not. Its failure to expand its presence in the energy sector, is reflective of how India does business internationally and, in someway, the incongruence in its strategic thinking. Thoroughly reliant on its buoyant private sector to represent it globally (as it does in Africa and Europe), it rarely furthers its foreign policy agenda through its large nationalised public-sector companies (ONGC being the rare exception), thus not making effective use of their technological and financial capabilities. This is in contrast to China and Russia’s approach, where almost all investment in the region’s energy industry is through state-controlled enterprises, and is representative of larger strategic objectives. Additionally, as a former ambassador suggested, India’s failure to play “the game” (that the elites in the CARs so desire, that furthers their own economic interests) has cost it dearly, suggesting that this was the reason that India lost the Kashagan deal.\footnote{Confidential author interview: Retired Senior Official & Former Ambassador. 2014.} This inability to strategically exercise its will in the region’s energy sector through investment and collaboration, despite its potential vitality to India’s energy diversification aspirations and its growing economic clout, is an important constraint and is responsible for its limited success on that front.

In terms of trade and connectivity, India’s biggest problem is that it does not have direct geographical trade access to the CARs without a common border (discussed later). Yet, in addition to this, there exist major lacunae in India’s economic strategy in the region, which need to be addressed. Despite the occasional success story, Indian investment and involvement in industry in the CARs is conspicuous by its absence. As scholar John Schaus has shown in his recent study on the role of India’s private sector in the country’s foreign policy, India makes extensive use of Outbound Foreign Direct Investment (ODI) to supplement its developmental assistance program
in the furtherance of its foreign policy agenda.\textsuperscript{109} This ODI is almost entirely exercised through the private sector (or through public-private partnerships with governments), directed toward Africa and the extended neighbourhood, with several success stories in the IT, healthcare, mobile-telephony and hospitality sectors.\textsuperscript{110} Notwithstanding success elsewhere, this strategy is poorly implemented in Central Asia, reflecting the situation in the energy sector, where despite potential vitality of the region’s economic sector to its foreign policy, the Indian government has not been able to channel investment into it. An Indian entrepreneur and capitalist (who once considered investment in Central Asia) suggested in an interview that the government’s inability to support the private sector effectively ensured that no one was looking at the region seriously.\textsuperscript{111} Pressed for a clarification, he added that the “rules of engagement” were very different in Central Asia, where local elites had to be “taken care of” and, given the opaque operating environment in which the Central Asian governments themselves were not very forthcoming with investment guarantees and tax breaks, the region was considered too risky for major investment by Indian capitalists.\textsuperscript{112} In comparison to China and Russia, where the state is able to bankroll both private and public investments (or at least share the burden of risk), the Indian government’s inability to do the same has been a key reason for the lack of Indian investment in the region. Finally, as scholar Gulshan Sachdeva suggests, another reason for India’s limited economic involvement has been its inability to enter regional trading mechanisms and arrangements so far, and derive the benefits of sustained interaction with the CARs.\textsuperscript{113} Despite the government’s best efforts India remains outside the ambit of the SCO and the EEU, though there are hopes that this will change shortly.

Perhaps the most telling of India’s failures has been the “lack of attraction” that the “Indian model” presents to the CARs as one to emulate. Seen from the perspective of


\textsuperscript{110} ibid.

\textsuperscript{111} Confidential author interview: Indian Capitalist & Entrepreneur, Mumbai. 2015.

\textsuperscript{112} ibid.

its ability to project soft power and its own great-power ambitions, it is an issue that is rarely acknowledged, and was infrequently addressed within the elite interviews conducted. Laruelle, Peyrouse and Kavalski discuss this prominently in their explanations for India’s shortcomings in the region. Peyrouse argues that India refuses to position itself as an explicit model (in contrast to China and Russia) for the CARs and instead “lead the way”. This work posits that this approach itself is problematic, in a region where other powers constantly project their visions and ideas as “the way forward.” For India to be seen as an attractive partner, it is vital it uses both its hard-power and soft-power capabilities to project the “attraction of India” to the CARs, because it has specific interest and goals that can only be met by the use of both (unlike the EU which has limited hard-power interests in the region, and therefore takes a normative approach).

In addition to this, Peyrouse argues that India is caught in a bind because even though it is a democracy, it, along with Japan, explicitly chooses not to “promote democracy” as part of its foreign policy agenda. This leaves it at a disadvantage because it can neither play up its democratic credentials for fear of making the ruling elites suspicious, nor is it able to take suitable advantage of the efficiency of “authoritarian logic” that China and Russia display in their decision-making in the region. Peyrouse also contends that despite India’s rapid economic-growth and impressive technological and service-industry advantages, it is not seen as a “success story” in Central Asia, given its endemic poverty and failing infrastructure. This view resonated in interviews with Central Asian elites as well, who suggested that India’s inefficient and deeply bureaucratic decision-making system were seen as impediments to growth and not the best way forward in comparison to that of China. Laruelle echoes these thoughts elsewhere, and adds that despite India’s accentuation of its federal, secular and multi-ethnic values in its relationship with the CARs, it has little currency with local elites who see their countries as nation-states,

\[\text{\footnotesize 114} \text{ Peyrouse, Sebastien. 2011. 79.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 115} \text{ ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 116} \text{ ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 117} \text{ ibid.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize 118} \text{ Author interview: Burkanov, Aziz. Nazarbayev University, New Delhi. 2015.}\]
with a dominant majority (like China) and do not espouse these values. Kavalski, in his deep exploration of India’s external agency, takes the argument a step further and suggests that this “lack of attraction” holds true for India’s international relations across the board and is not just limited to its failures in Central Asia, and that until these issues are addressed India will continue to have little influence in the region. To him, India struggles to establish itself as a model in international politics without an influential foreign policy strategy, and has no “distinct attributes that regional actors might want to emulate.”

