



Indian Council
of World Affairs



Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia



Fostering Stability and Cooperation
in a Dynamic Continent

ATHAR ZAFAR





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First Published, September 2024

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ISBN: 978-93-83445-86-8

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5
Section I	
Formation and Evolution of CICA.....	11
Section II	
Cooperation in Asia in Security and Other Spheres.....	37
Section III	
India-CICA Engagement.....	55
Section IV	
Transformation & Way Forward.....	67
Conclusion.....	73
About the Author.....	79



INTRODUCTION



The Asian continent, a vast expanse inhabited by billions of people, is the largest and most diversified continent of the world.¹ Home of about 60 per cent of humanity, its population is projected to reach approximately 5 billion people in 2030.² Asia is the birthplace of many ancient civilizations, such as the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia, and the origin of almost all major world faith systems, predominant philosophies, and popular values. The continent is immensely rich in natural energy and other resources. Asia is connected with Europe and Africa in the north and west, and to Australia in the south. Asia's geography, linking the Indian, Pacific, and Arctic oceans, includes several critical transportation corridors. These corridors, comprising isthmuses, passes, seas, straits, and canals, facilitate both intercontinental and regional land and oceanic trade and commerce. The Asian continent has profoundly contributed to the humanity's political, economic and cultural growth trajectories throughout history. The continent contributed 42 per cent of the world GDP (at purchasing power parity) in 2021, which was more than any other region.³ According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Asia will contribute roughly 60 per cent of global economic growth in 2024.⁴

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The challenge of providing security across Asia's vast and diverse landscape has indeed been a longstanding issue, marked by various complexities and historical legacies. Efforts have long been made to achieve a sense of security through solidarity among Asian nations, but this has proven to be a challenging task.

Throughout its history, the continent of Asia has experienced significant growth alongside numerous challenges, including deaths, destruction, and calamities. Many regions in Asia have also endured external aggression, occupation, and colonial rule by foreign powers. These experiences have led to diverse political and developmental trajectories, influencing the continent's various paths of growth and external engagements. Indeed, Asia's diverse historical experiences have resulted in a wide array of political and economic pathways. Presently, different regions and countries within Asia are at varying stages of their social, economic, and political development. This diversity reflects the unique circumstances, policies, and historical contexts of each nation and region. Some regions and countries in Asia are also faced with non-traditional security challenges, including terrorism, drug trafficking and cyber threats.

The challenge of providing security across Asia's vast and diverse landscape has indeed been a longstanding issue, marked by various complexities and historical legacies. Efforts have long been made to achieve a sense of security through solidarity among Asian nations, but this has proven to be a challenging task. Various factors contribute to this difficulty, including the continent's vast



geographical size, diverse cultures, differing political systems, historical conflicts, and economic disparities. Bringing all countries on a common platform requires a combination of vision, resources and capabilities, which no single country seems to have the potential for. The use of division and conflict as a tool in the past continue to impact Asia at present. These historical legacies have often led to unresolved territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and geopolitical rivalries that persist to this day. It has caused trust deficit and lack of confidence of cooperation among the countries of Asia has been hampering regional solidarity.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s had profound geopolitical implications for Asia and Eurasia, particularly with the emergence of new nations and the reconfiguration of political and economic landscapes. It marked a significant shift where more nations in Asia could independently determine their political and economic paths. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which had exerted influence over vast territories of Central Asia, played a pivotal role in reshaping the region. Central Asia, comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, emerged as a focal point for new dynamics in Asian diplomacy and cooperation.

These Central Asian countries began to explore avenues for collective security and regional integration following the departure of the USSR as the primary external power in the region. New geopolitical dynamics, particularly in Central Asia, which sought to define its role and relationships in the neighbourhood, started to take shape. Central Asian regional countries moved to find common factors of collective security. This period spurred a drive towards Asian amity,

CICA became more popular gradually. This initiative envisaged a robust mechanism for preventive diplomacy, peaceful dispute resolution and cooperation in the field of regional security and stability.

encouraging the countries to engage with their neighbours and regional powers to foster mutual cooperation and security.

A formal initiative came from Kazakhstan just a year after its independence in December 1991. As part of preventive diplomacy, the initiative was though originally proposed as Conference on Interaction and Confidence building Measures in Asia (CICMA), the acronym CICA became more popular gradually. This initiative envisaged a robust mechanism for preventive diplomacy, peaceful dispute resolution and cooperation in the field of regional security and stability. Initially, progress on the CICA initiative was slow as member countries faced significant economic and political challenges. Nevertheless, over time, CICA gained momentum and emerged as a pivotal pan-Asian platform for Asian countries for discussing and fostering cooperation on security-related matters.

Recently, CICA has decided to transform itself into a full-fledged regional international organization to put more vigour in regional cooperation and widen the scope of collaboration in spheres beyond security. During the sixth CICA Summit, which was held in Astana

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in 2022, the ‘Astana Statement’ was adopted, emphasizing a systematic, inclusive, and open negotiation process for the gradual, incremental, and consensus-based transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international regional organisation. Indeed, the transition is influenced by ongoing changes in the regional and international scenarios. Not only aspirational but structural changes have been underway at CICA. The position of Chief Executive Officer has been replaced with the position of Secretary General, who will head the CICA administration and secretariat. This change is intended to streamline governance and administrative functions within the organization.

The transformation of CICA signifies a commitment among member states to deepen collaboration across various spheres beyond traditional security concerns. Over the years, CICA has expanded its scope and established interactions with various international and regional organizations and forums. This proactive engagement has laid the groundwork for mutually beneficial cooperation, enhancing synergy. Today, nearly three decades since its inception, CICA has demonstrated its effectiveness as a regional mechanism promoting peace, security, and stability across a vast expanse—from the Pacific Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and from the Urals to the Indian Ocean.

In 2014, CICA and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) secretariats signed a mutual trust agreement as both organisations share views on many common issues, including security, dispute resolution, opposition to extremism etc. CICA has established cooperation with international and regional organisations, including the United Nations and its various agencies, SCO-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, Economic Cooperation

CICA is bracing itself, counting on its members' increased and diversified cooperation, to respond to the changing regional and international dynamics and to forge closer cooperation among its members in facing the emerging security and other challenges in the wider Eurasian region.

Organisation (ECO) and the Arab League. It creates a good synergy of international efforts in solving security problems both at regional and global levels. CICA continues to forge greater external linkages with organisations such as Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) etc.

In view of these developments, it seems that CICA is bracing itself, counting on its members' increased and diversified cooperation, to respond to the changing regional and international dynamics and to forge closer cooperation among its members in facing the emerging security and other challenges in the wider Eurasian region.

It becomes important, particularly from India's perspective, to understand the evolution of a cooperative security architecture in Asia through initiatives like CICA. The present Sapru House paper studies the formation and growth trajectory of CICA, how various member countries are engaging and contributing to raise a regional security framework through CICA. There is also a section on recommendations to further enhance the initiative's efficiency.

For the research, both primary and secondary sources have been referred to, including from the CICA's official web pages, CICA members' official documents available in public domain, and interaction with subject experts.



SECTION I

**FORMATION AND
EVOLUTION OF CICA**



The idea of the formation of the CICA took shape within the complex geopolitical and geo-economic landscapes of the Asian and Eurasian region in late 1980s and early 1990s. During this period several factors were impacting the regional stability and security. For a long time, the Asian and Eurasian region has been lacking a comprehensive regional security architecture that covers the whole region on generally agreed principles, and holds effectiveness and authority in preserving and promoting peace and stability on its land, water and air. Security in Asia has often been vulnerable to internal and international exigencies. The former Soviet Republics, five of them becoming independent in Central Asia, three in South Caucasus, were facing economic hardships and suddenly found themselves without any security architecture. Countries in Central Asia and South Caucasus had unsettled borders. Further, central Eurasia and some of its periphery areas were dealing with the insecurity caused by terrorism and separatism. From within the region of Central Asia, the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-97) posed a serious security challenge not only to the country itself but also to its neighbours. Thousands of people died in the Tajik civil war.

Central Asia's southern neighbour Afghanistan was in turmoil for a long time. Taliban's rise in Afghanistan was a cause of concern among its Central Asian neighbours Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and

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Uzbekistan. The al Qaida's September 2001 attacks on the US also occurred during the period. The US accused the Taliban of providing sanctuary to the attackers and Central Asian countries extended support to the subsequent international military campaign. Multiple military bases and installations were set up in the region by foreign powers, including in Karshi-Khanabad in southern Uzbekistan and Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, to conduct the military operations against Afghanistan. The US air force planes were given permission to refuel at the Ayni air base near Dushanbe. Kazakhstan had given over flight rights and was part of the Northern Distribution Network.

The Asian region has borne the brunt of international terrorism, land and maritime boundary disputes, inter-state conflicts, major power rivalry and their conduct in the region, non-adherence to UN resolutions and established norms, military aggressions, pandemics and natural calamities. Further, tension and conflicts were raging in the Gulf region, and some other parts of Asia and Eurasia were dealing with separatism and other transnational crimes.

