

Flashpoint South and Central Asia: Strategic Aspects of a Historical Relationship

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Events in Afghanistan, Pakistan and India have recently focussed international attention on South Asia. However, developments there are not only rooted in the region, they are also a product of the close connections with neighbouring areas, especially with Central Asia.¹ These links emphasise the role of Islam in both regions, and indeed Islam has often been held responsible by the Western media for the instability and volatility in this part of the world. What this line of reasoning fails to recognise though is that relations between South and Central Asia cannot be explained solely with reference to Islam. For example, extremist and militant forces in the region rely just as much on Hindu, Buddhist and Sikh references and exploit ethnic or caste differences as they do on Islam.

Historical Background

Links between South and Central Asia have a long history. Mostly peacefully, but on occasion also violently, entire populations have repeatedly migrated from Central Asia to the Indian plains, bringing along their respective culture and religion. In return, the influence of Indian empires radiated to the north, affecting regions stretching as far as Central Asia. Many pre- and non-Islamic civilisations participated in these exchanges, such as the Buddhist empires of India, which took in local influences in the north and northwest, or the Arian preceptors of Hinduism who entered India from the north. However, the advent of Islam and its extension into Central and South Asia strengthened these links significantly. Many South Asian Muslims are proud of their ancestral, Central Asian heritage. The Muslim dynasties of the Moghul Emperors (1483–1862), who for centuries ruled over a largely Hindu population, in India originated from Central Asia. The enormously

¹ Central Asia refers here to the region comprising the five Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan). In a broader sense it also includes Azerbaijan, Xinjiang province in western China, Afghanistan, parts of northern India and northern Pakistan, with Kashmir.

rich influence of Central Asian, Persian and Afghan cultures on the cultures, languages, literatures, and styles of music and architecture is still in evidence throughout India today.

Since its emergence in mainly Hindu India, Islam has occupied an ambiguous position in South Asia. On the one hand, it could never remove Hinduism from its position of dominance. Islam has always remained a minority religion that could never claim more than 20 to 23 % of the population of the whole subcontinent as its adherents.² On the other hand, South Asia is currently the region with the largest number of Muslims compared to other geographic areas (twice as many for example as in the Arabic-speaking world), which is partly due to the high density of population in South Asia.³ Moreover, Muslims increased their impact on South Asian society by settling in several contiguous regions. Thus they spawned long-standing and highly developed regional centres influenced by Islam in the northwest and northeast (in what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh), on parts of the west and east coasts and in the Ganges plain north of Delhi, including the modern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Britain ruled over most of South Asia as the paramount colonial power, Islam generated close links between the anti-colonial movements of nationalist and Islamic orientation in British India and their counterparts in Russian-dominated, subsequently Soviet-ruled Central Asia.

After 1947, when India and Pakistan gained their independence, their relations with Central Asia were largely shaped by the latter's inclusion in the Soviet state. The two states were thus increasingly subjected to the polarization induced by the Cold War. While Pakistan, as a member of two military alliances (SEATO, CENTO), was very close to the U.S., India accorded special importance to relations with the Soviet Union. As the Soviet Union extended its relations with the states of South Asia, the importance of the Central Asian republics grew significantly. Soviet representatives from Central Asia were used in a calculated manner to improve the standing of Soviet politics in South Asia, relying on the respect and trust which the Central Asian heritage still enjoyed.

Pakistan Favoured a Multilateral Approach

For a long time, Pakistan considered the regional Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO, 1984) to be the major political framework for its pan-Islamic integration efforts toward Central Asia. The ECO was successor to the Regional

² According to the 1901 census, Muslims made up 21.22 % of the population. Government of India: Census of India, 1901. Calcutta: H.M.S.O., 1903, vol. I, part II, p. 397.

³ Approximately 450 million Muslims live in South Asia, as compared with roughly 200 million Muslims in the Arab World. Islamic web: Population of Muslims around the world, at <<http://islamicweb.com/begin/population.htm>>, downloaded on 17 June 2002.

Cooperation for Development (RCD, 1964), which Pakistan had founded together with Iran and Turkey as the economic arm of CENTO. The Central Asian Republics joined ECO in 1992, Afghanistan followed later. Inspired by the success of the European Community and NATO, many politicians in Pakistan believed the ten-member ECO could grow into a common market and a political Islamic bloc. However the turnover between Pakistan and the Central Asian ECO member states hardly exceeded one % of their mutual trade.⁴ Today, the ECO represents little more than a forum for debate that lives more from intentions than accomplishments. India remained excluded from the ECO. It tried in vain to neutralize this grouping by proposing to extend the South Asian Regional Cooperation for Development (SAARC) to the Central Asian states and Afghanistan.⁵

At the same time, the Central Asian states pursued other regional cooperation options that competed with the ECO. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, 1996) appears to have become the most influential of them, encompassing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, as well as Russia and China.⁶ Kazakh President Nazarbayev remarkably invited India to join the SCO.⁷ This can only be seen as a snub to Pakistan. The offer equally reflected the desire of the Central Asian states to ensure India's cooperation in the "war against terrorism", a move apparently aimed at Islamic activism in Central Asia and its sources in Pakistan.

Kazakhstan has also explored pan-Asian initiatives. In 1999 it convened the first regional security conference with 16 Asian states participating, among them India and Pakistan.⁸ This Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA)⁹ was the result of an initiative started in 1992 and sought to emulate the success of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It was remarkably reminiscent of an old Soviet proposal for

⁴ Mezhdgosudarstvennyy statisticheskiy komitet Sodruzhestva Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv: Sodruzhestvo Nezavisimykh Gosudarstv v 1996 godu: Statisticheskiy yezhegodnik, Moskva 1997, p. 66f; *ibid.* (1997) 1998, pp. 66f; *ibid.* (1999) 2000, pp. 56f.

⁵ The former Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, made this offer in his first official statement in his earlier capacity as foreign minister in July 1996. *The Times of India*, 25 July 1996.

⁶ For an overview and new assessment after Sept. 11, see Sean Yom: Russian-Chinese Pact a "Great Game" Victim. *Asia Times Online*, 30 July 2002, at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/DG30Ag01.html>.

⁷ President Nazarbayev during his official visit to India in February 2002. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL): Newslines*, 14 February 2002, at <<http://www.rferl.org/>>, downloaded on 30 July 2002.

⁸ RFE/RL: *Newslines*, 15 September 1999, *ibid.*

⁹ Cf. speech by Kazakh Ambassador to the US at Brookings Institution, Washington, on 9 July 2002, at <<http://www.brook.edu/fp/research/areas/russia/20020709.htm>>. CICA members include Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia and Kazakhstan.

convening a conference on Asian security and cooperation put forward by Leonid Brezhnev in the 1970s. A summit meeting of this regional security grouping in Kazakhstan on 3–5 June 2002 was used by the leaders of India and Pakistan, Vajpayee and Musharraf, to explore ground for compromise during the recent crisis in their relationship.¹⁰ The meeting sought to reduce tension emanating from the Kashmir conflict, from continuing attacks by militant Islamist groups and the massive forward deployment of military forces by both countries on their border. Though the meeting did not produce any tangible result, it nevertheless showed that the Central Asian states were still regarded favourably by the South Asian elites in their political calculations on account of the deep-seated respect for their common cultural legacy. In this respect, both countries followed a tradition that had allowed them to conclude a peace accord in Soviet Tashkent in 1965, at the height of the Cold War.

