



## NSA Meet with Central Asia

**For Prelims:** Central Asia, National Security Advisor (NSA), China's Belt and Road Initiative, Chabahar Port, Ashgabat Agreement, INSTC,

**For Mains:** India - Central Asia relations, Securing India's interests in Central Asia, Recent geopolitical developments and China's growing influence in Central Asia, India's role in Afghanistan Humanitarian Assistance, Significance of Chabahar Port for India

### Why in News?

The **National Security Advisor (NSA)** of India, for the first time, hosted a special meeting with his counterparts from Central Asian countries - **Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan**.

- Earlier in January 2022, the Prime Minister of India hosted the **first India-Central Asia Summit** in virtual format.



### What are the Key Highlights about the Meetings of NSAs?

- **30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** This was the **first time that NSAs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were in Delhi** for a high-level security meeting.
  - The meeting **coincides with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties** between India and the Central Asian countries.

- **Afghanistan the Centre of Talks:** The focus was mainly on the security [situation in Afghanistan](#) and the **threat of terrorism originating from the country** under the Taliban.
- **Deliberations over Chabahar:** The NSAs **supported India's proposal to include Chabahar port within the framework of the INSTC ([International North-South Transport Corridor](#))** connecting Iran to Russia via Central Asia.
- **Other Deliberations:** Deliberations over the need for **collective and coordinated action** against the “**misuse of [new and emerging technologies](#), arms and drugs trafficking, [abuse of cyber space](#) to spread [disinformation](#) and [unmanned aerial systems](#)”.**
- **Institutionalisation of Mechanism:** During the summit, the leaders **agreed to institutionalise the Summit mechanism** by deciding to hold it biannually.
  - An **India-Central Asia Secretariat in New Delhi** would be set up to support the new mechanism.

## Who is a National Security Advisor in India?

- The National Security Advisor (NSA) is the **primary advisor to the Prime Minister of India**. He also **presides over the National Security Council (NSC)**. The current NSA is **Ajit Doval**.
- The NSC of India is a three-tiered organisation that **oversees political, economic, energy and security issues of strategic concern**.
  - It was formed in 1998, where all aspects of national security are deliberated upon.
  - NSC **operates within the executive office of the PM**, liaising between the government's executive branch and the intelligence services.
  - The **Ministers of Home Affairs, Defence, External Affairs and Finance are its members**.

## How are India's Relations with Central Asia?

- **Historic Ties:** Central Asia is undoubtedly a **zone of India's civilisational influence**; the **Ferghana Valley** was India's crossing-point of the **Great Silk Road**.
  - [Buddhism](#) also found inroads in several Central Asian cities in the form of Stupas and Monasteries.
  - **Men of prominence** such as **Amir Khusrau, Dehlawi, Al-Biruni** etc. having Central Asian roots came and made their name in India.
- **Diplomatic Ties:** India considers the Central Asian countries as the “**heart of Asia**” and they are also members of the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#).
  - Central Asian countries are “**aware**” of **Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism** and its links to various terror groups.
- **Like-Mindedness in Combatting Terrorism:** India and the Central Asian nations have **similarities in approach in countering terrorism** and the threat of radicalisation.
  - The latest meeting called for the early adoption of the [UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism](#), which India had first proposed in 1996, but has been held up for decades, **primarily over differences on the definition of terrorism**.
- **India's Role in Afghanistan Situation:** India and the Central Asian countries have shared concerns over terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and its implications for regional security. **India has been a strong proponent for re-establishing peace in Afghanistan**.
  - In November 2021, India had hosted a **regional dialogue on the situation in Afghanistan**, which was attended by NSAs of Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- **Stand on Chabahar Port:** India has registered significant progress recently through **renovation of Chabahar port**. It is also a member of the [Ashgabat Agreement](#).
  - The port played an important role during the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan by delivering humanitarian goods to the Afghan people by international organisations.
    - Prior to the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, India delivered 100,000 tonnes of wheat and medicines to Afghanistan via the port's **Shahid Beheshti terminal developed by India**.

## What are the Challenges in Robust India-Central Asia Ties?

- There are **obstructions of physical connectivity** due to Pakistan's hostility and Afghan instability.
- **Politically, Central Asian countries are highly fragile** and prone to threats like **terrorism & Islamic fundamentalism** making the region a volatile and unstable market.
- **Involvement of China** in the region by the **Belt and Road Initiative** has significantly undermined India's influence in the region.
- **Porous border and unbridled corruption** along with the proximity with regions of soaring opium production (**Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle**) makes the region a **powerhouse for drug and money trafficking**.

## Way Forward

- When others engage with Central Asia from their own perspectives; China from economic, Turkey from ethnic, and the Islamic world from religious - **it would be befitting for India to give a cultural and historical perspective to the region** through a summit-level annual meet.
  - A **value-driven cultural policy** can help strengthen India-Central Asia bonds.
- India's growing global visibility and key contributions to multilateral forums like the **SCO** have catapulted India from an observer into a **critical stakeholder in the region**.
  - Central Asia provides India with the **right platform to leverage its political, economic and cultural connections** to play a leading role further in **Eurasia**.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

### Prelims

**Q. What is the importance of developing Chabahar Port by India? (2017)**

- (a) India's trade with African countries will enormously increase.
- (b) India's relations with oil-producing Arab countries will be strengthened.
- (c) India will not depend on Pakistan for access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- (d) Pakistan will facilitate and protect the installation of a gas pipeline between Iraq and India.

**Ans: (c)**

### Mains

**Q. A number of outside powers have entrenched themselves in Central Asia, which is a zone of interest to India. Discuss the implications, in this context, of India's joining the Ashgabat Agreement. (2018)**

**Source: IE**