In recent years, the need of pan-Asian or Eurasian security has been felt more than ever. Asia is home to largest standing armies of the world. The continent has a large number of missile producing and exporting countries. In recent years, Asia's military spending has observed 'large increases', especially in the wake of volatile security situations in various regions.⁵ According to the Stockholm

Kazakhstan aimed to create a conducive atmosphere for economic growth by addressing security issues in the region. The idea of CICA emerged as a platform to promote dialogue, confidence building, and cooperation among Asian countries.

International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) total global military expenditure in 2023 increased by 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022 and reached US\$ 2443 billion. Further, armed forces, including from the US, UK, France and Germany, are present and operate in Asian and Pacific areas.

It became imperative to forge a reliable and cooperative security mechanism in Asia. Asian countries, therefore, needed to evolve certain ground rules that would promote peace and security in Asia by reconciling the diverse concerns and interests of the countries of the continent. A comprehensive regional security architecture was needed that could address the diverse security needs and promote peace and stability.

Kazakhstan was newly independent and full of economic potential to explore. Located in the heart of Central Asia, Kazakhstan recognized the need for a platform to address security concerns in the region faced with political instability, economic challenges, and emerging threats such as terrorism and separatism. Kazakhstan aimed to create a conducive atmosphere for economic growth by addressing security issues in the region. The idea of CICA emerged as a platform to promote dialogue, confidence building, and cooperation among Asian countries.



■ Kazakhstan's vision of CICA

Kazakhstan played a pivotal role in visualizing and giving shape to the notion of CICA. The idea of achieving common security through confidence building measures among Asian states was proposed by Kazakhstan, which had planned giving up its substantive nuclear weapons stockpile. The country had the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal on its territory.⁶ By relinquishing its nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan demonstrated its commitment and pursuit of peace and stability in the region and beyond. Kazakhstan showed its global leadership in nuclear non-proliferation by renouncing its Soviet-legacy nuclear weapons in 1993 and closed the Semipalatinsk Test Site.⁷ Kazakhstan has been successful in increasing its international stature as a country in leading the efforts towards regional and international peace and stability. In subsequent years, the country was a venue for negotiations on Iranian nuclear deal and it hosted international meetings on Syria, and the talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Primarily driven by political, economic and security considerations, former and first President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed a novel idea to develop local security architecture for Asia. He explained this concept in his address to the UN General Assembly's 47th session on October 5, 1992.⁸ It may be noted that Kazakhstan had then just been admitted to the UN, and the former President was making his maiden speech from the rostrum of the General Assembly. President Nursultan is considered as the Founder of CICA and October 5 is commemorated as CICA Day.⁹

After initial preparatory years, the initiative got real traction with the complicated security situation in the region in early 2000s.

■ Formation of CICA

The evolution process, formation deliberations and the groundwork of preparatory documents took about a decade since the announcement made by President of Kazakhstan at the UN in 1992. The early years of CICA can be divided into two phases. In the first phase of three years (1992-94) since the UN speech, three meetings of the authorities from the Foreign Ministries of interested countries were organised by Kazakhstan. Gradually, the number of participants increased from 12 to more than 25.¹⁰ It can be said that the main accomplishment of this phase was the participants' agreement on understanding that existing differences must not hinder efforts towards finding concerted solution to problems regarding security. In the second phase, which was approximately from 1995 to 1999, a dedicated Special Working Group was formed to prepare for the Foreign Ministers' meeting of the interested states. The foundational documents for the organization were also prepared in this phase.

The statutory and regulatory documents were prepared and adopted, which created political, administrative and legal cooperation framework within CICA. The two documents adopted by member countries – Charter and Declaration – are considered as bases for cooperation. The Almaty Act¹¹ or the Charter of CICA was adopted at the First Summit meeting held at Almaty in 2002. The other fundamental document is called the Declaration on the



Today, CICA stands as a significant multilateral consultative forum aimed at promoting peace, stability, and cooperation in the vast and diverse continent of Asia.

Principles Guiding Relations between the CICA Member States.¹² It was adopted at the First Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held at Almaty in 1999.

By adopting its founding Charter or the Almaty Act, CICA took a formal shape on 4 June 2002 at the inaugural CICA Heads of State Summit held in the Almaty city, the former capital of Kazakhstan. India has been a founding member of CICA and the 2002 Summit was attended by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Since the inaugural Summit, CICA has convened five other Summits: in 2006 at Almaty, in 2010 at Istanbul, in 2014 at Shanghai, in 2019 at Dushanbe, and in 2022 at Astana.

Currently Kazakhstan is the CICA chairman. So far, Kazakhstan, Turkey, China and Tajikistan have held CICA's chairmanship. The CICA Ministerial Council in March 2024 decided that Azerbaijan will be the CICA Chair in 2024-2026 and host the Seventh Summit in 2026.¹³ The Chairmanship is decided by consensus; however, there is an on-going debate whether to introduce voting to elect the CICA Chairperson, the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General. Role of the Chairmanship includes coordination of activities by the CICA Chair country and Member States.

Today, CICA stands as a significant multilateral consultative forum aimed at promoting peace, stability, and cooperation in the vast and diverse continent of Asia. It was gradually joined by other Asian

CICA already covers about 90 per cent of the territory as well as population of Asia

countries and the initiative now consists of 28 members from total 48 Asian countries. Presently, CICA already covers about 90 per cent of the territory as well as population of Asia.¹⁴ To be a member of the CICA, a state must have at least a part of its territory in Asia.

Other countries, including the US, as well as various international organisations, including United Nations (UN) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), are observers in the forum. The US has been an Observer at least since 2010¹⁵, and it cannot become a member as it is geographically not located in Asia. The granting of the observer status to the US indicates that CICA and its members considered American engagement in Asian security and other affairs positively.

■ CICA's Objectives

On the premise of fundamental principles of sovereignty, non-use of threat or force, territorial integrity and cooperation for all-round development, CICA pursues enhancing regional cooperation through multilateral mechanisms. The purpose of this Asian forum is to promote stability, security and peace within and beyond the

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continent by enhancing cooperation. The defined goals of CICA are: Enhancing cooperation through multilateral approaches; Promoting trade and economic cooperation; Cooperating on environmental issues; Developing confidence building measures to address humanitarian issues; Promoting mutual respect, understanding and tolerance in the relations among civilizations; Preventing proliferation and eventually eliminating weapons of mass destruction; Eradicating the menace of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations; and Combating illicit drug production and trafficking.¹⁶

The initiative envisions a gradual shift towards Asian security cooperation. It was considered that confidence building measures should be taken up in less contested fields and gradually move towards challenging matters. Since the launch of the CICA process, the forum has taken significant efforts to define and form the framework for its activities.

■ Structure of CICA

CICA has taken measures for its institutionalisation, which enables the Member countries to efficiently interact in various areas of common interest. The organizational structure of CICA comprises three main bodies, and a permanent executive – Secretariat – to

provide substantive and administrative support for CICA activities. The three main agencies of CICA are:

CICA Summit: The meeting of heads of state and government is the highest decision-making forum of the initiative. The heads of state or government gather periodically (every four years) to discuss strategic issues, adopt declarations, and provide guidance on the forum's priorities. Since 2002, six CICA summits have been held so far. The seventh summit will be hosted by Azerbaijan in 2026.

Ministerial Meeting: CICA's second most important agency is the Foreign Ministers' meeting. Comprising Foreign Ministers or senior officials, the Ministerial Meeting (every two years) serves as a forum for political dialogue, policy coordination, and the review of CICA's activities.

Senior Officials Committee: Senior Officials Committee is the primary decision-making body for the implementation of agreements and decisions of the above two. It takes decisions on key issues concerning the development of interaction within CICA, as well as administrative and financial issues of the Secretariat's activities and all issues submitted to it by the Special Working Group.

Permanent Secretariat: CICA established its Secretariat at Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan in 2006. The secretariat shifted to Kazakhstan's new capital Astana in 2014. The Secretariat serves as the administrative wing, facilitating communication among member states, organizing meetings and events, and implementing decisions taken by the Summit and Ministerial Meetings. It also performs the tasks by providing administrative, organizational,



technical and informational support for all activities of the forum, including CICA meetings, implementation of CBMs, external relations, assistance to the Chairmanship, and other functions.

The Secretary General – the Executive Director of the Secretariat, is responsible for the activities of the Secretariat, administrative, financial and personnel management, and external cooperation.

In June 2024, CICA started the construction of a new headquarters in the Kazakh capital Astana. At the groundbreaking ceremony, participants laid a ‘time capsule’ within the foundation stone containing a message for future colleagues of the CICA Secretariat. The capsule is intended to be opened in 2049, marking CICA’s 50th anniversary. The new headquarters seeks to be one of the landmark buildings in Astana. The building will consist of four floors with a total area of 4,000 square metres, and a multifunction hall.

■ CICA’s practical activities

CICA is working to build confidence and consensus on a range of interests and concerns across Asia. Recognising that member states have diverse development goals and approaches to international engagement, CICA prioritises step-by-step process to build common structure in Asia for collective security. CICA believes that peace and security can be achieved through dialogue and cooperation, leading to a common indivisible area of security in Asia.¹⁷ Greater interdependence will lead to greater regional stability and prosperity.