Among other regional options, Central Asian republics continue – to varying extents – to attach importance to cooperation within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that partly replaced the Soviet Union after its dissolution. This co-operation is primarily expressed in the six-member Collective Security Treaty (CST, 1992) with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan as members from Central Asia. The CST has devoted much attention lately to fighting terrorism, although it does not appear to have been very effective in its endeavours. The customs union of the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) holds importance for states such as Kazakhstan. The Central Asian republics have also formed their own regional grouping, the Central Asian Cooperation (CAC, 2001). Turkmenistan is staying away from this and other CIS agreements, emphasising its declared neutrality.¹¹ Regular project cooperation with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) holds the promise for Central Asian states that the West will retain a stake in the transformation of this region to democracy and a market economy. The OSCE maintains centres in four Central Asian republics.¹² Projects have included conferences on enhancing security and stability, on drugs trafficking and terrorism, on freedom of the media, on freedom of belief and expression, on penal reform, a legislation alert and an assistance programme.¹³

¹⁰ RFE/RL: Central Asia Report, 6 June 2002, *ibid.*

¹¹ The Times of Central Asia, 25 April 2002, at <www.times.kg>, downloaded on 24 June 2002.

¹² Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan. At OSCE mission survey website <<http://www.osce.org/publications/survey/>>, downloaded on 15 January 2003.

¹³ Cf. OSCE website <<http://www.osce.org>>.

India's Close Relationship with Post-Soviet Central Asia

In contrast to Pakistan's multilateral strategy, India continues to rely on its close bilateral relations with the Central Asian republics dating back to the Soviet era. The foreign trade statistics of both countries reveal that India has been much more successful in this than Pakistan. India's trade turnover with the Central Asian republics is more than double the size of Pakistan's.¹⁴ Still, the general level of economic cooperation is relatively low. As market economy reforms have progressed rather slowly in Central Asia and the investment climate has remained unstable, many businessmen from India and Pakistan have lost interest. India has also directed attention to Muslim areas in Russia and built up relatively stable relations with Tatarstan and Bashkirya.¹⁵

Reflecting Soviet-style diplomacy, the Central Asian states have preferred to develop relations through official visits, declarations and agreements about basic principles of their relations, as well as through joint commissions.¹⁶ This approach partly reflected their high expectations that the geographic proximity of the two regions would generate many political, economic and security-related gains. Yet on the other hand, it also revealed that little progress had been achieved, especially in the economic field. Leaders from Central Asia, but also from other post-Soviet states, sought inspiration from India for their own political and economic reforms. Many of them regarded Indian-style capitalism as a socially and culturally compatible alternative to the U.S. inspired model that had dominated market reforms in Russia and some post-Soviet states after 1990 and which has since been held responsible for many social lines of division and political problems there.

India's own attempts to refocus on the U.S. and other Western countries after 1991 did not produce the desired results. The Indian leadership soon realised that the U.S. was in no position to replace the Soviet Union as the main source of military supplies for its army, and perhaps never would be. Once manufacturers of military hardware from the former Soviet Union emerged as strong commercial players in the global market, they also attracted Pakistan's attention. Security and

¹⁴ Cf. statistical data from CIS Statistical Yearbook, as quoted in fn. 4.

¹⁵ In 2001 India became Tatarstan's seventh-largest trading partner. It operates two cultural centres there. The city of Kazan is a twinned with Hyderabad, the capital of the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. RFE/RL: Tatar-Bashkir Daily Report, 26 July 2002, *ibid.*

¹⁶ India signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation with Uzbekistan in 1993, of cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in 1992, of economical and cultural cooperation with Turkmenistan in 1992; India signed declarations on principles of relationship with Kazakhstan in 1992 and Tajikistan in 1993. Pakistan signed declarations on principles governing relations with Kazakhstan in 1992 and with Kyrgyzstan in 1994, a treaty on cooperation with Turkmenistan in 1994. Klaus Fritsche: *Die indisch-pakistanische Rivalität und Zentralasien*. Cologne: BIOst 1994 (=Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien; 64), p. 37f. Asian Recorder, Delhi; Dawn, Karachi; RFE/RL: *ibid.*

defence cooperation became a major factor in both countries' efforts to seek close links with post-Soviet states. India gave priority to Russia and those republics that had inherited important parts of the Soviet military industrial complex. Uzbekistan was commissioned by India to build six IL-78¹⁷ aircraft for mid-air refuelling. India also signed a military cooperation agreement with Kazakhstan (June 2002), which envisaged joint production of military hardware such as torpedoes and heavy machine gun barrels.¹⁸ Kazakhstan also cooperated with India's space programme by launching Indian satellites from the Russian space terminal on its territory.¹⁹ In return, India agreed to assist Kazakhstan in training its pilots and modernising its Ayni airbase.²⁰ The Tajik defence minister showed interest in Indian munitions production.²¹ Russian Tatarstan also has the capacity to produce sophisticated military hardware in which India is interested.²² The Aviation Plant in Kumertau, Russian Bashkirya, produced two Ka-31 helicopters for India.²³

Pakistan benefited by gaining easier access to military hardware from post-Soviet states. It purchased 320 T-80-UD tanks from the Ukraine.²⁴ This deal was meant to counterbalance the military build-up in India, which was about to introduce the T-90 tank into its arsenal.²⁵ Pakistan also concluded a military agreement with Azerbaijan (April 2002), envisaging training for Azheri military officers, technical support and the sale of weapons and ammunition.²⁶ It was politically significant for both countries that they decided to support each other on the conflicts over Nagornyy Karabakh and Kashmir.²⁷ Pakistan also held exploratory talks on military cooperation with Turkmenistan. It had earlier trained Turkmen pilots and now wanted to assist it in creating a navy. When Pakistan's Navy chief Fasih Bokhari visited Turkmenistan in 1997, he particularly lauded its neutrality, which Pakistan regarded as tacit support for its efforts to prop up the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.²⁸

¹⁷ RFE/RL: Newswire, 18 December 2001, *ibid.*

¹⁸ RFE/RL: Central Asia Report, 6 June 2002, *ibid.*

¹⁹ Asian Recorder, Delhi 1993, p. 23329; 1996, p. 25359.

²⁰ RFE/RL: Newswire, 24 January 2002; 29 April 2002, *ibid.*

²¹ RFE/RL: Newswire, 19 December 2001, *ibid.*

²² RFE/RL: Tatar-Bashkir Weekly Review, 18 April 2000, *ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 8 January 2003.

²⁴ Praveen Swami: War and Games, in: *Frontline*, Madras, 3/2002, at <www.frontlineonnet.com>, downloaded on 29 June 2002.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ On the latter see also RFE/RL: Newswire, 25 May 2001, *ibid.*

²⁷ RFE/RL: Newswire, 16 April 2002, *ibid.*

²⁸ Talks of the Pakistani Chief of Navy in Turkmenistan in July 1997. RFE/RL: Newswire, 18 July 1997, *ibid.*

Afghan Conflict Draws Both Regions Together

It was the conflict in Afghanistan, which more than anything else demonstrated the closeness of South and Central Asia and this was reinforced when civil war broke out and the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in 1978. The Soviet Union employed many soldiers from its Central Asian republics there. The Islamic volunteers (*mujahidīn*), fighting in Afghanistan with support from Pakistan and the U.S., took symbolic revenge for the persecution of the "Basmachis,"²⁹ Islamic groups in Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s. Several of them had found refuge in northern Afghanistan and northern India at the time.

India and Pakistan treated the Afghan issue in a manner that was characteristic of their whole approach to Central Asia: they tried to gain access to the region to reap advantages for their own strategic rivalry. India continued to maintain good relations with the pro-Soviet governments in Afghanistan as a means of putting pressure on both Pakistan and the Islamist resistance movement. It feared the Islamic resistance would heighten tension amongst India's Muslims and have a negative impact on the situation in Kashmir. Pakistan hoped it could get external support from a neighbouring Central Asian bloc of Muslim countries to its north and west in order to balance the perceived political and military superiority of its eastern neighbour and feared opponent, India. Pakistan's Islamist military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq had already conceived of an Islamic bloc in this region that might also become a major economic factor.³⁰ After 1990, Pakistan's representatives repeatedly spoke of their search for a strategic hinterland in Central Asia. Pakistan's military in particular was looking for options to balance their country's situation in the event of an uneven conventional war with India.³¹ It wanted to use the territory of friendly Muslim states in the west and north to ensure continued military supplies for its army and thus make up for India's strategic advantage of having a vast hinterland of its own. However, Pakistan's understanding of the Central Asian states was rather vague. It overestimated the Islamic character of their elites and underestimated the weight of their common post-Soviet interests, their pro-European and pro-American leanings.