In addition to the broader existential questions that will continue to accompany India’s rise internationally, there exist several institutional reasons for India’s inability to capitalise on its much-touted cultural capital in the region and foster a deeper relationship. This is largely due to a pragmatic lack of resource and capability, where the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), which staffs the MEA, is unable to meet the diplomatic needs of a country of India’s size. As Shashi Tharoor, former Minister of State at the MEA, has noted, India’s diplomatic corps is grossly understaffed, with an estimated size of 900 Foreign Service officers, serving the aspirations of a country of 1.2 billion. This severely restricts India’s ability to meet its diplomatic objectives internationally, with the problem only being accentuated in smaller regions like Central Asia, where Indian embassies are generally understaffed and unable to adequately represent the country’s interests. As Stobdan, who served in Bishkek as Ambassador, confirmed, India’s often understaffed missions in Central Asia have often contributed to India’s incapacity in exploiting its cultural capital and promoting economic interests. Tharoor suggests that this problem isn’t confined to Indian representation abroad, adding that even at the MEA in Delhi, there is often a single Joint Secretary, addressing the diplomatic needs of an entire region. This is clearly evident in the case of Central Asia, where a Joint Secretary for Eurasia is responsible for the entire CIS – including Russia, parts of Eastern Europe, the CARs and the

119 ‘Interview With Marlene Laruelle’. FPRC Journal
121 Kavaslki 2010. 206.
123 Author interview: Stobdan, Phunchok. 2014.
Caucuses. Finally, in addition to its inadequate size, Tharoor contends that the IFS is also affected by a quality problem, which, while partly compensated by individual brilliance, is still affected by an institutionalised inability to think strategically and lacks important diplomatic soft skills (at least at the junior and middle levels).\textsuperscript{125}

Having discussed the reasons for India’s limited success in Central Asia that are still broadly within India’s control, the work now turns to an explanation of some of the reasons that are clearly not. Perhaps more debilitating than those within India’s control, these reasons are essentially products of India’s misfortunate geographic position, and the fluidity and dynamism of the political situation in the South and Central Asian region. Geographically, India’s biggest problem is its lack of direct access to the CARs and the fact that it does not share a common border with the region like China and Russia do. This has a direct impact on its ability to trade, build pipelines and engage in security cooperation with the CARs, and ensures that India is often at the mercy of Pakistani capriciousness on whether to allow overland access to the region or not. The other potential route to the region through Tibet and Xinjiang in China is also held to ransom by the larger uncertainties and issues in the India–China relationship. Till these concerns are addressed, India will always be a secondary player in Central Asia, without direct (or facilitated indirect) access, and can forget about exercising great-power influence in the region.

In addition, the dynamism and the fluidity of the overall politico-security environment in Central Asia and the resulting uncertainty that emerges from it are also inimical to Indian interests in the region and have affected the execution of its agency. At the meta-level, great power rivalries between China, Russia and the US in the region and greater Asia also affect India’s ability to articulate its interests effectively. A good example of this is India’s involvement in the Afghan reconstruction process post 2004, under a watchful American eye, with the hope that this would turn into a broader involvement with the region. This broader involvement, which was envisaged as being part of the US’ “New Silk Road” strategy, failed to materialise and India was forced to reconsider its options in Afghanistan after the US announced its withdrawal. Similarly, its entry into the SCO, which it desperately needs to boost it energy and

\textsuperscript{125} ibid.
trade cooperation with the CARs, is subject to Russian and Chinese approval, and has yet to materialise. This approval is also clearly at the mercy of the greater power games being played between India, China and Russia. At the India–Russia level, India’s decision to turn away from Russia and toward Israel and the US for defence purchases, and the subsequent cooling of ties, has had an impact on Russian support for its membership to the SCO. Similarly, the recent increasing Russian–Chinese propinquity does not bode well for India, as it reduces Russian motivations to seek India as a balancer of Chinese domination within the SCO. Yet further geopolitical uncertainties exist beyond great-power games and have affected India’s attempts to move toward Central Asia. The insecurity about the future of Afghanistan, and the continued presence of the Taliban and other terror groups in the region, has and continues to affect India’s abilities to exercise its agency in Central Asia.

In summary, the limited success India has seen in Central Asia, through its Look North and CCA policies in the last two decades, are a function of its complicated and uncertain geopolitical environment, and significant intramural shortcomings. While it has addressed some of the historical reasons for its failure, its continued strategic-thinking deficit, the paltry economic muscle it displays, and its inadequate diplomatic resources, when combined, all fail to conjure up a “model for success” that the CARs seek to emulate, despite its cultural capital in the region.

7.2.2 Mythmaking as an Alternative Explanation for India’s Shortcomings

At various stages, this work has engaged with the idea that the narrative accompanying Indian strategy in Central Asia is essentially mythmaking or discursive inflation on the part of Indian elites. This conjecture finds particular favour with international scholars of South and Central Asia, particularly in the works of Kavalski, Laruelle and Peyrouse. While Peyrouse and Laruelle construct this mythmaking as occurring within the strategies of various external powers with relation to the CARs and vice-versa, Kavalski argues it from a solely Indian perspective, not just in relation to Central Asia, but in relation India’s post-1998 foreign policy in general. A succinct discussion of the main themes of their ideas is provided in the next paragraphs, with reference to the objective of this chapter.
Peyrouse and Laruelle essentially argue that India–Central Asia relations have been subject to much mythmaking, particularly from Indian and Western scholars. This mythmaking, according to them, involves the use of “mythological traits” within the implementation of foreign policy, because the ultimate aim is the legitimisation of these actions in front of their domestic publics.\textsuperscript{126} Citing scholar Jack Snyder, they argue, “mythmaking offers a shortcut for the legitimizing of domestic policy,”\textsuperscript{127} where countries use national symbols, historical constructs, orientalist fashions, and literary allusions as cognitive monikers to vindicate their policies to domestic audiences. And Central Asia provides the perfect breeding ground for this given, “the high degree of ideological construction it provides,” which in turn stems from its reintroduction to the international system and geospatial location.\textsuperscript{128} To them, this is most visible in the various regional integration strategies and frameworks that have been proposed, stooped in historical readings and resplendent with myths and symbolism. To summarise, they contend that this is most apparent in the alternative Indian historical readings of the situation (the Silk Road, etc.) in which elites indulge in this discursive inflation, leading to unrealistic expectations for the relationship.