CICA Members and Observers

Sl. No	Members	Observers	Observer Organizations	Partner Organizations
1.	Afghanistan	Belarus	International Organization for Migration (IOM)	Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (APK)
2.	Azerbaijan	Indonesia	United Nations (UN)	Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)
3.	Bahrain	Japan	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
4.	Bangladesh	Laos	League of Arab States (LAS)	SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)
5.	Cambodia	Malaysia	Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic States	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
6.	China	Philippines		Eurasian Economic Union
7.	Egypt	Saudi Arabia		
8.	India	Turkmenistan		
9.	Iran	Ukraine		
10.	Iraq	USA		
11.	Israel			
12.	Jordan			
13.	Kazakhstan			
14.	Kuwait			
15.	Kyrgyzstan			
16.	Mongolia			
17.	Pakistan			
18.	Palestine			
19.	Qatar			
20.	Republic of Korea			
21.	Russia			
22.	Sri Lanka			
23.	Tajikistan			
24.	Thailand			
25.	Türkiye			
26.	UAE			
27.	Uzbekistan			
28.	Viet Nam			

Source: CICA website https://www.s-cica.org/index.php?view=page&t=member_states





**Inclusiveness defines all of the activities of CICA.
The CICA Member States enjoy equal status and take
decisions by consensus**

CICA GOVERNING BODIES

Council of Heads of State or Government (Summit)



Supreme governing body that defines priorities, provides policy guidelines and directions and takes decisions at the highest political level

Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Ministerial Council)



Governing body responsible for implementation of decisions and agreements reached at Summits as well as for consideration of current activities of CICA and all issues submitted to it by the SOC

Senior Officials Committee (SOC)



Basic decision-making body for implementation of decisions and agreements of the Summit and Ministerial Council that takes decisions on key issues concerning the development of interaction within CICA, administrative and financial issues of the Secretariat's activities and all issues submitted to it by the SWG

CICA WORKING BODIES

Special Working Group (SWG)



The SWG carries out coordination and management of current activities of CICA, considers, facilitates and monitors all CICA activities, and reports to the SOC

Experts Meetings



Experts Meetings formulate draft Concept Papers and Action Plans on implementation of specific CICA confidence building measures and report to the SWG and/or SOC

Specialised Meetings



On recommendation of the SOC, Specialized Meetings may be convened with participation of relevant ministries, competent national agencies or organizations of the Member States to consider issues of specific and/or technical character

Project Review Committee (PRC) of the CICA Fund



The CICA Fund is a special mechanism for identification of CICA projects and mobilization of voluntary funding for their implementation. The PRC of the CICA Fund considers and approves projects proposed by Member States for funding and voluntary contributions of donors

CICA ADVISORY BODIES

Council of Eminent Persons



Advisory body designed to develop and provide high level advice on a wide range of issues of interaction and development within the framework of CICA

Business Council



Advisory body integrating representatives of business organizations and public authorities of the Member States

Youth Council



Advisory body responsible for coordinating the activities of youth organizations, associations and movements of the Member States

Think Tank Forum (TTF)



Advisory body established for the provision of information and analytical support for CICA activities and to develop interaction among think tanks and research institutions of the Member States

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Building trust and agreement on a variety of interests and issues shared by Asia is the goal of CICA. Understanding the disparities in developmental priorities and accommodating the distinct approaches taken by member states in their international engagements and growth, CICA emphasises a gradual progression towards constructing a shared framework for collective security in Asia. According to CICA, communication and collaboration can result in an indivisible area of security in Asia, which will bring about peace and security in the region. Increased stability and prosperity in the region will result from increased interdependence.

■ Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

The CBMs are an important component of the CICA initiative. Asia is home to a wide range of countries with varying political systems, history, cultures, and security interests. Unequal development

Recognising that member states have diverse development goals and approaches to international engagement, CICA prioritises step-by-step process to build common structure in Asia for collective security.



According to CICA, communication and collaboration can result in an indivisible area of security in Asia, which will bring about peace and security in the region.

between countries and regions could be a source of discontent. Therefore, balanced and collective development is equally important as a goal for achieving stable peace. In this context, building confidence among countries becomes critical to forge regional cooperation. CICA, as an Asian multilateral framework, focuses on enhancing cooperation to promote peace, security and stability in Asia by undertaking confidence building measures in various dimensions. CICA has adopted a CBM approach primarily because of the region's diverse geopolitical landscape and the countries' different historical experiences. These factors have made it challenging to establish a traditional security framework based on partnerships or collective defence.

The CBMs are designed to promote cooperation and understanding between countries, rather than confrontation. This approach is

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The CBMs are applied voluntarily following the step by step approach while the measures identified in it are recommendatory in nature.

more compatible with the region's diverse and complex security environment. In 2004, CICA outlined the CICA Catalogue of CBMs to address five fundamental dimensions: economic, environmental, human, against new challenges and threats, and military-political. The dimensions are further divided in priority areas. This catalogue serves as a crucial tool for achieving CICA's objectives, which was adopted as a 'Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures' in 2021.¹⁸ It includes CBM on public health, energy security and Security of and in the use of information and communication technologies. The CBMs are applied voluntarily following the step by step approach while the measures identified in it are recommendatory in nature.

In order to ensure lasting stability, strengthen mutual confidence the Military-Political Dimension of CBM envisages CICA members to take measures including on exchanging information on armed forces, defence budget, presence of foreign military, planned military exercises, and mutual visits by military officials and experts. Implementation of CBMs of new challenges and threats dimension may include priority areas such as combating terrorism, security of information and communication technologies, combating illicit drugs, and epidemiological safety, public health and pharmaceuticals.

In economic dimension of the CBM, member countries can increase cooperation in areas such as to promote various modes of transport



Current status of Concept Papers and Action Plans on the implementation of CBMs under the priority areas of the CICA dimensions

No.	Dimension	Priority area	Coordinator	Co-coordinator	Current status of Concept Paper and Action Plan	
1	Military-political dimension		Kazakhstan	Turkey	The drafting of the Concept Paper and Action Plan is in progress.	
2	New challenges and threats dimension	1	New challenges and threats (general)	Turkiye	Afghanistan	The draft Concept Paper has been approved by CICA Member States.
		2	Combating terrorism	India	Not appointed	The drafting of the Concept Paper and Action Plan is in progress.
		3	Security of and in the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs)	Russia (2022-23, 2024-25)	China (2022-23, 2024-25)	The draft Concept Paper has been approved by decision and circulated. Updated concept paper under review of Members.
		4	Combating illicit drugs	Iran	Afghanistan	The Concept Paper approved in 2008, currently being updated.
		5	Epidemiological safety, public health and pharmaceuticals	Kazakhstan	China Jordan	The drafting of the Concept Paper is in progress.
3	Economic dimension	1	Development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs)	Russia	Kazakhstan Thailand Turkiye	The Concept Paper approved in 2021 and circulated among the Member States. The Action Plan was finalized and circulated among the Member States in March 2022.
		2	Energy security	Republic of Korea	India	The Concept Paper was approved in 2010 and is currently being updated.
		3	Information technology	Republic of Korea	Bangladesh	The Concept Paper approved in 2010, currently being updated.
		4	Tourism	Tajikistan	Sri Lanka	The Concept Paper has been approved in 2022.
		5	Development of secure and effective systems of transportation corridors	Azerbaijan	China, India	The draft Concept Paper approved in October 2022.

No.	Dimension	Priority area	Coordinator	Co-coordinator	Current status of Concept Paper and Action Plan	
		6	Agriculture	China	Not appointed	The Concept Paper has been approved in 2022.
		7	Finance	China	Not appointed	The Concept Paper was approved in 2021.
		8	Trade and investment	Not appointed	Kyrgyzstan Turkiye	A Coordinator has not been appointed yet.
4	Environmental dimension	1	Sustainable development	Thailand	Not appointed	The Concept Paper was approved by decision in 2023.
		2	Natural disaster management	Iran	Bangladesh	The Concept Paper has been approved in 2023.
		3	Environment protection	Mongolia	Bangladesh China	The Concept Paper has been approved in December 2023.
5	Human dimension		Uzbekistan	China India Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan	The draft Concept Paper approved in 2022. The updated Action Plan has been circulated among the Member States on 6 April 2023.	

Source: CICA Website <https://www.s-cica.org/docs/153928632165fa89b4dde9a.pdf>

linkages, development of transportation corridors, energy security, tourism, investments, and creating a common database on trade and other areas of economic interest. In human dimension, there may be cultural cooperation and people to people interaction with a view to encouraging tolerance and understanding, scientific, educational and sports engagements and exchanges. Joint archaeological expeditions for unearthing the common cultural heritage can be organised. Environment protection dimension of CBMs include sharing information on best practices concerning environmental protection and sustainable development, disaster management, development of early warning systems.



■ CBM Implementation

Despite its partial implementation among the CICA member states, the military-political dimension is a central aspect of cooperation. Member countries coordinate CBMs voluntarily. Some member states offer to be coordinators or co-coordinators for implementing specific confidence building projects. CBM implementation methods include establishing coordination and co-ordination roles, convening expert meetings, developing concept papers and action plans, carrying out specific activities, exchanging information, and various other forms of collaboration.