²⁹ The term "Basmachi" comes from "Baskinji" for attacker, rebel and has been used since the late Tsarist period for (Muslim) resistance to the sovereign. Hasan B. Paksoy: *Essays on Central Asia*. Here quoted from the Columbus 1992 Internet edition, at: <<http://www.ku.edu/~ibetext/texts/paksoy-6/cae12.html>>, downloaded on 2 July 2002.

³⁰ Cf. General Zia-ul-Haq's address to the nation on 19 November 1979. Zia-ul-Haq: *President calls for Islamic Society*, Islamabad 1979.

³¹ For details see: Dietrich Reetz: *Pakistan and the Central Asia Hinterland Option: the Race for Regional Security and Development*, in: *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 1/1993, pp. 28–56.

Regional Impact of Taliban Rule in Afghanistan

Developments in Afghanistan made it clear that both countries pursued separate and yet parallel tracks toward Central Asia. Pakistan had for a long time supported Islamic militants (*mujahidin*) and had helped the Taliban come into existence. It hoped it could establish a pro-Pakistani government in Afghanistan, which would bring its ideas of an Islamic hinterland closer to fruition. This was also intended to facilitate Pakistan's access to the land route into Central Asia. Significantly, when the Taliban emerged in 1994, one of their first actions was to liberate a convoy of trucks from Pakistan destined for Central Asia that had been detained by local warlords who were demanding a "road tax" as ransom.³² Moves such as integrating Afghan border districts into Pakistan's telecommunication network raised suspicions that Pakistan's help with reconstruction in Afghanistan might also have had expansionist designs.³³

Historically, India had not been without influence in Afghanistan either. The small but prominent elite of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan had always maintained close relations with India. The equally small secular Afghan elite also looked to India for cultural orientation, particularly its non-Pakhtun sections. During the civil war in the late 1990s India supported close relations with the Northern Alliance that united Persian-speaking and Shiite fighters of Uzbek and Tajik descent. They were the enemies of Pakistan's allies, the Taliban. Many of their families sought asylum in India.

When after the downfall of the Taliban the Northern Alliance emerged as the strongest political force in Afghanistan, many friends of India suddenly surfaced in the Afghan Interim Government, among them its head, Hamid Karzai, the Minister of the Interior, Mohammad Yunus Qanooni, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Abdullah Abdullah, whose families partly resided in India.³⁴ For Pakistan this development marked the bankruptcy of its Afghanistan and Central Asia policies. The nightmare of a two-front situation appeared to materialize, in which Pakistan was confronted with India in Kashmir and with the friends of India in Afghanistan.³⁵ Still, the new government in Afghanistan, and also that of India, clearly understood that stability would not return to Afghanistan without or

against Pakistan. This was largely due to the strong links among the Pakhtuns who are evenly distributed on both sides of the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. For that reason, during his official visit to Islamabad, Karzai pointedly stated in talks with General Musharraf that the "misunderstandings and misperceptions" of the past should be left behind³⁶ Pakistan joined Afghanistan's other neighbours in signing the Kabul "Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations" of 22 December 2002, termed a non-aggression pact and receiving explicit endorsement from the UN Security Council.³⁷

The reconstruction effort in Afghanistan and the development of effective regional economic cooperation with its neighbours in West, Central and South Asia is a potentially important field of engagement for both India and Pakistan. At present the two states are competitors, which prevents them from realising the full potential of this development task. Afghanistan has no railroad and two decades of war have heavily damaged its limited road network. Several project studies exist to extend Pakistan's railroad into Afghanistan and to link it with Central Asia and Iran. The most likely option is a rail link from Quetta in Pakistan's Baluchistan province through Chaman to Khushka in Turkmenistan. The track between Chaman and Khushka would be 800 km long. In the year 2000 its cost was estimated at more than U.S.\$ 600 million.³⁸ Another 100 million dollars would be required to upgrade the Quetta-Chaman section of the main line. Investors have so far shied away from putting money into this risky project. Pakistan would also like to lay a direct road link through the Wakhan Corridor to Tajikistan and thereby into Central Asia. This proposal appears even less likely to materialise in view of the difficult terrain and the reluctance of investors.³⁹ Here too, India pursues alternative projects that exclude Pakistan. Together with Iran and Russia, it has increasingly been promoting a "North-South Transport Corridor" since September 2000. The respective trilateral agreement came into force in May 2002. Goods from Indian ports will be shipped to Iran, from where they will continue their journey by rail and over the Caspian Sea into Russia right up to St. Petersburg, subsequently moving on to Scandinavia and Central Europe. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan also want to join the agreement. This route relies on transport links from the Soviet era, which need to be updated and extended for this purpose.⁴⁰

³² Dawn, Karachi, 4 November 1994, at website <www.dawn.com>, downloaded on 27 June 2002.

³³ For details see: Dietrich Reetz: India and Pakistan in the race for Central Asia: a comparison, in: Central Asia. Peshawar, 41/1997, pp. 211–251.

³⁴ ABCNews, 19 December 2001, at website <www.ABCNEWS.com>, downloaded on 2 July 2002. Hindustan Times, 13 December 2001, at website <www.hindustantimes.com>, downloaded on 2 July 2002.

³⁵ See, for example, India's participation in training the Afghan police, or, reports on transferring selected prisoners of the recent war to India. Pakistan alleged that among them were also Pakistani nationals fighting with the Taliban. Frontier Post, Peshawar, 28 July 2002, at website <http://frontierpost.com.pk>, downloaded on 1 August 2002.

³⁶ New York Times, 9 February 2002, Afghan and Pakistani Leaders Pledge to Move Beyond Old Grudges, at NYT homepage <www.nyt.com>, downloaded on 9 February 2002.

³⁷ The News (Karachi), 23 December 2002, at website <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/>, downloaded on 25 December 2002.

³⁸ Laila A. Ali, Pak-Afghan-CAS rail link feasibility study. Business Recorder, 23 April 2000, at the Assistance Afghanistan website <www.pcpafg.org>, downloaded on 13 June 2002.

³⁹ A proposal like this was made again during a visit by Musharraf to Tajikistan in June 2002. RFE/RL: Newline 3 June 2002, *ibid*.

⁴⁰ Russia, India and Iran Initiate North-South Transport Corridor, in: RFE/RL: Security and Terrorism Watch, 30 May 2002, vol.3, no.19, *ibid*.

The mining and transport of raw material is another promising potential area of cooperation. Turkmenistan has a strong interest in making its gas production independent of Russian companies and finding access to world markets through alternative transport routes. One pipeline, known as the TAP route (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline) could lead through Afghanistan to Pakistan and on to India. The gas could find many potential customers in the vast Indian market. There is speculation that the U.S. wants to further such a development for strategic reasons in order to undermine the Russian monopoly in controlling strategic natural resources in the post-Soviet realm. The American company Unocal achieved great prominence by becoming the development manager for the gas pipeline consortium CentGas, founded in October 1997. The estimated cost for the project at the time was U.S.\$ 1.9 billion for the segment to Pakistan and an additional U.S.\$ 600 million for the extension to India.⁴¹ Unocal was ready to accept the Taliban as a business partner. It employed a number of prominent lobbyists, among them Henry Kissinger and the current Afghan President, Karzai. As the Taliban appeared increasingly rigid on the participation of women in the construction of the pipeline, they provoked the ire of international Human Rights and Women's Liberation Organisations. This and their hard-line implementation of certain Islamic laws prevented the signing of the contract and forced Unocal to suspend work on the project. The Taliban lost up to U.S.\$ 1 billion in annual transit fees promised by Unocal and Bidas, an Argentine company, leading a rival bid.