Kavalski, on the other hand, argues that India’s entire post-1998 foreign policy indulges in this discursive inflation, and he traces four discursive constructs in which this occurs:

(i) a geopolitical trouncing of India’s perceived weakness; (ii) the development of a ‘new’ ideology of national strength (Hindutva); (iii) the seeming settlement of domestic political contestations; and (iv) the promulgation of a narrative of self-aggrandizement.\textsuperscript{129}

To him, India’s Look North policy in Central Asia provides a wonderful example of this, through which all four of these discursive constructs are exercised. His conclusions, therefore, are similar to Peyrouse and Laruelle’s and he argues that the Look North policy has had “no influence” in Central Asia given the larger failures of Indian foreign policy. His proposition is that:


\textsuperscript{128} ibid. 9.

\textsuperscript{129} Kavalski, Emilian. 2010. 14.
Thus, despite the proliferation of discourses on India’s nascent global grandeur, the absence of a readily available Indian vision of global politics – a *Pax Indica* if you will – prevents New Delhi from living up to the expectations generated by such narratives.\(^{130}\)

This dissertation acknowledges the value of this viewpoint, and agrees in part with the conjecture that a significant portion of the narrative accompanying India’s Central Asia relationship displays the imaginary overindulgence of its elite. While not in total agreement with Kavalski’s proposition that the entirety of India’s post 1998 foreign policy is dependent on mythmaking, it does acknowledge the utility of this construction in the case of Central Asia, and endorses Laruelle and Peyrouse’s views on it. Thus, while many of India’s deficiencies in Central Asia have legitimate reasons that are both in and out of its control, perhaps defining its success as limited (or as a failure) is also a function of the (measurement) bar being set too high for Indian agency. This skewed evaluation rubric in turn arises from the unrealistic expectations that have emerged from this discursive inflation, that both elites and analysts have encouraged and indulged.

### 7.3 Chapter Conclusions

As the concluding chapter in the body of the dissertation, this chapter accomplished vital ancillary objectives of explaining India’s interplay with the international system in Central Asia and evaluating the success of India’s strategy in the region.

In explaining India’s interplay with other great powers in Central Asia, it focussed on Russia (the status-quo security dominant power) and China (the upcoming economic power), and India’s interactions with them and their regionalisation mechanisms, the EEU and the SCO. With Russia, India shares a durable long-standing relationship that dates back to its formative years as a republic. Notwithstanding a recent cooling in ties, the relationship has emerged stronger after the arrival of President Putin and is centred upon Russia’s status as India’s premier defence partner and supplier. Russia sees Central Asia as its strategic backyard and continues to play a dominant role in the region. It remains wary of China’s growing influence amongst the CARs, yet it

\(^{130}\) ibid. 200.
must accommodate China to account for Russia’s increasing marginalisation by the West. India and Russia have had limited interaction in Central Asia in the past two decades. Yet it is clear that Russia is receptive to the idea of a greater Indian presence in the region, one it can facilitate through Indian access to the SCO and the EEU, possibly as a balance to China. Russia and India see eye-to-eye on the security threats that emanate from the region, and are also involved in the INSTC trade corridor.

Contrarily, the India–China relationship is dogged by political disagreement, despite China’s status as India’s largest trading partner. Tibet, a border and river dispute, Chinese support of Pakistan and mutual suspicions of each other’s motives, continue to play spoilsport in the furthering of ties. China sees Central Asia as essential to the security of its Western flank, given its issues with ethno-nationalism in Xinjiang and Tibet, and its fear of spreading religious extremism. The development of major pipelines into the CARs underline the region’s value to China’s energy security, and the development of its economic sphere of influence. China has been restrained in its approach to India in Central Asia and has outmuscled any Indian attempts to establish a foothold in the energy sector. While they share security concerns, little has come of this, given the bigger problems in their relationship. In India, China is seen both as an opportunity and a model to emulate, as well as a major threat, hinting to a conceptual incongruence, which needs to be addressed before India and China can cooperate in Central Asia.

India has applied for membership to the SCO and is currently in talks with the EEU about the establishment of a free trade zone. The SCO represents India’s best opportunity to engage all of the CARs at a regional level, boosting its economic and energy opportunities. Yet China’s reticence so far on facilitating this has been telling of the greater issues between the two countries. The EEU, while seen as a Russian attempt at reinvigorating the Soviet economic space, has been seen with optimism in Delhi, and could prove a useful tool for India in the region, given China and Pakistan’s absence from it so far. Yet, its lack of a politico-security component, like that of the SCO, and the fact that only two of the CARs are currently members, ensure that currently its value to India is limited with respect to Central Asia.
Most analysts agree that on evaluation, Indian strategy in Central Asia has seen little success. The reasons abound, and are both in and outside of India’s control. The lack of a common border with the region and its geographic position has in some way been the biggest barrier to economic and energy connectivity. Similarly, the power games between India and the other powers in the region hold its ties to the CARs to ransom, and are largely out of its control. Internally, its strategy is affected by the incapacities of its strategic culture and its limited diplomatic resources, which have led to poorly planned and an unsustainable economic and energy engagement, and limited security cooperation. All of these brought together, have resulted in a non-favourable view of India amongst Central Asian elites, where the “lack of attraction” of the Indian model is in direct contrast to that of China and Russia. However, if one takes into consideration the ideas of Laruelle, Peyrouse and Kavalski, it is possible to perhaps forgive some of India’s faults and take a kinder view on its engagement in the region. Their contention that mythmaking has led to the creation of unrealistic expectations is held as valid (if only partially) and can thus account for some of India’s “perceived failures” in the region.
8. Conclusion

This conclusion is divided into three sections: First, commentary is provided on the validity of the overarching argument of this work based on the research conducted, and after which succinct answers to the research questions that were initially posed are offered; Second, the limitations of this work are examined, along with possible avenues for further research that were identified during the study; And finally, closing comments are made on the way forward for India in Central Asia, based on the author’s interpretation of the results of the study.