Members can voluntarily implement the CBMs bilaterally or multilaterally by way of two modalities. In the first process, Member State/s can express their desire to implement a specific priority area of the CBM. Subsequently, the CICA Chair may consult those states appointment of coordinating country/countries. The Chair will request the designated country to prepare a draft Concept Note of the subject. The CICA Secretariat will distribute the Note among Members for their views and inputs, and then will be considered for decision. In the second process, CICA Member States may wish to exchange views on a particular priority area through the CICA Chairman and Secretariat as a first step. The Chairman and Secretariat will compile the information provided by the members and establish a database. The members may nominate experts and academicians for specific CICA priority area. The CICA Secretariat shall provide a logistical support for organizing specialized meetings in the Member/Observer States with the participation of experts and academicians to address the core of the issues and tasking the eligible experts to produce a working paper. The Working paper should be considered in the Special Working Group (SWG)

and later in the Senior Officials Committee (SOC) for further elaboration and decision.¹⁹

■ Academic activities of CICA – Think Tank Forum

The CICA Think Tank Forum (TTF) is an important platform for academic exchange and people-to-people connections among CICA member countries. Established in 2014 on the eve of the CICA’s Shanghai Summit, the CICA TTF functions as a Track II mechanism where leading think tanks discuss CICA’s policy direction and meet annually to assess progress and propose recommendations for its future development. Officially formalized in 2021, the forum is a member-driven initiative that tackles critical issues, conflicts, and challenges facing the Asian region. The CICA TTF aims to enhance mutual trust. In recent years, the CICA TTF has played a role in shaping a CICA perspective and consensus on new themes like supply chain resilience.

The CICA Member States have decided to transform the TTF into an information and analytical advisory body. Proposed by Kazakhstan President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, this initiative strengthens CICA by providing expert analysis and fostering communication between member states’ think tanks and research institutions. The CICA TTF is seen as playing a key role in CICA’s evolution into an organization.

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■ Major accomplishments of the CICA initiative

CICA successfully conducts its core objective of providing a platform for political dialogue and confidence building among Asian nations. The CICA governing bodies of all levels hold their meetings, enabling Members to develop a shared vision and a common stance on a wide range of regional and global security issues. It has successfully held its Summits and Ministerial Meetings, Meetings of the SOC and the SWG etc. Over the years, CICA has made significant strides in promoting confidence, peace, stability, and cooperation in Asia through various initiatives and activities.

The Member States have been actively implementing CBMs across the five key dimensions, which is the main area of CICA's practical activity. Beyond CBMs, it has fostered cooperation in specific areas through successful initiatives by Member States, in particular it established the CICA Youth Council, the Think Tank Forum and the Business Forum to promote cooperation among the Member States

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in specific areas. In the last 30 years, some notable accomplishments of CICA include:

Facilitating dialogue: CICA is the only pan-Asian organization that covers a vast territory from the Pacific to the Mediterranean and from the Urals to the Indian Ocean.²⁰ CICA provides a platform for Member states from Asia and participants and observers to engage in a regular and constructive dialogue on a wide range of political, security, and economic issues, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and confidence across the continent and beyond.

Advancing CBMs: CICA has developed a comprehensive framework of CBMs, including the adoption of the Almaty Act in 2002, which outlines principles for conflict prevention and resolution, as well as the establishment of working groups on specific areas such as counter-terrorism, disaster management, and environmental protection. It is important to note that CICA's CBM implementation relies on member states' voluntary participation, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility.

Strengthening Regional Security: By emphasizing dialogue and cooperation, CICA creates a platform for member states to build trust and address differences peacefully. This reduces the likelihood

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of conflicts erupting and allows for a more collaborative approach to managing regional tensions. Ultimately, this contributes to a more peaceful and stable Asia.

Robust Track II Process: CICA Think Tank Forum platform has been successful in fostering an unrestricted exchange of ideas and discussions among the academics and experts from CICA countries. This platform ensures a comprehensive and scientific analysis approach in advocating policy formulations for their respective governments.

■ Challenges for CICA

Despite its achievements, CICA faces several challenges that could impede its effectiveness in addressing the security dynamics in Asia. CICA Members have diverse political, economic, and security interests, leading to differences in priorities and approaches, which can hinder consensus-building and cooperation within the initiative.

There is an increase in strategic competition in Asia, which can have a bearing on the CICA process. Major countries and economies of Asia have their own vision of security in the region. In Asia, some external players are also active in the regional security spheres though they are not members of this initiative. Rising geopolitical competition in Asia, with major powers pursuing individual security visions, can complicate CICA's efforts to foster a unified regional approach.

It may be said that despite facing challenges CICA will continue its path of finding common grounds for cooperation and progress because this is the only viable road ahead for the countries in the region.

At the regional level, there are various major unilateral and multilateral initiatives launched in Asia/Eurasia aimed at enhancing political, economic and security cooperation, including the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. CICA needs to navigate discreetly and take along the other initiatives.

The challenge also persists at the CICA administrative mechanism level. The Permanent Secretariat of CICA operates with limited resources and capacity, which constrains its ability to implement programmes effectively and respond promptly to emerging challenges. Finally, CICA's ongoing transformation into a major regional international organization might delay implementation of major CICA decisions. As, the focus of CICA might be inward for the duration, rather being on regional developments.

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SECTION II

**COOPERATION
IN ASIA IN
SECURITY AND
OTHER SPHERES**

The challenges of countering the transnational threats of terrorism, extremism, separatism, drug trafficking, illegal migration and other issues require a more coordinated approach.



The rise of multipolarity and the increasing importance of Asia on the world stage underscore the need for multilateral and inclusive approaches to global security. The bygone era of unilateral dominance is over. Today, ensuring regional and global stability requires the participation of all major players. At the same time, a major political and economic transformation is taking place in Asia, indicating that the Asian continent has a new important role to play in the world order. Asia is rapidly becoming the main global platform for international relations of the 21st century, both in terms of economic capacity and in terms of its influence on the world politics. With its vast human, industrial and natural resources, as well as its rich cultural diversity and heritage, Asia is once again becoming the centre of global processes.

CICA recognizes the close link between peace and security in Asia and in the other parts of the world.²¹ As the world's largest and most populous continent, Asia holds immense potential to be a driving force for global progress. However, achieving this potential requires

Today, Asia confronts a multitude of security challenges, encompassing traditional threats alongside emerging issues like energy security, environmental sustainability, food security, connectivity, and enhancing people's living standard.



CICA, as an intergovernmental forum having the largest geographical reach in the Asian region and a comprehensive agenda, is the most appropriate platform to consolidate the collective vision and wisdom of all Asian countries in the interests of security, stability, peace, cooperation, and development, and to ensure their full inclusion in the global security architecture and international multilateral decision-making processes.

addressing existing security challenges. Asia needs to be a strong independent commonwealth of nations, pursuing common goals, solving its own internal problems all by itself and contributing to global peace and security. To do this, Asia needs to leave behind the old relics, overcome the dividing lines and artificial fragmentation left over from the colonial past, and converge to create a single and indivisible security space, anchored by a reliable and effective system of multilateral cooperation institutions, one of which is CICA.

At the same time, in Asia, as in the rest of the world, against the background of still unresolved intra-regional issues of peace and security, there is an increase in new challenges and threats that are rapidly adapting to modern conditions and new technologies. The challenges of countering the transnational threats of terrorism, extremism, separatism, drug trafficking, illegal migration and other issues require a more coordinated approach.

Today, Asia confronts a multitude of security challenges, encompassing traditional threats alongside emerging issues

like energy security, environmental sustainability, food security, connectivity, and enhancing people's living standard. This evolving security landscape recognizes the interconnectedness of national, regional, and human security. Security is now considered in a broader sense as the threats combine traditional and non-traditional challenges. Energy and food security, environment sustainability are now part of the concept of overarching security. There is an overlap between security in its traditional and non-traditional concepts and its new concept linking with development, social security, liberation, emancipation and human security. It is a new phase where state security, international and regional security converge with societal and human security.

On the other hand, while robust security measures are crucial, an excessive focus on them can sometimes hinder international cooperation. It can affect many of the global security institutions and mechanisms from functioning normally, for example, restrictions imposed during and post-COVID-19 scenario. Therefore, the need for practical collective actions of the Asian states in response to new challenges to security and development is becoming increasingly important.

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International terrorism and extremism have posed a serious challenge, including in CICA region. Many CICA Member countries have long been affected by the menace of terrorism and have been making efforts to deal with this challenge effectively.

multilateral decision-making processes. It is important to prepare the strategic vision for the future with regard to security in Asia.

CICA needs to undertake serious efforts and planning on common security concepts in Asia to help resolve common security challenges by formulating a comprehensive plan for the entire region. The economic, political, security, humanitarian cooperation should promote a collective and integrated effort by the member countries.

■ Insecurity in Asia

In recent years, Asian countries have been a witness to inter-state conflicts, including involving CICA members. The continent has many unresolved disputes, such as Israel-Palestine, building tensions in South China Sea. Terrorism and extremism remain a potent threat, while the COVID pandemic caused a serious challenge and exposed the vulnerabilities across the continent, especially in the health sector. Further, external players have also developed their

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Though CICA recognizes that ‘the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations should be comprehensive, consistent and avoid double standards’, there have been uneven responses from member countries to countering terrorism in CICA area. This creates problem in forging cooperative security environment in the region.

stakes in the stability of Asia and have registered their presence in the region’s space. It is important to pay attention to the issues of integration and emancipation of countries and peoples of Asia. Finding consensus on Asian security is a big challenge among Asian countries. There is no single organisation in Asia uniting all countries in a binding framework. CICA in this context is an important platform for Asian countries to hold a security dialogue.