After the downfall of the Taliban it still appears difficult to revive the project. Conditions remain uncertain for investors. The smouldering conflict between the nuclear powers Pakistan and India over Kashmir and other issues are partly to blame for this. The persisting tension prevents India from joining a project where a strategic recourse such as gas or oil would be transported across the potentially hostile territory of Pakistan. The commercial viability of the pipeline is equally uncertain. Pakistan is making a great deal of effort to obtain a greater share of its energy requirements from local sources. The Indian market is expected – due to better growth rates – to generate much higher demand for gas and oil. But this additional demand can also, and with far less risk, be met through alternative projects, such as transport by ship from Iran and Oman to India's west coast, or through a pipeline under the Arabian Sea. The U.S. Department of Energy, therefore, has lately viewed prospects for the TAP route with caution.⁴²

The Karzai administration hopes to relaunch the project, viewing it as one of its few potential sources of income for development. Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed a trilateral accord in December 2002 for a feasibility study of the project to be financed by the Asian Development Bank.⁴³ But it is still unclear

⁴¹ Unocal company bulletin, at website <<http://www.unocal.com/uclnews/97news/102797a.htm>>, downloaded on 15 January 2003.

⁴² US Energy Information Agency (EIA): Pakistan Country Analysis Brief. 03/02. At website <<http://www.eia.doe.gov/cabs/pakistan.html>>, downloaded on 29 July 2002.

⁴³ The framework agreement was signed at a trilateral summit on 27 December 2002 in Ashgabat. *The News*, 28 December 2002.

where the financial backing for the construction and operation of the pipeline is supposed to come from. The new U.S. caution also reveals a shift in attitude toward Russian control over Central Asian energy resources. The United States has come to see Russia in a different light after the close cooperation in the international anti-terrorist coalition in the aftermath of September 11. In view of the highly volatile situation in the Middle East, the U.S. now seems to regard the natural resources in the post-Soviet realm as a potentially much more reliable strategic reserve. The U.S. administration has not yet given up on the TAP project though. The statement by the U.S. Ambassador to Turkmenistan at a meeting in Ashgabat clearly illustrated the complexity of its commercial and strategic objectives:

"The U.S. government also is ready to back the commercially viable trans-Afghan gas pipeline. The implementation of this program can produce a decisive impact on Afghanistan's stability and prosperity and, apart from this, would allow an increase in the volumes of Turkmen fuel exports and diversification of routes. We decisively support this point, too."⁴⁴

Russia's reluctance to fully endorse the project creates another obstacle. Russia fears commercial disadvantages from the diversification of Turkmen gas export routes, all of which currently cross Russian territory. However, given the strong Russian interest in the Afghan situation and its good cooperation with the U.S. as part of the coalition against terrorism, it appears unlikely that Russia will let the project fail completely.

Alternative pipeline projects involving India and Pakistan are being pursued by Iran, which is keen to market its huge gas reserves. In 2002 it commissioned feasibility studies for an overland route through Pakistan to India: estimated cost up to U.S.\$ 6 billion. An underwater line to India, bypassing Pakistan, would cost U.S.\$ 3.3 billion.⁴⁵ The latter also received support from the Russian monopoly Gazprom.⁴⁶

Islamist Networks across the Region

Taliban rule and the war against terrorism in Afghanistan also made it abundantly clear to what extent Islamist networks nourished or started in South Asia extend to the whole region, and even into Central Asia. Their militant spin-offs have proven capable of threatening the security and stability – mostly through internal conflict – not only of regional states, but also of Western industrial powers, including the United States, which was shown to be vulnerable on its own territory far away from the region. These militant groups are often inspired by, and pledge allegiance to,

⁴⁴ RFE/RL: *Weekday Magazine*, 11 July 2002, *ibid*.

⁴⁵ RFE/RL: *Features*, 18 December 2001, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 August 2002.

purist religious movements such as the Deobandis, although their objectives may not coincide and they should not be confused with them.

Although they often figure prominently in public and in the news, Islamists represent only a minority of Muslims in the region. Modern Islamic revival and purification movements with an anti-Western orientation came into being in South Asia during the colonial period and directed their activities against both colonial rule and the Western way of life which was spreading rapidly in South Asia. This did not necessarily imply that they were “backward” or “traditional.” Many Islamic leaders and activists received a Western education, which made them all the more clearly and painfully aware of the vast discrepancy between the ideals of the Western way of life and their implementation in India and Pakistan. Other Islamists hailed from a more conservative background. They graduated from the traditional Islamic schools (*madrassa*), which provided them with high-level theological qualifications, but gave them very little knowledge about the modern world. The Western media have often attacked the famous Islamic school in Deoband (*dār al-ʿulūm*) for the ideological and religious inspiration it is supposed to have given to the Taliban. However, such an assessment fails to notice that although both relied on a similar formal interpretation of Islam, the classical Deobandi school of thought emphasised rather more tolerance and a largely peaceful cohabitation of different religions and cultures on Indian soil. The Deoband School convincingly practiced this attitude during the anti-colonial movement when it allied with mainstream nationalist forces such as the Indian National Congress. In contrast, the Taliban with their rigorous approach to the interpretation and practice of Islam catered more to the harsh realities of Pakhtun tribal life, to the views of nomads and villagers and their reading of modernity.

Since 1991 many Islamic groups from Pakistan and India have engaged in re-Islamising Central Asia. They have made it a priority to bring knowledge of Islam back to Central Asia following the long disruption of Islamic life there. Pakistan’s Islamic Party (*Jamāʿat-i Islāmī* – JI) systematically and extensively republished and distributed Islamic literature in Central Asian languages. Its Institute of Regional Studies in Peshawar served as a special centre of production and dissemination of such material.⁴⁷ The institute translated, for instance, works by the South Asian reformist scholar Sulaiman Nadwi (1884–1953), who also inspired Islamic teaching in Central Asia.⁴⁸ The Islamabad-based Institute for Policy Studies, a JI think tank, published a monthly magazine, “The Muslims of Central Asia” (*Wastī Eshiyā kē Musalmān*) in Urdu. Deobandi educational

groups lent support to selected *madrassa* and local Islamic foundations (*waqf*) in Central Asia. The *Tablighī Jamāʿat*, an Islamic missionary movement from South Asia, dispatched lay preachers to the region as well. Tajik students could be seen attending a five-year course on Islam at a Saudi-financed *madrassa* in Peshawar. When they went into town they were allowed to speak Arabic only in order to conceal their Central Asian origin. Remarkably the Tajik students were also very interested in taking computer and English lessons while in Peshawar to equip them for the arrival of the market economy.⁴⁹ Central Asian students studied at the International Islamic University (IIU) in Islamabad, an ambitious international endeavour for the “Islamisation of Knowledge” financed with Saudi money. The IIU also trained judges from the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan in Islamic law (*sharīʿa*).⁵⁰

Unholy Alliance of Militancy, Drugs, and Illegal Weapons

In the course of an Islamic resurgence, many Islamic parties and groups in Pakistan and India formed militant wings. As *mujāhidīn* – fighters for the faith – their members participated in the Afghan war against the Soviet invasion, in which they received abundant political and material support from the West. Their success convinced them that it would be easy to extend the struggle against un-Islamic customs and unbelievers. After the war, in a context of economic stagnation, the fighters were unable to find employment in the Afghani civil sector. Many foreigners, mostly of Arab origin, but also fighters from Uzbekistan, Chechnya and the Chinese Muslim province of Xinjiang, were looking for new tasks. They could not return to their home countries, where the authorities’ fear of internal destabilisation made them mostly unwelcome. Regional conflicts in some Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Chinese province Xinjiang) became intertwined with the situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), or the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRP), but also many individual fighters, particularly Uighurs operating in Xinjiang, took temporary refuge in Afghanistan or in the tribal areas of Pakistan. They came to attend religious schools in Pakistan and received financial backing partly from Saudi-Arabia and partly from Iran. The Central Asian groups in part grew out of Islamist underground networks from the Soviet era, which grew more radical after the transformation of 1990–91 and also attracted sections of the pro-government Islamic sector. Outside money and missionaries often helped shape the militant Islamic milieu.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Interviews by the author at the Institute of Policy Studies at Islamabad on 4 November 1994, and at the Institute for Regional Studies at Peshawar on 9 December 1996.