8.1 Overall Argument and Research Questions

Before the answers to the multiple research questions that were posed are presented, it would be cogent to examine the original assumptions behind this work and deduce whether or not they remain valid.

The central argument of this work was premised on the exploration of certain factors that were identified as driving Indian strategy in Central Asia. These factors (or determinants) were identified from an initial survey of the literature and contemporary scholarship on the subject and were the object of exploration in this dissertation. Initially, three determinants were identified (namely, security and strategic concerns: India’s need for energy diversification; and trade and connectivity ambitions) as being posited to explain India’s engagement with Central Asia. Using these three determinants as a base for its exploration, the work set out primarily to see if they still offered a valid explanation for the impetuses behind Indian agency in the region; if other drivers of Indian motivation, in addition to these three determinants, could be ascertained; and if a suitable conceptual framework could be developed to comprehend the geopolitics of Indian strategy in Central Asia. These central objectives of the work all assume additional significance given the enunciation of the CCA policy by the MEA in 2012 and the significant up-gradation that Indian strategy in the region underwent, largely because much of the contemporary scholarship on the subject was penned before this occurred.
As the dissertation has shown, the argumentation that drove this research is still valid. Indeed, India’s motivations and strategy in Central Asia are still driven by the three identified determinants, which play a key role in the shaping of Indian agency in the region. In the short-term context, India sees security concerns as the major driver of its engagement in Central Asia, especially given the dynamism and uncertainty that accompanies the transition process in Afghanistan and the Western withdrawal from the region. In the long-term, however, Indian elites envisage Central Asia, with its measureless natural resources, as invaluable to India’s energy security and as both a destination for India’s growing economic outreach, and a bridge to the heart of Eurasia in terms of connectivity and trade.

Additionally, the identification of India’s great-power ambitions and its subsequent use of soft power in the region as the fourth determinant, significantly contribute to the validity of the argumentation behind this study. These great-power ambitions are closely linked to the conceptual framework that was offered in the study as a lens to comprehended Indian agency in the region. This conjectural framework used a dual approach, developing a classical geopolitical narrative premised upon Mackinderan conceptualizations of the Heartland and a historical revival of the Great Game and Silk Route, and an India-specific slant premised upon the existence of an Indian grand strategy for its interactions with the world. As the answers to the research questions will specifically show, the main assumptions behind this work remain valid.

What are the determinants of India’s strategy in Central Asia and what are the national, regional and international dynamics that shape these determinants?

The determinants of Indian strategy in Central Asia, as identified and explored in this study, are as follows: First, India’s security and strategic concerns emanating from the greater South and Central Asia regions; Second, India’s need to seek diversification of sources for its energy security given its rapidly growing population and economy – an opportunity that the CARs present given their abundant natural resources; Third, India’s ambitions to trade with Central Asia and use the region to facilitate sustainable connectivity with greater Eurasian region; Fourth, and finally, the region is seen as a vital component to India’s great-power ambitions and within its extended
neighbourhood. Indian elites see success in its sphere of influence as essential to the growth of its global presence.

There are various national, regional and international dynamics occurring simultaneously that shape these determinants. Nationally, India’s concerns with its internal security, which is threatened by terrorism and religious schisms, and its need to ensure consistent economic growth to alleviate poverty directly impact its security and energy overtures in the CARs. Regionally, its relationship with Pakistan and the instability in the AF-PAK region, which threatens to be compounded in the wake of the Western withdrawal, drives its strategic cooperation with the CARs, as does its need to keep China from playing an overbearing role in a region it sees as a vital area of its extended neighbourhood. Globally, India sees itself as a great civilization that is slowly but surely taking its place as a rightful actor on the world stage. In doing so, it must navigate the complexities and dynamics of global politics as it interacts with China, the West, Russia and other powers in the region. China’s meteoric rise, the relative decline of the West, and Russia’s delicate position between both, all serve to make India’s decision-making in Central Asia complex, given the many limitations that India faces (those that are of its own making and those that are not).

*What are the historical trends that shape the contemporaneous interactions between India and the Central Asian states?*

The documented existence of strong historical and cultural ties between South and Central Asia continue to play a key role in moulding contemporaneous interactions between India and the CARs. Ancient ties go back as far as the passage of Buddhism from India to Central Asia, with constant interaction through ancient and medieval times. The arrival of the Central Asian Mughals to India heralded the dawn of India’s greatest empire between the 16th and 18th Centuries, which spawned much of North India and the southern parts of Central Asia. The flow of artists, intellectual thought, language, and culture between the regions in this period was unprecedented, and shapes modern perceptions of the other in each region. With the arrival of the British in India and the Tsar’s army in Khanates of Central Asia, the two regions were abruptly separated and became hotbeds of geopolitical activity, as their colonial masters coveted the other’s possessions. The inception of the Khanates into the Soviet
Union in the 20th Century, and India’s subsequent independence, cast a mortal blow on connectivity in the region, as Moscow limited outside contact with Central Asia. The rekindling of India’s relationship with the Soviet Union in 1954, after the death of Joseph Stalin, allowed a newly independent India and the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics to re-engage. As academic and cultural contact resumed, India had significant cultural capital in the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India was unable to build on its presence in the region in the early nineties, as a result of its own domestic political and economic concerns. However, by the end of the nineties, India had taken cognizance of the importance of the newly independent CARs to and attempted to strategically engage with them, calling into use its significant cultural capital and historical ties to the region.

Yet, as this study and contemporary scholarship have shown, the employment of historical narratives in the shaping of contemporaneous ties is also problematic. The overuse of historical narratives by Central Asian and Indian elites, to argue for a bright future or relations between the countries, often overlooks the present, and the numerous tribulations in their on-going relationship. The achievements of the past are used as excuses for the failures of the present, and then become forbearers for future success, with the risk that in reality, relations remain in stasis.