■ Terrorism

International terrorism and extremism have posed a serious challenge, including in CICA region. Many CICA Member countries have long been affected by the menace of terrorism and have been making efforts to deal with this challenge effectively. There is a variation in the policy approaches towards effectively dealing with the threat of terrorism among regional countries. Countries in CICA need to be aware of urgency of combating traditional and non-traditional security threats, including dealing with terrorism, drug trafficking and other transnational crimes.

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Civilizations'. It said to be 'fully committed' to fighting terrorism and strengthening bilateral, regional and international cooperation required to meet this challenge.²² The declaration considered eliminating terrorism as the common goal of all cultures and civilizations and underlined that terrorism cannot be attributed to religion, nationality or civilization. CICA highlights the necessity of preventing terrorism through countering ideologies that justify it.²³

Though CICA recognizes that 'the fight against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations should be comprehensive, consistent and avoid double standards',²⁴ there have been uneven responses from member countries to countering terrorism in CICA area. This creates problem in forging cooperative security environment in the region. There is a need to exert influence from the CICA platform to desist any kind of financial, material or moral support to terrorism and extremism from any quarters.

CICA also identifies separatism as one of the main threats and challenges to the security and stability, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of states. It underlines that the Member States shall not support on the territory of another Member State any separatist movement and entities. The CICA Charter mentions that 'member-state shall not support on the territory of another memberstate any separatist movements and entities, and, if such emerge, not to establish political, economic and other kinds of relations with them, not to allow the territories and communications of the member-state to be used by the above-mentioned movements and entities and not to render them any kind of economic, financial and other assistance.'²⁵

The Sixth Meeting of the CICA Summit at Astana, 2022 adopted 'CICA Plan of Action on the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy'.²⁶ Stating that it is mindful of the role it is well placed to play in coordinating efforts for national, regional and international counter-terrorism initiatives, the Plan of Action mentions four pillars to root out terrorism:

Pillar I: Measures to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism

Pillar II: Preventing and combating terrorism

Pillar III: Measures to build States' capacity to prevent and combat terrorism

Pillar IV: Measures to ensure respect for human rights for all and the rule of law as the fundamental basis of the fight against terrorism

The Plan of Action includes to condemn and prohibit any forms of justification, glorification or apologia of terrorism, combating transnational organized crime, including the illicit trafficking in and smuggling of arms and drugs, human trafficking, and money laundering, which are closely connected to the financing of terrorism, preventing the radicalization, enhancing relevant information sharing, preventing foreign terrorist fighters from crossing national borders, and to strengthen the capacity of the national criminal justice systems.

In a recent development, Tashkent hosted the inaugural meeting of the Central Asia Regional Expert Council in Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees, on 14 May 2024.²⁷ The Council aims



India has also proposed to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1996 the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). CCIT provides a legal framework making it binding on all signatories to deny funds and safe havens to terrorist groups.

to serve as a permanent platform for expanding partnerships between government agencies, civil society institutions, and local communities in the countries of the region, which are the essential parts of the whole-of-government approach in the fight against terrorism and extremism. The meeting was held under the auspices of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism and the Government of Uzbekistan. It served as a platform for Central Asian countries to exchange their experiences regarding the repatriation of citizens from conflict areas, including from Syria and Iraq. Discussions revolved around implementing a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to facilitate the reintegration process effectively. The involvement of local communities and civil society organizations was highlighted in order to foster a holistic whole-of-society approach.²⁸ It was reported that as of May 2024, more than 2,100 people have returned to the region through humanitarian operations organized by Central Asian states.

CICA Secretary General Kairat Sarybay also addressed the Regional Expert Council meeting and said that the CICA Members of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – showed their ‘responsible approach’ in repatriating a significant number of their citizens, primarily children and women, and reintegrating them into society. He also called for the consolidation of efforts of

the states of the region, international and regional organizations to exchange information and best practices on the subject.²⁹

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■ Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been in turmoil for decades, impacting security and regional cooperation in Asia and Eurasia. In a swift development in August 2021, the Taliban took over the power in Kabul. Except Turkmenistan, which is an observer state, all neighbours of Afghanistan are CICA members. The CICA initiative has the potential to be an effective platform to contribute to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan. CICA considers that terrorism, violent extremism and illicit drugs and its trafficking pose threat for security and stability of Afghanistan, the region and beyond. CICA has been supportive of international efforts for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan in order to help revive the country as a stable and prosperous member of the international community.³⁰ The forum emphasizes that peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be inclusive Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. CICA countries need to re-assess the new security situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the whole region.



Afghanistan can stabilize when there is a desire for stability among all domestic actors in the country. CICA countries can play their role by contributing to formulation of a regional security focused on Afghanistan. A stable and secure Afghanistan will be crucial in developing inter-regional connectivity in the Eurasian region.

■ Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic made it evident how security encompasses broad base areas such as climate security and resilient supply chains. In the case of pandemic outbreak, vaccine diplomacy becomes vital to devise solutions to speedy control of the pandemic and build mutual trust and confidence among countries. The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of the international society and connectivity at various levels. It was evident that nations could be susceptible to deliberate biological threats. The Pandemic affected economic development, people's living standards, financial stability, energy security, and supply chain security. The process of globalisation was hindered. Nevertheless, on the other hand, COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the significance of technology and that science has witnessed a striking success, which is evident from the speed of vaccines' development by many CICA countries.

A shared interest in developing the CICA process has opened up new possibilities to increase trade, economic and environmental co-operation for achieving sustainable development.

CICA can work to develop a common policy framework in epidemiological security and devise mechanism and structures for consultation, mutual help, risk information sharing, capacity building, and improving health infrastructures. CICA can also establish an effective crisis management and emergency response mechanism. The forum in 2021 updated the CICA Catalogue of Confidence Building Measures and included a new priority area “Epidemiological Safety, Public Health and Pharmaceuticals”, which foresees interaction of the Member States in countering new challenges and threats of an epidemiological character. By including epidemiology in its CBMs, CICA acknowledges the importance of international cooperation in addressing public health threats. This can involve sharing information about disease outbreaks, coordinating responses, and developing joint preparedness plans.

■ Economic Cooperation & Connectivity in CICA area

There has been growing emphasis on increasing economic cooperation and integration through enhanced connectivity in the CICA region. A shared interest in developing the CICA process has opened up new possibilities to increase trade, economic and environmental co-operation for achieving sustainable development. One of CICA’s goals is sustainable connectivity, a proposal that the President of Kazakhstan made at the last Summit of CICA in 2022. The CICA chairmanship of Kazakhstan has proposed to establish CICA Council on Sustainable Connectivity. Connectivity encompasses more than just transportation, such as harmonising culture, trade, and digitalisation. Therefore, one of the goals should be to coordinate all connectivity initiatives and determine how



The International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a unique link connecting different regions of Asia and between Asia and Europe.

CICA might contribute to them. The interconnection of the Asian continent into a coherent economic body has become an urgent need. The development of transit and transport capacities, import and export opportunities, access to capital, goods, services and labour markets, new scientific and technological capacities, and the free movement of ideas and people – all this requires effective tools to strengthen the connectivity of the continent’s economic, financial and trade systems.

CICA emphasises that joint efforts for promotion of regional connectivity, especially integrated and competitive transport and logistics systems, which will help achieving more efficient use of trade opportunities among the members and accelerate regional and international transport and transit cooperation that will duly serve the goal of sustainable economic development. The Forum considers that construction and development of transportation and telecommunication networks as well as oil and gas pipelines are essential for promoting investment opportunities and strengthening wide ranging cooperation among the Members in areas such as trade, economic, scientific, technical and energy co-operation.

Digital economy is a modern reality and there is a need to coordinate actions and develop specific measures of cooperation in CICA.

Several CICA members are working on various connectivity initiatives. Some CICA members are also landlocked and have no direct access to international transportation networks. Kazakhstan in Central Asia actively participates in the integration of the region. Azerbaijan and Armenia are working at various levels, including exploring the possibility of opening of the transportation corridors, which will help securing peace and greater regional cooperation.

The International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a unique link connecting different regions of Asia and between Asia and Europe. India emphasises the significance of multiple connectivity projects, including the INSTC, the Chabahar port connecting Central Asia, and the proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), in addition to other alternate routes, to ensure sustained and resilient inter-regional and global connectivity.

■ Cooperation in Digital Economy

Information and communication technologies have greatly promoted the economy and social welfare of the mankind. Digital economy is growing rapidly and it will play an important role in the world's economic growth. Digital economy is a modern reality and there is a need to coordinate actions and develop specific measures of cooperation in CICA.

It is a very complex and technically challenging task, however, in the CICA region, development of digital economy can be observed, including in India. Members, including India, Russia and China should continue to work on consensus in academic community on issues related to digital economy.³¹ For CICA developing countries,



digital economy is beneficial in economic transformation. The digital economy can also be used to promote and upgrade the conventional economy/industry. Digital economy accompanies certain challenges. It is important to balance innovation and employment, as many developing economies have huge employment pressure.

