



CICA Gaining Dynamism in Shifting Focus on Asia

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Introduction

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, commonly known as CICA, organised its fifth summit meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 14-15 June 2019. The CICA summit is generally organised after every four years. The theme of the 2019 Summit in Tajikistan was “Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region”. The gradual strengthening of the CICA process assumes significance amid changing global and Eurasian dynamics. The global economic pivot is perceptibly moving towards Eurasia/Asia with the rise and rapid growth of large economies. Besides, hitherto leading economies enumerating merits of free trade and process of globalisation are showing fatigue and resorting to protectionism in international trade. There are also signs of nationalistic tendencies emerging in various democracies of the world. The Fifth CICA Summit meeting was held at important regional and global junctures and it appeared that the organisation is seeking to acquire a new dynamism in the re-shifting global focus towards Asia. It can be explored if the organisation can emerge as a pan-Asia continental platform unifying the diversified group of peoples to form a single vision for future development of Asia, Eurasia and the world?

The Secretariat of CICA was established in 2006 and it is located at Astana, which has been renamed as Nursultan – the capital of Kazakhstan, in the honour of the first President of the country Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev. CICA’s membership has been growing, it has 27 members from Asia nowⁱ. Other countriesⁱⁱ, including the US, as well as various international organisations, including United Nations (UN) and Organization for Security and Cooperation

ⁱ The 27 CICA members are: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan and Viet Nam.

ⁱⁱ Observer states are: Belarus, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Ukraine and USA.

in Europe (OSCE), are observers in the forumⁱⁱⁱ. So far, Kazakhstan, Turkey, China and Tajikistan have held the chairmanship of the organisation.

Evolution of CICA

The end of Cold War not only changed the geography in Asia, but also affected its polity and economy. The disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) led to creation of five Republics in Central Asia. These republics were not in proper economic shape and were suddenly without a security architecture and neighbouring Afghanistan was also in turmoil. China and India were yet to emerge economically. Amid this chaotic condition in Central Asia, the visionary former President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed a novel idea to develop a local security architecture for Asia. He explained his concept in his address to the UN General Assembly's 47th session in 1992.¹ It may be noted that Kazakhstan had then just been admitted to the UN, and the President was making his maiden speech from the rostrum of the General Assembly. As part of preventive diplomacy, the initiative was originally proposed as Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICMA) but the acronym CICA became more popular gradually.

President Nazarbayev, who is considered as the founder of CICA, in the UN address visualised the progress CICA would make. The initiative envisaged step by step movement towards security cooperation in Asia. It was suggested that confidence-building measures should be initiated in less contested fields and gradually take up more challenging matters. Nevertheless, the evolution process, formation deliberations and the preparatory documents preparation took about a decade.

Before the beginning of the formal conference in 2002, the evolution of CICA can be divided into two phases. In the first phase of three years (1992-94) since the speech of the Kazakh President at the UN, 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 29 participants in the third meeting.² It can be said that the main accomplishment of this phase was the participants' agreement on understanding that prevailing differences should not hinder efforts towards finding concerted solution to problems regarding security. In the second phase, which was roughly from 1995 to 1999, a dedicated Special Working Group was formed to prepare for the Foreign Ministers' meeting of the states interested in CICA. Foundational documents for the organization were also prepared during the second phase.

The two documents adopted by member countries – Charter and Declaration – are considered as bases for cooperation. The Almaty Act or the Charter of CICA was adopted at the first summit meeting held at Almaty in 2002, after 10 years of the CICA proposal at the UN by Kazakhstan President. The second fundamental document is called Declaration on the Principles Guiding Relations between the CICA Member States.³ It was adopted at the First Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held at Almaty in 1999. The meeting of heads of state

ⁱⁱⁱ Observer organisations are: International Organization for Migration(IOM), League of Arab States (LAS), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) and United Nations (UN)

and government is the highest decision-making forum of the organisation. CICA's second most important agency is the Foreign Ministers' meeting.

CICA's Objectives

On the premise of basic principles of sovereignty, non-use of threat or force, territorial integrity and cooperation for all-round development, CICA seeks to enhance regional cooperation through multilateral mechanisms. This Asian forum is aimed at providing enhanced cooperation and promotion of stability, security and peace across the continent and beyond. CICA seeks eradication of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Cooperation in environment and prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are also among its other important objectives.

Understanding varying developmental priorities and differences in approach adopted by member states for their growth and international engagements, CICA preferred step-by-step advance to build common structure in Asia for its collective security. In order to achieve the objectives, CICA has adopted what it terms a 'Catalogue of confidence building measures'⁴. The confidence building measures have been broadly put into five categories: i. fight against new challenges and threats; ii. economy; iii. environment; iv. human area, and v. military-political dimension.

The confidence building measures are being implemented by member countries. Some member states offered to be coordinators or co-coordinators for implementing specific confidence building measures projects. India volunteered to co-coordinate two confidence building measures in the CICA framework. One is in the sphere of "developing secure and effective transportation corridors", with Azerbaijan being the main coordinator. Second is in the field of energy security, where South Korea is the primary coordinator.⁵ India has also been actively participating in other activities undertaken by CICA.

India's engagement with CICA

For creating a platform to achieve the objective of a cooperative environment in Asia, the first CICA Summit was held in 2002 at Almaty, the former capital city of Kazakhstan. The then Prime Minister of India Atal Bihari Vajpayee had participated in the first summit. Highlighting the unifying factors in Asia, he 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."⁶ 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 also adopted the 'Declaration on Eliminating Terrorism and Promoting Dialogue among Civilizations.'