*Are there particular conceptual and analytical frameworks through which Indian motivations and agency in Central Asia can be understood? If so, do they justify the initial hypothesis and identification of determinants?*

This study offers two conceptual frameworks for the comprehension of Indian agency in Central Asia. The first is premised upon classical geopolitical conjectures, and argues the relevance of Mackinder’s Heartland and the applicability of the revival of the Great Game. It also suggests that an alternative historical geopolitical narrative, the revival of the Silk Route, helps to explain India’s agency in the region. These geopolitical conjectures are directly linked to the three determinants that were initially identified: security, energy, and trade and connectivity. Mackinder’s contention of Central Asia as the heartland and key to the control of the Eurasian continent, given its strategic location and abundant natural resources, continues to be valid as contemporary scholarship maintains. The resulting New Great Game (while not as
deterministic as Mackinder’s original postulations) is fitting, as a cognitive moniker for the description of the agency of outside powers in the region; yet it must be nuanced, given the increasing agency of the CARs themselves. Therefore, these conceptualizations are appropriate when one seeks to understand India’s initiatives in Central Asia, which are driven by the security, strategic, and energy security determinants. Similarly, the revival of the Silk Route is an appropriate cognitive moniker to explain India’s trade and connectivity requirements from Central Asia, as it seeks to expand its economic sphere of influence in a sustainable (and non-threatening manner) and seeks connectivity across greater Eurasia, across the very pathways that the ancient Silk Road took.

The second framework proposed offers a grand strategic lens to comprehend Indian agency in Central Asia. This grand strategic lens argues that there exists a nascent Indian grand strategy, which is slowly being enunciated as India acquires the economic and military capabilities that compliment its rising power status. This grand strategy shapes India’s perceptions of the outside world, premised upon its own particular national security needs. And, it is a valuable tool for comprehending Indian ambitions in Central Asia. Indian grand strategy divides the world into concentric circles, and Central Asia’s location in the second circle, or India’s extended neighbourhood, explains India’s attempts to seek influence in the region and counter that of other powers. This grand strategic perspective explains the fourth determinant: India’s great-power ambitions and its consequent attempt to exercise sway in the region through its economic and soft power, comparable to that of other players. Both conjectural frameworks offered in this study therefore support the validity of the initial hypothesis and identification of the determinants.

In strategic terms, what are the regional security concerns of the CARs and the national security objectives of India that foster engagement between the two in this field?

India has manifold national security apprehensions that emerge from the greater South and Central Asia regions. The CARs echo similar concerns, and these have formed the basis for the burgeoning security and strategic cooperation between the two. India’s national security concerns emanate from both outside and inside its
borders. The perpetual disquiet in the AF-PAK region, the withdrawal of the West from Afghanistan, and the emboldening of the Taliban and other extremist groupings affiliated to it are of deep concern to India, given its past experiences during the Afghan and Tajik civil wars. It fears Pakistan’s ability to leverage the disquiet in the AF-PAK region; to support Islamic religious extremists; to wreak havoc in J&K (which continues to be disputed by India and Pakistan); and to encourage cross-border terror attacks on Indian soil. In addition, its anxieties are compounded by the effects growing religious extremism in the region could have on the delicate construction of its own national fabric between a Hindu majority and an occasionally disenchanted large Muslim minority. Finally, given its experiences in the Kargil War, India is concerned by the role radical and terror-groups in the region can play in stoking tensions between India and Pakistan – both nuclear-armed states – and their ability to attack the integrity of the Pakistani state itself, a worst-case scenario in which Pakistan’s nukes could fall into the arms of these very groups.

Relatedly, the CARs too see the presence of radical cross-border outfits and religious extremism as a major challenge and hazard. Elites in the CARs fear the linkages between Islamic radicalism and the various opposition groupings that question their authoritarian rule. Based on their own experiences with the fallouts of the Afghan and Tajik Civil wars, the CARs are mindful of the threat that a Taliban return to power in Afghanistan could pose to them, through its support of the drug trade, arms trafficking and radical groups in Central Asia. This shared threat perception by India and the CARs fosters engagement between the two in this field.

*What drives India to seek energy cooperation with the CARs and what is the current state of this cooperation?*

India’s energy overtures to the CARs are driven by internal compulsions to secure its energy future and its need to diversify the sources of its energy imports. In addition, Indian elites see energy cooperation with the CARs as a base upon which to build greater trade and economic engagement. India’s energy needs are rising precipitously, keeping with the size of its mammoth population and its rapid economic growth. Its energy requirements are focussed on alleviating poverty and ensuring consistent growth, and it is clear that its domestic energy resources are increasingly insufficient
in meeting these requirements. Estimates suggest that India will be the world’s largest net energy importer by 2030, importing over half of its requirements. A majority of India’s energy imports are comprised of hydrocarbons (oil and gas) and uranium ore for nuclear fuel. Central Asia’s bountiful energy resources are therefore seen as a key component of India’s diversification of its sources away from the Middle East and Africa. Further, India sees participation in the Central Asian energy sector as essential to responding to China’s so-far unchecked ambitions in the region – as both countries compete for natural resources across the world – and as a platform to engage the CARs economically and build on its trade and connectivity aspirations.

The CARs are receptive to India’s presence in their energy sectors, and they see India’s emergence as a possible counter to their dependence on Russia and China as the only destinations for Central Asian energy. India currently has a minor presence in the Kazakh oil and gas sector, and is intent on the realisation of the TAPI pipeline from Turkmenistan. In addition to this, India’s recent imports of Kazakh and Uzbek uranium ore are testament to the growing energy cooperation between India and the CARs.

*What are the greater motivations for Indian trade and economic engagement with the CARs?*

This study argues that India sees trade and economic engagement with the CARs as essential to expanding its economic sphere of influence to include Central Asia; as an important step in building regional economic integration across South and Central Asia, thus spreading the benefits of economic prosperity as a tool to bring peace to the broader region; and as a tool of influence, complimentary to its soft-power, in order to achieve its great-power ambitions.