Security of data and digital sovereignty are also issues in global governance. Data has become critical resource in the digital economy. At present, there are no regional and global governance with regard to digital economy. There is a need to define the ownership of data, and how we can promote a secured cross border data flow is an important question. There is a possibility that developed countries can exploit the resources of developing countries, which raises the sovereignty issues of digital assets and data.

In the process of transition, some developed countries are taking measures to create technical barriers in the growth of developing countries to get engaged in the process of globalisation and prevent their catching up the momentum of the world's economic growth. Earlier, it was digital divide, now we face digital confrontation. CICA member countries are faced with challenges in developing digital economy, including digital economic infrastructure and platforms. For example, developed countries in Europe and Asia have more profitable digital platforms like YouTube and Google.

CICA can cooperate in digital economy in spheres like digital infrastructure, digital economic safety, digital talents' training etc. CICA can also strengthen international coordination of member countries in digital economic policies and legislation. Currently, the

CICA is home to largest energy consumers in Asia and the world as well as largest energy producers. CICA has been emphasizing that dialogue and cooperation among producer and consumer states have become all the more important.

focus seems to be preparing for ICT infrastructure, governments should also prepare an enabling environment and formulate strategies to encourage digital businesses. Not only companies but individuals with talents can also be brought under focus in digital economy as many individuals have extraordinary talents and scientific abilities, who may not get the opportunity to implement their creative ideas.

The Sixth Meeting of the CICA Summit held at Astana on 13 October 2022 adopted ‘CICA Leaders’ Statement on Cooperation in the Field of Security of and in the Use of Information and Communication Technologies’.³² It reaffirms that the commonality of approaches to ensuring security in the use of information and communication technologies and declares that the development and use of ICTs in international cooperation should be based on universally recognized principles of international law. It also reiterates the need to assist developing CICA Member States in building capacity in the area of information security and bridging the ‘digital divide’ in order to ensure security and sustainability of the global information space.

■ Energy Cooperation

The Asian continent has vast energy resources, including oil, gas, uranium along with vast potential for renewable energy production in a sustainable manner. CICA is home to largest energy consumers



CICA has its role to play, as the tasks mentioned in the CBMs, to further increase interactions to improve relations among the countries of Asia, particularly in the fields of common subjects, such as energy security, agriculture, and sharing and applying technology for the benefit of the common people.

in Asia and the world as well as largest energy producers. CICA has been emphasizing that dialogue and cooperation among producer and consumer states have become all the more important. It underlines that energy security is an indispensable part of economic and social security as well as sustainable development. CICA has invited the relevant parties to contribute to energy security and to further enhance dialogue and cooperation on energy issues.³³

The stance maintained by CICA is that the international community should, on the basis of the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’, further promote and reinforce energy security featuring mutually beneficial cooperation and diversified forms of development, particularly in developing countries, aimed at sustaining economic and social development.

CICA is trying to pursue cooperation in the field of energy through CBMs. India is a co-coordinator in energy security dimension with Korea being its coordinator.

■ Environmental cooperation

Asia in recent years has faced multiple environmental issues and natural disasters, including flood, typhoon, desertification, heat wave, forest fire, and earthquakes. The environmental issues

impact sustainable development in the continent. Further, the decarbonization of the economy is an issue of great urgency for Asia. Therefore, environmental protection and sustainable development provide an important dimension of cooperation among the CICA member countries. It is also something no single country can address on its own.

At the Sixth CICA Summit 2022, President of Kazakhstan proposed an initiative to host a CICA Ministerial Conference on Environmental Issues in 2024 in Astana. The proposal indicated CICA's approach to deal with environmental protection and sustainable development issues in Asia. He also proposed that the conference would also suggest the establishment of a new advisory body the CICA Environmental Council.³⁴

CICA has its role to play, as the tasks mentioned in the CBMs, to further increase interactions to improve relations among the countries of Asia, particularly in the fields of common subjects, such as energy security, agriculture, and sharing and applying technology for the benefit of the common people.

India sees CICA as an important forum in a multipolar Asia. Since its inception, India has been an integral part of the CICA journey. As a founding member, India values CICA's vision of promoting peace, security and prosperity in Asia.



SECTION III

**INDIA-CICA
ENGAGEMENT**

■ India's engagement with CICA

India sees CICA as an important forum in a multipolar Asia. Since its inception, India has been an integral part of the CICA journey. As a founding member, India values CICA's vision of promoting peace, security and prosperity in Asia. It is corresponding to India's fundamental philosophy of *Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam*, which means that the whole world is one family. Inspired by Gandhian thoughts, Government of India's vision of "*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayaas*" (Together for Everyone's Growth, With Everyone's Trust and Endeavour) aligns with CICA's emphasis on the promotion of economic and social progress, and the 'well-being of all peoples'.

Apart from devising approaches to deal with traditional and non-traditional security challenges, CICA is important for India from transport, energy, renewable energy, education, startups, economic and trade perspectives. India has been making its contribution to strengthen the initiative, including by organizing and participating in various activities of CICA. India has consistently emphasised that CICA's approach should remain rooted in the realities of Asia. In CICA, India also recognised the Asian diversity and the consequent need to move ahead gradually, building upon consensus and voluntary participation.

India is developing cooperation with various countries in different regions of Asia, including in West Asia, where Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, Qatar and the UAE are CICA



members. CICA has expanded significantly in recent years. Saudi Arabia has recently been included as an Observer country. India, especially in recent years, has paid great attention to deepen economic ties with West Asian region, which is important not only in energy and food security but also hosts a large number of guest workers from India and other South Asian CICA countries. CICA can develop a framework to promote cooperation among members in these areas, which will be beneficial for both skilled and non-skilled workforces.

■ India & CICA Summits

For creating a platform to achieve the objective of a cooperative environment in Asia, the first CICA Summit was held in 2002 at Almaty. It was a tumultuous phase in Asia, especially in South Asia and West Asia, and security and stability were major concerns. Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee had participated in the first Summit. He highlighted the unifying factors in Asia, and noted: “All the nations of present-day Asia are, in some way or the other, products of the process of interaction and integration that has gone on in Asia throughout history. Therefore, in our tendency to focus on the conflicts of the day, we should not forget or belittle our shared past.”³⁵ He termed terrorism a ‘formidable enemy’ and said that “Asian and global security depends crucially on how unitedly, decisively and speedily we counter this menace.” The Almaty Summit had also adopted the ‘Declaration on Eliminating Terrorism and Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations.’

Addressing the media at Almaty on the following day of the Summit, the PM said that “This Conference was aimed at spreading the message of peace, security and friendship so that peoples of Asia could concentrate on removal of poverty and promotion of socio-economic development through close bilateral and regional cooperation. This, indeed, was India’s principal motivation behind our unstinted cooperation over the last 10 years in the CICA process.”³⁶

India has continued to give high priority to the CICA process and Senior Government of India Ministers participated in the Summits as the Prime Minister’s Special Envoy. The Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Murali Deora represented India at the second Summit in 2006 at Almaty. He stated that CICA can contribute to the development of ‘a cooperative and pluralistic security order in Asia’, which is based on mutual understanding, trust and sovereign equality.³⁷ He added that the fight against terrorism needed to be global, comprehensive and sustained and not selective or discriminatory. He urged to redouble the efforts to root out the menace of terrorism and there should be zero tolerance towards it.

The Commerce and Industry Minister of India Anand Sharma attended the third Summit at Istanbul on 8 June 2010, as Prime Minister’s Special Envoy. The declaration adopted by the third CICA Summit recognised the initiative’s role in meeting the challenges faced by the world community, particularly in Asia. Member countries reaffirmed their commitment to develop CICA as a platform for dialogue and to further enhance cooperation. They



condemned terrorism and regarded it as the ‘most serious threat’ to international peace and security.

The Fourth Summit was held at Shanghai, China, on 21 May 2014. It was organised soon after the parliamentary elections in India (April-May 2014). A senior official from India’s Ministry of External Affairs participated in the Summit. It was said that the organisation has joined the ranks of ‘leading forums in Asia for dialogue on security issues and confidence building.’³⁸ It was mentioned that terrorism poses a serious threat to the security in the region and the commitment to CICA’s principles should be manifested in actions on combating terrorism. He highlighted that CICA’s priority should continue to be placed on practical, voluntary and achievable confidence building measures.

Fifth CICA summit was held on 15 June 2019 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, with the theme of “Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region”. Addressing the Summit, India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said that the 21st century is being hailed as the Asian century and CICA can surely play a useful role in promoting peace, security and development in Asia.³⁹ India supports a rule-based order in Asia. The Minister termed terrorism as the gravest threat in Asia and sought support for early finalisation of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, proposed by India. The lack of energy security was identified as a key developmental challenge, which require better dialogue between consumers and producers for a stable energy market and for promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy. He

CICA could be important for India from transport, energy, renewable energy and economic and trade perspectives.

There is a need to work towards confidence building measures that actively promote economic cooperation, cultural interaction and people-to-people contacts.

expressed confidence that CICA would continue to evolve into a 'balanced, open and inclusive framework' for Asian countries to interact and cooperate in addressing multi-faceted challenges, acting in accordance with a common vision for a more secure and prosperous Asia.