The then Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Murali Deora represented India as Prime Minister's Special Envoy 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.⁷ 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 then Commerce and Industry Minister of India Anand Sharma attended the third Summit at Istanbul in June 2010, as Prime Minister's Special Envoy. The declaration adopted by the third CICA Summit recognised the organisation'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.⁸

The fourth summit was held at Shanghai, China, in May 2014. It was organised soon after the parliamentary elections in India in the same year, and was represented by an official from India's Ministry of External Affairs. It was said that the organisation has joined the ranks of 'leading forums in Asia for dialogue on security issues and confidence building.'⁹ 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.

Fifth CICA Summit

The Fifth CICA summit was organised in Tajikistan in June 2019, held immediately after the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Heads of State Council Meeting at Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic, on 13-14 June 2019. Many leaders including, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Iran President Hassan Rouhani went to Dushanbe after attending the SCO summit in Bishkek. Minister of External Affairs Subramanyam Jaishankar represented India at CICA summit 2019. It was the first visit of the new Minister to Central Asia. Addressing the Fifth Summit, Foreign Minister Jaishankar said that 21st century is being considered as an Asian century and CICA can play a constructive role in promoting peace, security and development. He said that terrorism is the 'gravest threat' faced in Asia today. He added: 'Many CICA members are victims of terrorism and [it] should be clear that terrorists and their victims must never be equated.' It was suggested that a comprehensive strategy was needed to combat terrorism.

Many CICA members shared concerns over Afghanistan as they are also involved in various ongoing processes to address the problem. About the situation in Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Jaishankar said that India supports an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned national peace and reconciliation process. The declaration issued by CICA leaders also echoed similar views saying 'peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan should be inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned.'¹⁰ India is of the view that the initiatives must include all sections of Afghan society as well as the elected Government of the country.

CICA has been focusing on economic cooperation and confidence building measures. The group has some of the largest energy producers and consumers of the world. Lack of energy security has emerged as a key developmental challenge in the region. Foreign Minister Jaishankar proposed 'a better dialogue' between consumers and producers for a stable energy market, promotion of energy efficiency and greater use of renewable energy.

Renewable energy has the potential to emerge as a strong base of cooperation in CICA area. Along with other countries in the world, India is making efforts in this direction by

establishing an International Solar Alliance (ISA). At the Fifth CICA summit, India invited CICA members who have not yet joined the ISA to become part of the initiative. The Alliance is headquartered at Gurugram, near Delhi and so far, 74 countries have signed the Framework Agreement.

The declaration adopted by the fifth CICA summit at Dushanbe highlighted the concerns raised by India, including terrorism. It expressed 'deep concern on the security threat posed by extremism and terrorism in all forms and manifestations.' It also called upon states to devise a comprehensive strategy to combat terrorism by eliminating conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, countering misuse of the internet for terrorist purposes and dismantling terrorist shelters. CICA leaders noted that 'promotion of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, prosperity, elimination of poverty and illiteracy, are among the most effective measures to remove the breeding ground of terrorism and extremism.'"

The summit also urged greater economic and cultural cooperation and improvement in connectivity for increasing trade and transit. The declaration welcomed 'all initiatives' by the members to promote cooperation in various fields, including economy, finance, transport and trade within the geography of CICA both 'at bilateral and multilateral levels' in conformity with the purpose and principles enshrined in the CICA Principles Guiding Relations among member countries.

CICA celebrates cultural diversity as a 'precious asset', which is to be sustained by all as a factor of peace and development. The declaration also welcomed various initiatives to increase cultural interactions in Asia, including the Annual Surajkund International Crafts Fair in Haryana, India. It stated that such initiatives were part of 'concrete contributions' to civilisational dialogue and exchanges in the region. The leaders emphasised the need to promote tourism, including through reviving the traditions of the ancient Silk Route that connected people in the past.

Conclusion

The fifth CICA summit was held at a time when there is a growing interest of the world in Eurasia. The re-rise of big Asian economies is underway and the economic pivot is shifting from West to the East. In recent years, prominent institutions have been emerging in the Eurasian landscape. If SCO is finding traction among regional countries, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) are trying to create a regional economic cooperation framework, and in getting attention from across the globe.

The CICA initiative has potential to play a significant role in economic and cultural spheres even if security cooperation is yet to emerge as a priority for cooperation among member countries. In terms of economic cooperation framework, CICA can facilitate the stage to find mutually beneficial engagements in areas like hydrocarbon sale purchase, hydropower generation and distribution, business consultancy and investment in each other's economies.

Asia faces multiple challenges and it also presents a diverse picture representing a unique regional framework. Closer bilateral and regional economic cooperation among the CICA members can act as a powerful catalyst for development of people in the region as well as for

resolution of difficult problems left by history. India has been associated with the initiative since its inception. Before becoming a full member of the SCO in 2017, CICA has been the only regional multilateral platform shared by India and Central Asian countries. As the global focus is shifting towards Eurasia, the regional initiatives and institutions are gaining new dynamism, which will also lead to increased expectations from people in the region.

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Disclaimer: The views expressed are that of the Researcher and not of the Council.*

End Notes

¹ United Nations Documents, <https://undocs.org/en/A/47/PV.24>

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³ Secretariat of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, “About CICA,” http://www.s-cica.org/page.php?page_id=7&lang=1

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¹⁰ Dushanbe CICA Summit 2019, “Declaration of the Fifth Summit of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia - Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region,” 15 Jun 2019, <http://www.cicasummit2019.tj/dushanbe-declaration>

¹¹ Dushanbe CICA Summit 2019, “Declaration of the Fifth Summit of Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia - Shared Vision for a Secure and More Prosperous CICA Region,” 15 Jun 2019, <http://www.cicasummit2019.tj/dushanbe-declaration>