With a growing global economic presence, India sees trade with and investment in Central Asia as a logical step forward in deepening its engagement. Its comparative advantages in the IT and Knowledge Processing sectors play a large role in this. From a broader perspective, it sees economic liberalisation and growing regional economic integration as a way of addressing its issues with Pakistan, and bringing prosperity to Afghanistan in the long run. It hopes to engage Afghanistan and Pakistan in its trade
with the CARs and Eurasia, and use economics as a way forward for peace and a sustainable future in its immediate and extended neighbourhoods. In addition, its economic engagement goes hand in hand with facets of its soft power, as India attempts to build its reputation in the region.

India sees the region as a conduit for greater connectivity to the Eurasian continent, given the CARs’ strategic location at the heart of all of the major transport corridors. These networks include surface transport linkages, digital communication grids, and education and healthcare hubs, and will facilitate sustained interaction for India with Russia, the CARs, parts of Eastern Europe, and the Caucuses, reconnecting it to regions it was cut off from when the old Silk Routes collapsed.

*What are India’s great-power ambitions and how are they linked to its strategy in Central Asia?*

Indian elites see the country’s great-power ambitions as natural, and stemming from its status not just as a state but also as a great civilisation, with its ancient Hindu and Buddhist roots. To them, this understanding of India’s great-power status is driven by more than conventional military and economic superiority, and originates from a sense of moral authority, scientific and cultural temper, and India’s post-colonial status and non-interventionist foreign policy. India’s great power-ambitions can be traced back to its independence and the vision of Jawaharlal Nehru, its first Prime Minister.

According to scholars, India’s great-power ambitions are driven by its need for foreign policy autonomy; its need to secure the integrity of India’s external and internal borders; its ability to generate economic growth and greater social inclusion; and its desire to secure diplomatic recognition as a leading power in the world. From this perspective, its success or failure in Central Asia – a vital region within its extended neighbourhood – will be telling. And, this has been evident in its policies in the region so far. It has taken a largely independent foreign policy position, without structuring deep alliances with any major powers in the region; it has engaged in security cooperation with the CARs in an attempt to nullify the various existential threats that emerge from the broader region; it sees Central Asia as important to its
expanding sphere of economic influence and as a vital source of energy resources; and, it seeks recognition from the CARs, using the many facets of its soft-power.

*How does India exercise its soft power and use its cultural capital in the region?*

India’s use of soft power, which capitalises on its cultural capital in the region, is directly linked to its great-power ambitions. Indian elites see success in Central Asia (and India’s extended neighbourhood) as essential to building a narrative that tells of an Indian civilization emerging as a great power. India uses a soft-power approach to compliment its economic, security, and energy overtures in the CARs, and often relies on its soft power and cultural capital to make up the deficits in its cooperation in other fields. India displays different facets of its soft power in the region – in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the poorest of the CARs, India makes extensive use of its Development Cooperation programs, providing training, education and humanitarian assistance. With the other states, in addition to training, India plays up its knowledge sector advantages, and has committed to building a pan-Central Asia e-Network, creating healthcare facilities and engaging in scientific and technical exchanges. In addition, India uses popular culture, its political values, and its foreign policy as devices in constructing influence in Central Asia, given the civilizational affinities India shares with the region.

*How has India interacted with other powers in Central Asia – both in bilateral and multilateral terms?*

India’s direct interaction with Russia and China (the two powers this dissertation studied) in Central Asia has been limited. India and Russia share a durable relationship that dates back to the fifties. The Soviet Union was India’s premier ally for much of the Cold War period, and Moscow facilitated links between India and the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics. While both countries see eye to eye on a plethora of issues in the region, their engagement has been sporadic with limited security cooperation since the nineties, largely due to the colossal difference in the levels of influence that each has in the region. Yet scholars identify a number of “convergences of interest” that both share, and many within India’s elite believe that partnership with Russia is the best way forward for India in the region. In a similar
vein, the Russian-led EEU is seen as an innovative and novel option for India to engage with Central Asia economically, given Russia’s encouragement of a trade pact with India; its support of the INSTC transport corridor and the Chabahar port project in Iran; and its backing of the TAPI and IPI pipelines. Finally, the fact that both India and Russia realise that a closer partnership in the future could help counter growing Chinese dominance in the region, augments this idea.

On the other hand, India and China continue to share an awkward relationship – a function of their disagreement on border issues, China’s objections to India’s support of the Dalai Lama, India’s lingering mistrust of Chinese intentions as a result of the 1965 war, and China’s perpetual support for Pakistan. Despite this, China is India’s largest trading partner, and its importance to India looks set to increase. In Central Asia, India has had limited interaction with China, except in Kazakhstan where China twice outbid India in a high-stakes game for Central Asian energy fields. Yet, as many Indian elites acknowledge, China potentially holds the key to a greater Indian role in Central Asia, and can facilitate overland trade access through Tibet and Xinjiang, as well Indian entry into the SCO. India sees the SCO as the most viable multilateral forum to economically engage with the CARs, and is currently waiting on acceptance of its membership.

India’s interactions with Russia and China (and to a certain degree, the West) in Central Asia underline Delhi’s implicit understanding that, for it to succeed in the region, it needs a strong bilateral partnership with a major power, and a multilateral platform to engage with the CARs.

*What are the reasons for India’s limited success in the region so far?*

The fact that Indian strategy in Central Asia has seen limited success is due to a combination of its own shortcomings and a plethora of geopolitical factors that work against India. Of the factors that do not lie in its control, perhaps the biggest barrier has been its geographic position and its lack of a shared border with the region. Dependent on Pakistan and China for access to Central Asia, India has had little luck in its quest for overland trade routes, and has been forced to seek a circuitous route through Iran and Russia to trade with the CARs. Similarly, its biggest energy
endeavour, the TAPI pipeline, remains susceptible to the unbaiting situation in AFGHANISTAN and its own tetchy relationship with Pakistan and China. And, notwithstanding the narrative grandstanding by Indian and Central Asian elites and India’s recent economic growth, questions remain as to what kind of aspirational values India presents to the CARs. As a secular, multi-ethnic, democracy with massive levels of poverty, India is not seen in the same way as China and Russia is by the elites of the CARs, who see much more similarity between their ambitions and the models for development put out by China and Russia.