India has been continuously supporting CICA and its initiatives. As the Prime Minister's Special Envoy and Minister of State for External Affairs, Meenakshi Lekhi participated in the sixth CICA Summit at Astana on 13 October 2022. Addressing the Summit, she said that over the past 30 years CICA has made commendable progress, and has played an important role in building confidence between countries of Asia, which is large and diverse. She added that CICA's progress and role 'is in tune with India's support for inclusive, consultative and cooperative multilateralism and its fundamental philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means the world is one family.' India views CICA as an important platform

India actively participates in CICA activities and initiatives promoting peace, security, and stability in Asia, especially its various CBMs



to promote multilateralism in diverse and multi-polar Asia. A reference to India's initiatives for sustainable development, such as International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and Digital India was also made.⁴⁰

Minister Lekhi termed terrorism the biggest challenge and the biggest violator of human rights in all its forms. It was said that terrorism, like climate change and pandemics impacts us all. India follows a zero-tolerance approach towards terror and unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including cross border terrorism. The Summit was informed that as a first responder India has provided humanitarian assistance to the tune of 50,000 metric tonnes of wheat and 500,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the Afghan people in the current crisis.

CICA could be important for India from transport, energy, renewable energy and economic and trade perspectives. There is a need to work towards confidence building measures that actively promote economic cooperation, cultural interaction and people-to-people contacts. Strengthening trade, investment, joint ventures, and cooperation in science, technology and human resource development need to be pursued consistently. Given the problems that Asia has, uniting nations through a multilateral process, as CICA is attempting, needs investment of time, effort and energy of involved countries. India supports the step-by-step approach in building peace and stability in Asia.

■ India in CICA CBMs

India actively participates in CICA activities and initiatives promoting peace, security, and stability in Asia, especially its various CBMs. Participation in CBMs is voluntary and India's engagement indicates its strong desire to bring the benefits of security, energy, connectivity and social developments to a majority of population in Asia. India has taken a proactive role in CBMs coordination. It is volunteering as a coordinator in one CBM dimension and co-coordinator in three dimensions. India is coordinating in the Priority Area of combating terrorism while in 'Energy Security', 'Developing Secure and Effective Transportation Corridors' and in 'Human' areas it is a Co-coordinator.⁴¹

India organised various programmes while being the coordinator of the CBMs. As Coordinator of Energy Security CBM a training workshop on Renewable Energy for the relevant CICA Member States' subject matter experts was held on 18 June 2021. Issues related to integration of networks and balancing in the electricity sector while expanding the use of renewable energy sources in transportation and other industries were discussed. It was highlighted that international cooperation in such areas as hydrogen energy production and storage may significantly expand the scope of the sector.⁴²

India convened a 'Traditional Medicine' webinar in February 2022, which was participated by about 50 experts from various CICA countries. India showcased the role of the AYUSH system in public health, introducing such systems as Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Naturopathy and Homeopathy. The participants exchanged



experience in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 and potential cooperation in the field of Ayurveda and other traditional systems of medicine. They also discussed ways and opportunities for the development of traditional medicine of CICA Member States.⁴³

On February 2-3, 2023 India under the CICA framework organised a virtual workshop on ‘Counter Radicalization’. Topics such as radicalization and extremism; rise of fundamentalism and its global impact; misuse of social media as a tool for radicalization; models of de-radicalization; and radicalization & international terrorism, were discussed among the participants.⁴⁴

On 25-26 May 2023, India organised a virtual workshop on the ‘Misuse of Internet’ under the framework of the CICA CBM. The participants shared their expertise on various topics including the Misuse of Internet in Organised Crime; Use of Malware and Ransomware as a tool for Financial Crime; Prevention of Information and Communication Technology Crime against Women and Children; Use of Dark Web and Cryptocurrency in Illegal Trade and Terror; and Futuristic Information and Communication Technology Crime and Internet of Things Hacks.⁴⁵

■ India-CICA Digital cooperation

India has made significant progress in digital economy development. It has utilised the technology in a big way. The Digital India programme 2015 that seeks to transform India into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy, is an example of achievements, which might be of interest and relevance to other countries. In India’s total population of about 1.4 billion, 1.38 billion

CICA has also been a platform for India to call for a reformed multilateralism, which reflects appreciation of contemporary geopolitical realities.

people were issued a unique 12 digital biometric identity card (Aadhaar). There were 1.21 billion mobile phones, including about half a billion smart phones. There are over 750 million internet users. Some of the facilities which will be provided through Digital India are digital locker for individual documents and certificates, e-education, e-health, e-sign, e-shopping, national scholarship portal, UMANG (united mobile application for new age governance). Over 1200 services by central and state governments' services will be accessible in multiple languages.

Cyber space is a seamless global common without borders. Security in digital age has assumed increased importance, especially in recent years. Post COVID pandemic, working from home and digital technology has gained greater importance, security of cyber space consequently has become critical. Recent surges in ransom-ware attacks across the world have again highlighted the need for a global coordinated response to this threat. There have been discussions about the use of cyber weapon by state and non-state actors.

In this regard the international community has not reached a consensus on how to deal with these issues. Taking cue from the Geneva Convention, cyber-attacks on civilian infrastructure medical, utilities, education etc. should be prohibited. Given that the cyber space knows no boundaries, the way forward is that any



future process must be inclusive of all governments, stakeholders such as business, industry, users and civil society. Instruments must be flexible and capable of accommodating new issues and challenges.

Cyber security and digital economy are connected to hard security issues. It will be difficult to have greater cooperation in digital domain without confidence building. CICA should develop cooperation in digital security. India has been saying that Asia faces the challenges of terrorism, radicalisation, drug trafficking and organised crime. To face these diverse challenges, there is a need to undertake concerted action. From the CICA platform, India has also said that “India’s vision of the Indo-Pacific as a free, open and inclusive region underpinned by international law is premised on the common pursuit of progress and prosperity. In this direction, India has traditionally maintained close and friendly cooperation with regional organisations in Asia, including CICA”.⁴⁶

CICA has also been a platform for India to call for a reformed multilateralism, which reflects appreciation of contemporary geopolitical realities. India is of the view that multilateral institutions must be made more accountable to their membership, they must be open and welcoming to a diversity of viewpoints and cognisant of new voices, especially those from Asia. The United Nations Security Council must be made more representative of developing countries in order to build trust and confidence in its ability to provide leadership to the entire world. India values a multipolar international order, underpinned by international law, premised upon respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity

of all countries, resolution of international disputes through peaceful negotiations, and free and open access for all to the global commons.⁴⁷

Given the efforts the Indian government has made to support small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs), including their internationalisation, it can be said that India can significantly contribute to the development of economic and trade cooperation in CICA. CICA can benefit from India's excellence in basic sciences. Pharmaceuticals, space and IT, startups and innovation can be of great use for CICA countries in expanding cooperation.



SECTION IV

**TRANSFORMATION &
WAY FORWARD**



CICA has the potential to play a more significant role in shaping the regional security architecture in Asia, provided that it addresses its challenges and leverages its strengths effectively. Some key areas for future focus include transformation of CICA into an institutionalised mechanism, expansion of membership and enhancing cooperation among various other stakeholders.

Transformation of CICA into a full-fledged regional organization

CICA currently serves as a coveted platform for dialogue and interaction on wide range of security and development issues. The initiative has certainly made a significant evolutionary progress since its inception. Its transformation to an international organisation is considered to be in the spirit of CICA's development. CICA's transformation, into an international organisation is a strategic objective of Kazakhstan's CICA Chairmanship, which has put forward a proposal of transformation. The Forum has released a document 'Conceptual Approaches to the transformation of CICA into an international organization for regional security'⁴⁸ in August 2021 proposing discussion on the transition.

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based transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international regional organization. A document ‘Astana Statement on CICA Transformation’ has also been adopted. Though the Astana Statement was adopted in 2022 to transform CICA into a full-fledged regional international organisation, it can be said that it is already mature enough with all its features, such as a governing body, administration body, its contribution and financial committees to be an international organization. CICA already has the status, role, functions, modus operandi, structure and other properties of a full-fledged international organization. The transformation process is taking place simultaneously in different area viz. administration of CICA, charter etc.

CICA has already been shaped into an effective multilateral platform for political dialogue and it has been performing on the lines of an international organization. The proposed transformation process does not seek to change the goals and objectives of CICA or to alter the fundamental principles of the forum’s activities, primarily the consensus principle of decision-making and the voluntary participation of its Member States in confidence building measures. It is also not proposed to make any fundamental changes to the existing structure of the governing bodies and their working

methods, or to adopt new legally binding documents at the initial stage of transformation.

It is proposed that the transformation be carried out as a step-by-step action, starting with the launch of the process and moving forward towards medium and long-term goals, progressively adapted depending on the political will and level of ambition of the Member States.

■ Likely transformation advantages

The transformation of the forum into a full-fledged international organization will significantly expand the opportunities and instruments for mutual assistance and practical cooperation among the Members to address common challenges, including through conducting concrete and tangible activities for the Members' benefit. Nevertheless, there should be clarity in what kind of issues CICA is going to tackle as it is to become an international organisation. It is important for achieving tangible results and for that a clear vision is required. Adopting step-by-step approach is therefore a better policy.

The transformation of the forum into a full-fledged international organization will significantly expand the opportunities and instruments for mutual assistance and practical cooperation among the Members to address common challenges, including through conducting concrete and tangible activities for the Members' benefit.