⁴⁸ Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi: *Life of Muhammad*. Zhizneopisaniye Wyelikogo Mukhameda. (Russian) Transl. by Shah Mahmood. Peshawar: Institute of Regional Studies 1994. Idem: *Nekotoryye aktualʹnyye woprosy musulʹmanskoy fikhi v svyazi s namazom, rozoy i zakatom*. (Russian) Transl. by Shah Mahmood. Peshawar: Institute of Regional Studies 1992.

⁴⁹ Interviews by the author in Peshawar on 20 November 1997.

⁵⁰ Dawn, 17 November 1993.

⁵¹ For a fuller analysis, see Dietrich Reetz: *Islamic Activism in Central Asia and the Pakistan Factor*, in: *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, 1/1999, pp. 1–37.

The entanglement of Islamist fighters in the Kashmir conflict evolved in a similar manner. A militant uprising started in Indian-controlled Kashmir in 1990. After 1994 it was basically taken over by groups coming from outside.⁵² In terms of members, leaders, and sources of financing, they overlapped extensively with groups fighting in the Afghan civil war between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance (*Harkat-ul-Mujāhidīn* – HUM, *Hizb al-Mujāhidīn* – HM, *Lashkar-i Taiba* – LT, *Jaish-i Muhammadī* – JM). Many of them were also involved in the widespread sectarian violence between Sunni and Shiite groups that marred public life in many cities in the Pakistani province of Punjab (*Lashkar-i Jhangwī* – LJ). Observers believe that Pakistan's military leadership has the means and influence to pull the rug from under these groups in Kashmir. But, in spite of strong international pressure it cannot muster the resolve to close down training facilities, financial channels and supply lines. Pakistan's ideological self-identification is closely tied to Kashmir. Its military leadership and civilian elite believe that all of Kashmir should rightfully belong to Pakistan. This claim is based on the fact that Kashmir has a majority Muslim population. The region's political status has been disputed ever since partition and two inconclusive wars have been fought with India over it.

The long Afghan civil war contributed to the emergence of a burgeoning "Kalashnikov culture" in Pakistan.⁵³ Weapons left over this war, drugs, and militias of various persuasions, ranging from Islamist to regional to ethnic, created a deadly mixture. The drugs economy established an ominous link between South and Central Asia through the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The latter is estimated to be the world's largest exporter of heroin. Its share in Western markets is put at around 80 percent.⁵⁴ Many factors contributed to the expansion of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and the mass production of raw opium and heroin: the long civil war; the lack of alternative sources of income in the largely rural tribal areas; and the search for sources of finance for the civil war and militant groups. As a result, mafia-like structures emerged in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in which parts of the military and security apparatus, the tribal elites, the big landowners and some militant groups operated hand in hand. They valued Central Asia as a promising transit channel to Western markets. This development led to a significant increase in

On more recent developments, see the studies of the International Crisis Group (ICG): The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan campaign, 30 January 2002; Central Asia: Islamist mobilization and regional Security, 1 March 2001. Tajikistan: An uncertain peace, 24 December 2001, at website <www.crisisweb.org>, all downloaded on 27 July 2002.

⁵² BBC News South Asia: Who are the Kashmir Militants? 10 August 2000, at website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia>, downloaded on 16 July 2002. ICG: Kashmir: Confrontation and Miscalculation, 11 July 2002: *ibid*.

⁵³ This was aptly described by Ralph Joseph: Pakistan fights to end "Kalashnikov culture". The Washington Times, 20 August 2002, at website <<http://www.washtimes.com/world/20020820-27615356.htm>>, downloaded on 20 January 2003.

⁵⁴ ICG: Central Asia: Drugs and Conflict, 26 November 2001, *ibid*.

opiate consumption in the Central Asian republics, in Afghanistan and Pakistan. When the Taliban leader Mullah Omar banned poppy cultivation in 2000, production effectively ceased. At the same time, however, this released part of the substantial stockpiles estimated at 220 tons of heroin, "the equivalent of a nearly two-year supply for the needs of the Western Europe market."⁵⁵ The Karzai administration has already declared its resolve to continue suppressing poppy cultivation. In this it is facing strong local resistance from local tribesmen who fear for their livelihood. The success of anti-drugs policies will ultimately hinge on a macro-economic concept that aims to create alternative sources of income.

Since General Musharraf assumed power, the Pakistani government has also devoted considerable attention to fighting the weapons and drugs culture. These efforts include programmes for the seizure of illegal weapons, more resolute measures to combat the drugs trade, restrictions on recruitment drives by Islamist and other militias, and the reformation, registration and supervision of religious schools.⁵⁶ Yet success does not come easily. These measures are strongly resisted by many. They remain half-hearted and will have little impact as long as certain Islamic militants are spared, particularly in Kashmir. As a result, some of these organisations have been able to regroup under new names.

Strategic Rivalry between India and Pakistan

The whole equation is further complicated by the fact that India and Pakistan are locked in a strategic rivalry over supremacy in South Asia. Their contest is strategic because in some ways it is interpreted by parts of the elites of both countries as existential and irreconcilable. Many Indian leaders never accepted the 1947 partition of colonial India into two states, the secular and multi-religious Indian Union, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, comprising the Muslim majority areas in the northwest and northeast of the subcontinent. Some Islamic groups and Pakistani politicians asserted that Pakistan was the homeland of all Muslims in South Asia,

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Musharraf repeatedly discussed these issues. In particular, his June 2001 address to more than 5000 religious scholars on the occasion of the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (Milad-un-Nabi), created a great stir when he gave a highly critical assessment: "If we compare the model Islamic society and the situation in Pakistan, we will realise that there is no tolerance in the society, justice and equity and no merit. We want to impose our ideas on others, and there is contradiction in our sayings and deeds which is causing damage to the country." News, 7 June 2001, at <<http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews>>. Another important event was Musharraf's speech on 12 January 2002, in which he rejected Islamic militancy even more clearly. He banned five militant groups (LT, JM, TJP, TNSM, SSP) and put another on the observation list (SP). All religious schools had to be registered by 23 March 2002. Dawn, 13 January 2002. Later, however, he shied away from fully implementing these policies, although he maintained a certain pressure on militants, particularly with a sectarian background.

claiming guardianship over India's sizeable Muslim minority (12% – see table 2). Others demanded the restoration of Muslim rule over the entire subcontinent.

Political differences between elements of the Muslim elite and the opposing Congress party that co-operated closely with Hindu nationalists, sharpened considerably during the independence movement. Widespread communal rioting during and after partition in 1947–49 forced millions to emigrate and left hundreds of thousands dead. Those events left behind abiding feelings of insecurity and bitterness, which still form an essential part of the mutual fear perception. India fought three wars with Pakistan in 1948–49, 1965 and 1971. The last one helped create an independent Bangladesh out of East Pakistan and left Pakistan's leadership traumatised.

Reflecting this polarisation, Pakistan has routinely attacked India for the way it supposedly treated its Muslim minority. A typical acrimonious exchange ensued at the 57th opening session of the UN General Assembly in 2002. Referring to the communal riots in Gujarat earlier the same year, General Musharraf stressed that “the international community must act to oppose extremism in India with the same determination it has displayed in combating terrorism, religious bigotry, ethnic cleansing and fascist tendencies elsewhere in the world.” To this India retorted the next day that “with 150 million Muslims, India has the second largest Muslim population in the world; greater than that of Pakistan. We are proud of the multi-religious character of our society. Equal respect for all faiths and non-discrimination on the basis of religion are not just part of our constitutional obligations, but, as the whole world knows, they are the signature theme of India's civilization and culture.”⁵⁷

Although the strategic balance had demonstrably changed in favour of India, Pakistan's leaders still assumed they could deal with India on the basis of parity. Pakistan chose to achieve this mainly through high military spending. In terms of its gross domestic product, Pakistan's military expenses are almost double those of India (see table 1). There are also internal political reasons for the prominent role of Pakistan's army. Pakistan has been repeatedly ruled by army generals and this has prevented the political process from taking proper roots.⁵⁸ In this the military colluded with ranking representatives of the civil bureaucracy and with landowners.⁵⁹ Often the argument is made that Pakistan cannot withdraw from strategic competition with India either in Kashmir or in general, because this would make its large army redundant. During the long military rule of Zia-ul-Haq and more recently under General Musharraf, army officers have increasingly acquired stakes in landed and industrial property, as well as positions in civil administration, which they are not likely to relinquish easily.