The geopolitical factors that work against India are further compounded by India’s own shortcomings and together have ensured India’s limited profile in the region. India continues to have significant strategic failings and a misfiring strategic culture, which manifests itself in the lack of muscle India has displayed economically and in the energy sector in Central Asia. Additionally, India’s limited diplomatic resources and institutional capability dedicated to servicing more than the needs of its foreign policy, has added to India’s woes in the region. All of these assume additional significance when combined with India’s historical failures and inability to build on its presence in Central Asia in the nineties. Yet, as a number of scholars have suggested, perhaps the bar for success for India has been set too high, as a result of the discursive inflation engaged in by Indian and Central Asian elites. And, perhaps, India’s limited success should not really be perceived as a failure.

8.2 Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

The major caveat of this work is the dynamism and fluidity of both the subject and object of study. This dissertation looked at the motivations behind Indian strategy in Central Asia since the creation of the independent CARs, a time period of slightly over two decades. In this period, Indian strategy and motivations in the region have undergone several changes, as was evident with the enunciation of the CCA policy in 2012. And, on a broader level, Indian foreign policy has undergone paradigm shifts after the 1998 Nuclear Tests, 9/11, and, more recently, after the arrival of PM Narendra Modi in May 2014. Similarly, the CARs themselves have been subject to much uncertainty, and continue to be so. Even during the writing of this dissertation, much has changed in the region, as the West withdraws from Afghanistan and China
marches on toward economic dominance, placing Central Asia at the heart of its SREB plan. Therefore, while this dissertation attempts to make a contemporary contribution to the field, there is always a chance that what is valid today, will not be so tomorrow.

Also, this work has focussed exclusively on the Indian perspective, providing limited insight into Central Asian perspectives on the subject. While extensive fieldwork in Central Asia would have facilitated additional insight into the bilateral relationship, it would not have been feasible within the subject of this dissertation, and is hence suggested as a future avenue for study given the limited availability of knowledge on Central Asian thinking about the region’s ties to India. Other empirical limitations include the reliability of interviewed elites, especially those serving in official capacities (or recently retired), given the sensitivity of the subject matter to India’s national security issues. While every attempt was made to elicit complete responses from them, hints were often offered instead of answers, and some of the conclusions drawn were proffered in interviews with academics and researchers.

On the subject of Indian strategy in Central Asia, certain avenues for further research presented themselves during the course of this study.

From a theoretical perspective, while not used within this dissertation, scholar Nayef Al-Rodhan’s concept of “Meta Geopolitics”\(^1\) emerges as a potential alternative geopolitical explanation for Indian agency in Central Asia. In his theory, Al-Rodhan argues a “multidimensional view of state power comprising both soft and hard tools: domestic politics, economics, military and security issues, and diplomacy,”\(^2\) an approach that could very well provide justification for Indian agency in the region. A similar approach was used to compare the EU and SCO’s agency in Central Asia in a recent dissertation,\(^3\) and deserves examination in the case of India.

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At the bilateral level, it is clear that India’s relationship with Kazakhstan is burgeoning and will soon require a sustained commitment by Indian elites, breaking with India’s regional approach to the region. As the region’s largest, richest and most-developed country, Kazakhstan’s importance to India will only grow as it exercises greater influence in the SCO and the EEU, and emerges as the de facto leader of the region. There has been little scholarship on this subject in recent years, and an exploration into the bilateral relationship is suggested, as a potential vital area of further research for academics and the Indian establishment.

Finally, an argument can be made for using the structure (the determinants) and framework of this thesis in the comprehension of Indian agency in other regions within its extended neighbourhood, which are similar to Central Asia. India’s security, energy, economic, and great-power ambitions and overtures are not exclusive to its strategy in Central Asia, and can be seen within its policies in other resource-rich and tactically important areas like Africa and the Middle-East. The East Coast of Africa offers a similar geopolitical milieu to Central Asia, with its strategic location in the extended neighbourhood of the Indian Ocean, its abundant natural resources, and fast-growing economies. In addition, China’s growing presence and that of other world powers, and the existence of a large Indian diaspora (India’s cultural capital), reflect the resemblance of the region to Central Asia and suggest that a similar analysis could be performed.

8.3 The Way Forward for India

The way forward for India in Central Asia is as problematical as it is full of promise. India’s foreign policy received a major fillip with the arrival of Modi as PM in May 2014. Not dependent on a pernicious coalition to stay in power in Delhi, Modi has had a free hand to plot India’s revival on the world stage, unlike his predecessor Manmohan Singh, who took a low profile internationally for much of his second term in power. In the last year, Modi has been a peripatetic leader, and has made a significant attempt to recast India’s relations with the US, Russia, China, and Japan, all of whom are important in the context of Central Asia. In addition, he is scheduled to visit all five of the CARs in the summer of 2015, underlining the importance he places on the region. While the end of this foreign policy stasis in Delhi is a welcome
sign, there is much yet to be done in Central Asia for India, and more that lies out of its control.

The India – Central Asia relationship is one that is characterized by a high “degree of uncertainty” as both Indian and Western scholars note.\(^4\) This uncertainty stems largely from the geopolitical environments in which both lay, and global political tribulations that are beyond their control. Geopolitically, the unravelling situation in Afghanistan with the withdrawal of the West, and the re-emergence of the Taliban can easily upset any progress in the India – Central Asia relationship. In addition to this conundrum, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, and continued Islamic sectarian strife in the Middle East and Pakistan, underline the complexity of the broader issues that policymakers in India and the CARs must take into account. Politically, India’s ties to the CARs will continue to remain hostage to its tetchy relationship with Pakistan, and the graver issues it must resolve with China, as it desperately seeks access. Its attempt to circumvent these have also fallen prey to global political complications that are outside its hands. India’s ambitions to join the SCO have yet to see fruition, and attempts to partner with Russia in the region have also fallen victim to Russia’s fallout with the West, and its increasing beholdence to China.