Consequently, CICA, as a full-fledged international organization for regional security, is likely to become a more effective tool for the practical implementation and achievement of the CICA principles and goals. It will be able to give a significant impetus to ensuring stronger connectivity on the Asian continent and finding joint solutions to regional problems. It can also expand opportunities for strengthening mutual trust and cooperation, as well as unite the contribution and strengthen the role of Asian states in the global security architecture.

The renewal of CICA through its transformation into an organization will give a significant political impetus to the dialogue within CICA and to the further gradual transition to a new level of cooperation. Moreover, the CICA process, continuing what it started and moving towards the goals for which it was created, will be enforced with a stronger and more stable institutional framework and enriched with additional means to achieve these goals.

The transformation of CICA into a full-fledged international organization for regional security will give the already successful dialogue platform an international standing and a global role, thereby significantly strengthening the leverages of Asian states over global processes. The CICA Member States, united in the pan-Asian organization, will have the opportunity to collectively promote and protect the common interests of the region.

The broad range of economic issues, global and regional challenges to sustainable development and environmental protection, epidemiological threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic decline demonstrate the need for greater

engagement among Asian nations. New primary focus areas could be ICT, counter-terrorism, public health, pharmaceuticals, developing ability to adapt to rapid changes.

There has been also a discussion whether to include Eurasia in CICA's geographical expanse; however, it has been generally agreed for the time that CICA should remain focused on Asia. Asia needs to recognise its place in the evolving global order, and the transformation means elevating the new role of Asia in global affairs.

Funding: Budget reform of CICA, including establishing mandatory budgetary funding by the Member States, introducing a scale of assessed contributions based on the UN scale, with due regard to the membership of CICA, improving the budget structure and budget planning process, and adapting correspondingly the Financial Rules and Financial Regulations. Establishing the CICA Fund to support collaborative research initiatives is another crucial goal. CICA wants donors to participate in this project voluntarily. Iraq has contributed US\$ 10,000 to the CICA Fund. Kazakhstan is also considering of making a financial contribution.

Focus on new challenges: A more robust CICA could encourage wider participation from Asian countries. The transformation could allow CICA to focus on emerging challenges like sustainable development, climate change, cooperation on Asian financial scenario, youth development, and economic interconnectedness. New initiatives could be launched to address these issues.

Secretariat: Further institutional strengthening and capacity-building of the Secretariat towards an effective executive structure capable of carrying out tasks assigned by the Member States in all



five dimensions of cooperation, with the strengthening of the role of the Secretary General and the analytical capacity of the Secretariat, and the provision of the necessary mandate and resources to the Secretariat.

India's approach to transformation: CICA's transformation to an international organisation is in the spirit of CICA's development. India appreciates the vision presented by the CICA Chair in the 30th year of its formation to give it a shape of an international organization through a gradual, inclusive and transparent process while maintaining its core principles of consensus and voluntary nature of cooperation.

Connectivity, as mentioned in the Astana Statement on CICA Transformation, is likely get greater traction in CICA area. India has been pursuing to develop resilient supply chains and transit arrangements, especially with the Eurasian region. A sustained and institutionalised mechanism is required to prepare and deal with them and CICA in its transformed role of an organization would be suitably equipped to deliver.

In Asia and Eurasia, various mechanisms working for greater regional security, connectivity and economic cooperation, include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Collective Security Treaty Organisation and Eurasian Economic Union. Regional activities of CICA and the other forums have similar goals and objectives and are complementary in nature.

■ Way forward

Asia is growing fast and it is expected to continue to lead global economic development in future. CICA has comparative

demographic advantage in comparison to other regional initiatives, in terms of natural resources, and the entrepreneurial manpower to make Asia a vibrant region of growth and prosperity. India considers CICA as a unique Asian forum of different cultures and traditions making it one of the most important mechanisms to promote dialogue among civilizations and cultures.

- i. In order to increase economic cooperation, CICA can start a dedicated economic dialogue among the member countries. Cooperation in digital economy and its significance in economic transformation have great potential. In the digital era, there is a greater need of cooperation for digital security. There is a need to formulate rules of engagement in digital economy and cyber security spheres.
- ii. CICA can work on young leaders' programme for member states. India has rich experience in the field of innovation and start-ups.
- iii. CICA needs to continue work towards CBMs and promote economic cooperation, cultural exchanges and people-to-people interactions. CICA should develop a common policy framework in epidemiological security and devise mechanism for consultation, help, risk information sharing, capacity building, and improving health infrastructure.

By addressing its challenges and leveraging its strengths, CICA can continue to play a constructive role in shaping the regional security architecture and fostering a peaceful and prosperous future for Asia.



- iv. CICA may continue its efforts to expand its membership to include more countries in Asia, particularly those with significant political and economic influence, to enhance effectiveness as a pan-Asian forum.
- v. CICA should deepen cooperation with other regional organizations and initiatives, such as ASEAN and SCO to promote synergy in addressing common challenges.
- vi. CICA should strengthen the capacity of its Permanent Secretariat, including by mobilizing resources, enhancing technical expertise, and streamlining administrative processes, to enable more effective implementation of its programmes and initiatives.

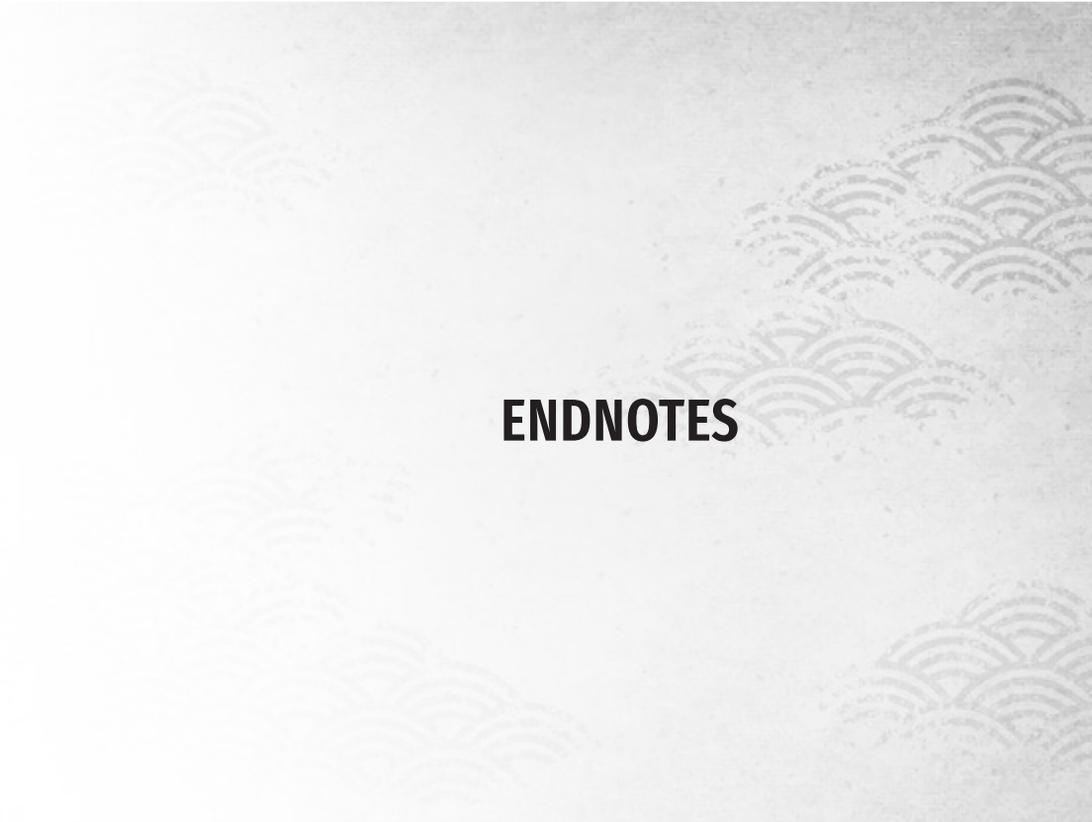
■ Conclusion

The CICA initiative was perceived in the backdrop of multiple developments underway in Asia and the world. The idea of consolidation in Asia has been present for a long time. CICA represents a uniquely valuable forum for promoting peace, stability, and cooperation in the diverse and dynamic region of Asia. Gradual strengthening of CICA reflects the common aspiration of Asian countries and trust in the initiative to find local solutions to issues they face. CICA has made significant contributions to enhancing dialogue, trust-building, and conflict prevention among its member states. CICA includes countries of great influence and power and it has become a coveted platform for dialogue on wide range of security and developmental issues. Collaboration at the forum can help in solving major international problems.

By addressing its challenges and leveraging its strengths, CICA can continue to play a constructive role in shaping the regional security architecture and fostering a peaceful and prosperous future for Asia. Terrorism continues to pose a big threat to peace and it affects all of us in Asia. India follows a zero-tolerance approach towards terror and unequivocally condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It is important that CICA countries cooperate sincerely to effectively deal with the menace of terrorism and extremism. Increasing security cooperation and enhancing connectivity could be important areas for further cooperation towards regional integration.

The CICA initiative plays a significant role in forging cooperation in Asian economic and cultural spheres while security cooperation is emerging as a top collective priority for collaboration among member countries.





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