⁵⁷ United Nations: General Assembly, 57th session, 2nd plenary meeting, 12 September 2002, and 4th plenary meeting, 13 September 2002, on website of United Nations, at <<http://www.un.org/ga/57/pv.html>>, downloaded on 15 January 2003.

⁵⁸ The military ruled Pakistan briefly in 1954 under martial law, 1958–62, 1969–71, 1977–88, and 1999–2003.

⁵⁹ Cf. Hasan Askari Rizvi: *Military, State and Society in Pakistan*. Houndmills 2000.

Table 1. Selected Military Indicators of the Strategic Balance between India and Pakistan

	India	Pakistan
Military expenses (2001)	U.S.\$ 12,879,000,000	U.S.\$ 3,159,000,000
Share of military expenses in GDP (2000)	2.4 %	4.5 %
Total Armed Forces	1,263,000	620,000
Reserve	535,000	513,000
Army	1,100,000	550,000
Main battle tanks	3,414	2,300+
Navy	53,000	25,000
Principal surface combatants	27	8
Aircraft carriers	1	None
Submarines	16	10
Air Force	110,000	45,000
Combat aircraft	738	353
Nuclear warheads (est.) ^a	100–150	25–50
Short-range missiles ^b	Prithvi I (150 km): 20–50? Prithvi II (250 km – air force version): 25 ordered? Prithvi III (250–350 km): under development; Agni (short-range, 700 km): ?; Sagarika (submarine-launched, 250–350 km): under development?	Hatf I (80 km): 80; Hatf II (180 km): number unknown; Hatf III (280 km): 30–84; Shaheen I (600–750 km): unknown
Medium-range missiles ^b	Agni I (1,500–2,000 km): 5?; Agni II (2,000 km): 20 ordered;	Ghauri I (1,300–1,500 km): 10–12?; Ghauri II (2,000 km): 5–10?
Long-range missiles ^b	Agni III (3,000 km): under development?	Shaheen II (2,000–3,000 km?): under development
Nuclear capable aircraft ^b	Mig-27: 147; Mig-29 (1,650 km): 64; Mirage 2000 (1,850 km): 35; Su-30 (3,000 km): 10; Jaguar (850 km): 88	A-5 “Fantan” (2,000 km): 60; Mirage III (4,000 km): 107; Mirage-5 (4,000): 64; F-16 (2,500): 32

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies: *Military Balance 2001–02*. Oxford 2001, pp. 162–65, 167–68. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute: *SIPRI yearbook 2002*. Oxford 2002, pp. 279, 285. a: Duncan Lennox: *Comparing India's and Pakistan's strategic nuclear weapon capabilities*, in: *Jane's Strategic Weapon Systems*, 30 May 2002, at <http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jsws/jsws020530_1_n.shtml>, downloaded on 20 January 2003. b: India: *Nuclear Forces, 2002*, in: *Proliferation News and Resources*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington): online, at <<http://www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/numbers/india.asp>>. Pakistan: *Nuclear Forces, 2002*, *ibid.*, at <<http://www.ceip.org/files/nonprolif/numbers/pakistan.asp>>.

Even though Pakistan has a disproportionately large army, it is still no match for India's armed forces. So far, all military battles have ended in India's favour. Yet, Indian military experts often point to the fact that for some sectors and battle lines the gap is not all that large. There is also a persistent belief that Pakistan's military is better trained and organised. In any case, India nowadays rarely has the superiority it would need to win a decisive battle convincingly. The strategic situation changed significantly when India confirmed its nuclear status and detonated five nuclear devices on 11 and 13 May 1998. Pakistan followed suit only weeks later, on 28 and 30 May.⁶⁰ This confirmed what had long been suspected, that both countries possessed the capabilities to produce nuclear weapons.

India hoped the explosion would confirm its status as a global player and a member of the "nuclear club." It had long set its eyes on a role in world politics equal to that of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.⁶¹ China's presence there, in particular, had irked India, as it often felt challenged by Chinese policies. India's relationship with China has been ambiguous. They have shared common political ideals in world politics ever since they co-founded the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s. They jointly opposed the "dictate" of the two "superpowers," the U.S. and the Soviet Union, to the world in general and Asia in particular. Yet India still regarded China a potential threat. The two have a long-standing border dispute that led to the outbreak of a brief war in 1962, which India did not win. India's ruling party at the time of the nuclear explosions was the Bharatiya Janata Party, which pursued a strident cultural nationalism based on the Hindu religion. The explosions were meant as an assertion and affirmation of the ruling party, whose power base was still shaky.

For Pakistan, the nuclear explosion was intended to bring the benefit of a great equalizer in the strategic equation with India.⁶² Now it seemed that India's conventional superiority no longer mattered. Pakistan continued to challenge India militarily through insurgency operations in Kashmir and other trouble spots,

⁶⁰ Cf. Rodney W. Jones and Mark G. McDonough: *Tracking Nuclear Proliferation: A Guide in Maps and Charts*, 1998. Washington 1998, at website of Carnegie Endowment for Peace, <<http://www.ceip.org/programs/npp/track98b.htm>>, downloaded on 20 January 2003, notably chapter 8 and p. 111. American scientists could not fully confirm the claimed numbers of explosions but agreed that nuclear explosions had taken place.

⁶¹ Playing on the newly acquired nuclear status, Prime Minister Vajpayee forcefully confirmed India's demand to join the other permanent members of the Security Council, "as long as effective power in the Council rests with the permanent membership." United Nations: General Assembly, 53rd session, 13th plenary meeting, 24 September 1998, on the United Nations website, at <<http://www.un.org/ga/53/session/pv53.htm>>, downloaded on 15 January 2003.

⁶² The situation was aptly summarized by Michael Krepon, Founding President of the Henry L. Stimson Center in his testimony to the US House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia: *The current crisis in South Asia*, 6 June 2002, on the Center's website, at <<http://www.stimson.org/media/?sn=me20020607371>>, downloaded on 20 January 2003.

assuming India would not reply in kind for fear of a nuclear conflagration. This assumption was proven wrong shortly afterwards. Pakistan started a local military adventure in the Kargil sector on the Indian side of the line of control in Kashmir in May 1999. Army troops occupied the seemingly inaccessible mountain heights at a time when they were seasonally vacated by Indian forces. However, political pressure from the U.S. and a heavy military response from India forced Pakistan into humiliating retreat.

The leadership of both countries seemed callously ignorant of the concomitant obligations and consequences of nuclear status. Only later did they start clarifying command chains, establishing early warning systems and securing their assets against terrorist attacks.⁶³ When taken to task by the international community for having crossed the nuclear threshold, India and Pakistan colluded in their arguments that they had the right to possess the same capabilities as other nuclear powers, as long as these refused to give them up. They refused to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and strongly resisted the sanctions imposed by the U.S., although these were limited and had little economic effect. It was a telling sign that so far only India has developed a nuclear doctrine, and that only after the nuclear tests. Pakistan has kept the option of first use for its nuclear deterrent open, referring to India's stronger position in conventional warfare, while India has agreed to a non-first use regime. Both sides have agreed to refrain from attacks on each other's nuclear installations and to exchange lists of nuclear facilities on a regular basis. So far India and Pakistan have successfully avoided signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), a position made easier by a negative U.S. Senate vote in 1999, although they have agreed to abide by a voluntary test ban.⁶⁴

At a time when many factors have a bearing on security, the strategic rivalry between the two states extends to various areas and issues, ranging from economic growth, to the introduction of modern technologies and computerization, to reserves and exploration of strategic raw material and energy resources, to educational levels, poverty alleviation and the protection of the environment. Table 2 shows a number of general indicators, which demonstrate that India is slightly more advanced than Pakistan, although not to the extent suggested by the difference in the ratios of size and resources. India's functioning democracy works to its advantage, although a closer look at the political culture in both countries shows that there are many obstacle and aberrations that still need to be removed. So far, globalisation has served India better than Pakistan, as the latter has seen a

⁶³ Cf. Praful Bidwai: *Nuclear South Asia: Still on the Edge*. In: *Frontline* (Madras), vol. 20, no. 2, 18 January 2003.