Despite the deck being stacked against India and despite its litany of past failures, there exists a near consensus amongst elites that India’s time is yet to come in the region.\(^5\) The reasoning behind this argues that, as India’s international profile rises commensurate with its economic growth, it will incentivise greater cooperation in the CARs. India’s comparative advantages in the IT and knowledge sectors of the service economy, and its large pool of English-speaking technical graduates, present a golden opportunity for the CARs as they structure their economies away from a dependence on the sale of natural resources. In addition to this, India’s democratic attributes – the very qualities some experts have criticised as having no value for the CARs, could come in handy in the long-term, as the CARs themselves undergo transformations after their first generation of political leadership pass on the baton.


Uncertainty or optimism aside, as interviews with Indian elites revealed, there remain some concrete strides that India can take to step up its engagement with Central Asia. While a detailed discussion of these is beyond the scope of this chapter, the most conducive of these are offered below.

**Politically**
- A continued focus on bilateralism and multilateralism, stressing India’s ties with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan at the bilateral level, and through the SCO and the EEU at a multilateral level.
- Greater political cooperation with Russia and Iran in Central Asia and where feasible with pragmatic ties with China and Pakistan to facilitate trade with the region.
- Stronger security interaction and a comprehensive partnership with the CARs in Afghanistan in order to secure Indian interests.

**Diplomatically**
- Sustained high-level contact through visits and summits. India has been guilty of not paying enough attention to the CARs in the past and needs to make up for this.
- Greater diplomatic strength dedicated to Central Asia, with more officers and larger embassies.
- Governance and institution building assistance to the poorer CARs.

**Economically**
- Government-led investment guarantees for private Indian firms that seek engagement with the CARs.
- Greater Indian investment in the IT, healthcare, education, pharmaceutical and space sectors in Central Asia – all burgeoning areas for cooperation.
- Indian capacity building assistance in the creation of a service sector as the CARs transform their economies away from natural resource dependency.
Energy Security

- Greater government-led investment in Central Asian energy fields and resources.
- Sustained dialogue with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and secure greater access to uranium ore resources.
- Involvement in a regional electricity mechanism with the southern CARs, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Connectivity

- Support for the INSTC and Chabahar projects along with negotiations with Pakistan and Afghanistan for overland access to the region.
- Greater air connectivity with the aim of a daily flight to each Central Asian capital from Delhi and Mumbai.
- India needs to live up to its promises announced in the CCA policy and build key networking and communication infrastructure in the region.

Culturally

- Increased people-to-people contact – India should open up its Visa-on-Arrival program to all the CARs to facilitate this.
- More scholarships for Indian students, researchers and artistes to visit Central Asia and vice-versa.
- Increased Indian Developmental Cooperation for the poorer CARs.
- A greater Indian presence in popular culture, television programming and news broadcasting in Central Asia.
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All interviews unless mentioned otherwise were conducted in New Delhi and Mumbai between October 2014 and February 2015. Interviews were either recorded or transcribed or both, depending on the preference of the interviewee. Some interviewees preferred not to be named given the sensitivity of the subject matter to their work.

1. Ajay Bisaria – Joint Secretary (Eurasia), MEA
2. Ajay Patnaik – Professor and Former Head, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, JNU
3. Amb. Neelam Singh Deo, IFS (Retd.) – Director, Gateway House, and Former Indian Ambassador to Denmark
4. Amb. Phunchok Stobdan – Senior Fellow and Eurasia Centre Coordinator, IDSA and Former Indian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan
5. Amb. V. Ashok, IFS – Indian Ambassador to the Czech Republic (Interviewed in Prague in July 2014)
6. Amrullah Saleh – Former Director of the National Security Directorate of Afghanistan
7. Anonymous – Indian Capitalist who considered investing in Central Asia
8. Anonymous – Retired Senior Official, MEA and Former Indian Ambassador
9. Anonymous – Senior Diplomat, Central Asian Embassy
10. Ashok Behuria – Research Fellow and South Asia Centre Coordinator, IDSA
11. Aziz Burkanov – Assistant Professor, Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan
13. Brig. Rumel Dahiya, SM (Retd.) – Deputy Director, IDSA
14. C Raja Mohan – Distinguished Fellow, ORF
15. Comm. C. Uday Bhaskar (Retd.) – Distinguished Fellow, Society for Policy Studies and Former Officiating Director, IDSA
16. Jagannath Panda – Research Fellow and East Asia Centre Coordinator, IDSA
17. Lt. Gen. Gautam Moorthy, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, ADC (Retd.) – Member, Armed Forces Tribunal and Former Director General Ordnance Services, Indian Army
18. Lt. Gen. RK Sawhney, PVSM, ASM (Retd.) – Dean, Centre for Defence Studies, Vivekananda International Foundation and Former Deputy Chief of Staff, Indian Army
19. M. Ashraf Haidari – Deputy Ambassador, Embassy of Afghanistan
20. Maj. Gen. B.K. Sharma, AVSM, SM (Retd.) – Deputy Director (Research) and Head, Centre of Strategic Studies and Simulation, USI
21. Meena Singh Roy – Research Fellow and West Asia Centre Coordinator, IDSA
22. Nandan Unnikrishnan – Vice President and Senior Fellow, ORF
23. Prof. Nirmala Joshi (Retd.) – Director, India-Central Asia Foundation and Former Head, Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies, JNU
24. Prof. SD Muni (Retd.) – Distinguished Fellow, IDSA and Former Indian Special Envoy and Ambassador
25. Rana Banerji, IAS (Retd.) – Former Special Secretary, Research and Analysis Wing
26. Shebonti Ray Dadwal – Research Fellow and Non-Traditional Security Centre Coordinator, IDSA
27. Smruti Pattanaik – Research Fellow, IDSA
28. Vishal Chandra – Associate Fellow, IDSA
29. Wilson John – Vice President and Senior Fellow, ORF