⁶⁴ Cf. the speeches by the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, A.B. Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, at the opening of the 53rd UN General Assembly in 1998. UN website, *ibid.* Cf. also: *India, Pakistan Commit to Sign CTB Treaty by September 1999*. In: *Arms Control Today*, Washington: online, October 1998, at <http://www.armscontrol.org/act/1998_10/ipoc98.asp>, downloaded on 10 January 2003.

Table 2. Selected General Indicators of the Strategic Balance between India and Pakistan

	India	Pakistan
Population (July 2002 est.)	1,045,845,226	147,663,429
Muslims	125,501,427 (12 %)	143,233,526 (97 %)
Area (land)	2,973,190 sq km	778,720 sq km
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – per capita (2001)	U.S.\$ 2,500	U.S.\$ 2,100
Literacy	52 % (1995)	42.7 % (1998)
Population growth rate (2002 est.)	1.51 %	2.06 % (2002 est.)
Oil production ^a	658,200 b/d	53,600 b/d
Oil reserves ^a	4.8 billion bbl	208 million bbl
Gas reserves ^a	22.8 tcf	21.6 tcf
Nuclear power plants ^b	14	2
Share of nuclear energy generation ^b	3.7 %	2.9 %
Software industry exports (2001) ^c	U.S.\$ 8.3 billion	U.S.\$ 19.1 million

Sources: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency: The World Factbook 2002. Washington, DC: online, at <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html>>, downloaded on 25 January 2003. a: Oil and Gas Journal, online, at <<http://orc.pennnet.com>>, downloaded on 16 January 2003. b: Uranium Information Centre, India and Pakistan: Nuclear Issues Briefing Paper 45, Melbourne, October 2002, at <<http://www.uic.com.au/nip45.htm>>, downloaded on 20 January 2003. c: Dawn. 11 November 2002, at <<http://www.dawn.com/2002/11/15/nat18.htm>>, downloaded on 10 January 2003.

rapid deterioration in its economic, political and administrative framework. India has succeeded in creating an increasingly competitive indigenous software and computer industry (see table 2). Both face the difficult task of adopting transparent and financially sound economic policies capable of diffusing wealth and prosperity beyond a selected few. The gravity of Pakistan's internal instability at a certain point can be gauged from the careful way the U.S. tailored its sanctions for the nuclear tests in such a manner as to prevent Pakistan from collapsing, a prospect dreaded not only by the U.S., but by India.

Internationally, this rivalry has spurred the two countries into competitive challenges in many fields beyond South Asia. They both joined the race for placing satellites into orbit, using them for economic, military and educational tasks. India again had an edge on Pakistan as it was able to launch its own satellite rockets, while Pakistan had to settle for China and Russia launching its two satellites in 1990 and 2001. Both states sought prominent positions in international organisations, frequently blocking each other's candidates. They built regional alliances in Asia and among the Indian Ocean hinterland states to

outmanoeuvre each other. Pakistan frequently rallied the Islamic Conference Organisation states behind its policies, notably on Kashmir. It also attempted to line up the smaller South Asian states of Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka against India. The latter in turn tried to develop closer relations with selected Islamic countries such as Iran and some of the Gulf States, but also with Israel. India hoped to move closer to the economically prosperous ASEAN grouping, explicitly seeking to exclude Pakistan. And now they compete for the favour of the U.S., which has been left as the only effective source of international order, finance and protection in the region.

South Asia and the West: Consequences of Nuclear Status and September 11

The end of the Cold War caused a sea change in the international standing of India and Pakistan. The Soviet Union, India's strategic partner and major supplier of military hardware, dissolved. Pakistan had left the two Western military alliances of SEATO and Cento even earlier. Its semi-allied status with the U.S. in the Afghan war against the Soviets ended with the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Pakistan lost all relevance for the U.S. in 1992 when the pro-communist Najibullah administration was toppled in Afghanistan. Even worse, Pakistan faced economic and military sanctions by the U.S. under the Pressler amendment to the U.S. foreign assistance law, as a result of its nuclear ambitions after 1990.⁶⁵

The relevance of internal politics increased significantly for both countries. Concepts based on religion and cultural nationalism replaced social and ideological aspirations. Free from global commitments, India and Pakistan were thrust back into the region of South Asia. They were now tempted to fill the resultant gap in the international order with regional ambitions of their own. Against this background, relations with Central Asia acquired a new significance for both governments. India was remarkably successful in reviving its old claim to regional supremacy, getting the U.S. to tolerate and partly accept it as perhaps inevitable. Pakistan's Pan-Islamic ambitions fared considerably worse as they ran counter to U.S. interests in the region and ultimately suffered defeat. Pakistan almost choked on its striving for external support and influence. After 1990 it overextended its strategic borders completely by its involvement in Afghanistan, Central Asia and Kashmir. India was unable to reap the full benefits of its strategic offensive. Its decision to go nuclear in May 1998 failed to enhance its security and stability, nor could it prevent armed conflict with Pakistan, as the military skirmish in Kargil demonstrated.

⁶⁵ Cf. the article by two-time Pakistan ambassador to the U.S., Mrs. Maleeha Lodhi, "The Pakistan-U.S. relationship", in: Defence Journal, April 1998, at <<http://www.defencejournal.com/april98/pakistanus.htm>>, downloaded on 20 January 2003.

Yet the two countries' decision in favour of the nuclear option triggered a number of strategic consequences, many of which also bear on relations with Central Asia.⁶⁶ The attention given by the major powers, in particular the U.S., to the region has significantly increased.⁶⁷ During the recent escalation of tension between India and Pakistan, sparked by the situation in Kashmir and leading to an unprecedented military build-up, it was the potential outbreak of a nuclear conflict between the two contenders that pushed the U.S. into intense mediation efforts. Russia and several Central Asian states have also taken a strong interest in diffusing the tension, which reflects their awareness that their territories are within reach of Indian and Pakistani nuclear warheads, not to mention the spill-out from any nuclear explosion in the immediate neighbourhood. All international players were particularly anguished by repeated pronouncements from Pakistan's Islamist politicians qualifying the country's nuclear assets as an "Islamic Bomb."⁶⁸ In preparation for the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, the U.S. and Pakistan held intense negotiations on how best to secure Pakistan's nuclear assets against Islamic militants both inside and outside the Pakistani armed forces. Musharraf repeatedly asserted in public that such a danger had never existed. Nevertheless, he made changes to the military chain of command that excluded a number of generals known for their pro-Islamic leanings.⁶⁹ Reports of regular private contact between nuclear scientists from Pakistan and some Islamist groups in Afghanistan

⁶⁶ Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik: *New nukes: India, Pakistan and Global Nuclear Disarmament*. Oxford 2000.

⁶⁷ US to Press India and Pakistan as Fears Rise. *New York Times*, 13. May 2002, *ibid.* US for Pact with Pakistan, India on Nuclear Devices. *News*, 28 January 2002, *ibid.* A Nuclear War Feared Possible Over Kashmir. *New York Times*, 8 August 2000, *ibid.* – all downloaded on 16 July 2002.

⁶⁸ The most prominent Islamist politician, Qazi Husain, chairman of the Islamic Party (JI), stated in June 2002 that "there was an American plan which stipulated that Pakistan should withdraw support for the Kashmiri people... After completing this task, Pakistan's nuclear programme would be the next US target." *News*, 8 June 2002, *ibid.* Another Islamist politician, Mian Abdul Janbaz of the Ahl-i Hadith, warned Islamic groups against a confrontation with the government in October 2001 as any damage to Pakistan would have even a greater effect on the Muslim Ummah "because it (Pakistan) is the sole Muslim nuclear power." *News*, 7 October 2001, *ibid.* The JUI-F politician, Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri, warned the government that "the aim of the US forces was to subjugate the entire Muslim world and destroy Pakistan's nuclear capabilities." *Ibid.*, 24 September 2001. Even at the start of the nuclear programme in the early seventies, Pakistan's liberal Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, spoke of an "Islamic Bomb," although this was more a tactical consideration to placate the Islamic opposition than a matter of conviction. Z. A. Bhutto: *If I Am Assassinated*. Delhi 1979.

⁶⁹ Pakistan Moves Nuclear Weapons, Musharraf Says Arsenal Is Now Secure. *Washington Post*, 11 November 2001, online, at <www.washingtonpost.com>, downloaded on 15 June 2002.

also caused much anxiety.⁷⁰ Countermeasures by Pakistan's military and the U.S. were aimed at preventing Islamic militants from gaining access to nuclear know-how and material. The occasional smuggling of nuclear waste from some former Soviet facilities through Central Asia into Pakistan and Afghanistan constituted another dangerous variable. There were fears that some groups might acquire the capability to build a "dirty bomb," in which conventional explosives would be mixed with low-grade nuclear material.⁷¹

As a consequence of this development and in response to the situation in Afghanistan after September 11, the U.S. has now opted for substantial engagement in Central Asia and Pakistan.⁷² Attitudes towards the U.S. have undergone substantial revision. Regional players, even powers like Russia and China, now compete for U.S. support. They want to use the American presence and potential to bolster their international standing; increase internal stability against challenges from opposition forces and reap the economic benefits. This has tended to strengthen efforts by Central and South Asian states to find new ways of cooperation, as 16 Asian states demonstrated at a regional security conference in Kazakhstan in June 2002.⁷³ It is to be feared, however, that the emphasis on cooperation will not last, if it is limited to security issues. As long as there are no significant infrastructure links between Central and South Asia, the prospects of long-term cooperation between the two regions based on economic prosperity look bleak. Given the international interest in the consolidation of Afghanistan, conditions for progress toward lasting regional cooperation might appear more favourable than ever before, but this could change any time.

⁷⁰ Sultan Bashiruddin Mahmood and Abdul Majid, who had been associated with Pakistan's nuclear programme, had founded a religious NGO for relief work in Afghanistan. They were alleged to have had personal contacts with Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. *Pakistan to Forgo Charges Against 2 Nuclear Scientists*. *Washington Post*, 30 January 2002, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Two retired Nuclear Scientists admit to meeting Osama bin Laden. *Dawn*, 12 November 2001.

⁷² According to the U.S. news channel CNN, forces of the anti-terror coalition are currently stationed at bases in Uzbekistan (Termez: U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division, Khanabad: U.S. Air Force special operations forces), Tajikistan (Dushanbe: Aircraft C-160 and C-130 of French Air Force), Kyrgyzstan (Manas/Bishek: U.S. and French transport and fighter aircraft, up to 3,000 U.S. military personnel), Afghanistan (Bagram: U.S. Army 10th Mountain Division, 101st Airborne, 1,700 British Royal Marines, UN peacekeeping forces ISAF from Germany, Austria, Netherlands, Finland, Denmark, Turkey, Mazar-e-Sharif: small contingent of 10th Mountain Division, one French infantry company, Khost: logistics and supplies of U.S. Special Forces, Kandahar: 101st Airborne Division, Pul-i Kandahar: helicopter base) and Pakistan (Dalbandin/Baluchistan: unknown number of U.S. military forces, Jacobabad: U.S. transport aircraft, Pasni: U.S. Marines). Downloaded on 1 August 2002 from CNN-Homepage at <www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2001/trade.center/military.map.html>, downloaded on 25 January 2003.

⁷³ See fn. 10.

U.S. actions in the region have often left the impression that it intends to press ahead all alone. Yet in reality the U.S. often filled a void in which no other player chose to engage. With regard to South and Central Asia, Europe has usually been reluctant to go on the offensive. It lacks the political will and the means to enforce its policies. It has very limited military capabilities and does not show much cohesion and unity of action among member states. Europe can and must do more to contribute to cooperation efforts in the region. It possesses a wealth of expertise, a vast cultural knowledge and deep historical understanding.⁷⁴ Germany is a case in point. It proved very effective in facilitating two Afghan conferences in Bonn, the first of which brought into being the first Interim Government, while the second reviewed progress on reconstruction. It helped with the conduct of the Grand Tribal Congregation (Loya Jirga), which elected the second Interim Government. During visits to the U.S., Afghan representatives made a point of highlighting Germany's role.⁷⁵ Germany participates in the UN peacekeeping force ISAF, where it took over command jointly with the Netherlands in early 2003. It is assisting the Afghan Ministry of Interior in rebuilding the Afghan police force. German Special Forces are operating alongside coalition forces.⁷⁶ Germany will also want to continue seeking the cooperation of the region's states in international organisations, especially as it was elected a member of the UN Security Council alongside Pakistan for a two-year term (2003–04) and is a temporary chairman of the Council at a time that is crucial for the region, in view of the Iraq crisis and the unfinished war on terrorism in Afghanistan. Success will eventually be measured in terms of Europe's reliability and the durability of its engagement and how it takes into account not only Afghanistan, but also Pakistan and India on which many of the prospects for stabilisation rest. This is the only way to prevent South Asia from losing the attention of Western governments again. Recent events have proven that security for the Western world, as well as for the states of South and Central Asia, is indivisible and cannot be achieved without close mutual cooperation. Afghanistan, Pakistan and northern India, on the one hand, and Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, on the other, form a sensitive contact zone between the regions of South and Central Asia that, for the foreseeable future, has turned into a political-geographic region of global significance.

⁷⁴ Cf. Fact Sheet: Germany's Contributions to the Coalition Against Terrorism. German Embassy to the US, at its website <http://www.germany-info.org/relaunch/info/archives/background/fs_afgan.html>, downloaded on 25 January 2003.

⁷⁵ So they are not old hands at being on the world stage. AP, 28 July 2002, at homepage of Washington Post: *ibid.*

⁷⁶ Cf. Fact Sheet: Germany's Contributions to the Coalition Against Terrorism. German Embassy to the US, at its website <http://www.germany-info.org/relaunch/info/archives/background/fs_afgan.html>, downloaded on 25 January 2003.

Central Asia: The Great Game Revisited

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The traditional tug-of-war between powerful foreign nations for dominance in the Central Asian region is often referred to as "the Great Game" – a term coined in the 19th century by British writer Rudyard Kipling. This designation re-entered our modern day vocabulary in the 1990s when foreign governments and oil companies started to compete for the rich energy resources of the Caspian Sea and has since, some Western analysts claim, been much overused.

The government of the United States, in particular, – the leading player in this game – likes to downplay the continued validity of the idea of a game and pretend that the hectic shuffling for position among states and companies has no geopolitical significance. According to U.S. government officials, the quality of the relationship between Washington and Moscow today is such that America no longer views Russian activities in Central Asia through the prism of U.S.-Russian rivalry.¹ However, the list of high-level visitors who passed through the Central Asian capitals in the year following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 tells a very different story. Visiting American congressional delegations clearly outnumbered the combined delegations of Russia and China – the other main competitors in the region.

Russian officials, on the other hand, have been far more candid. Moscow historically views Central Asia as its "soft underbelly", a buffer zone that safeguards the Russian motherland from any potential troubles from the south. Although Russia accepted the presence of U.S. troops on Central Asian soil after September 11 as part of its support for the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, this was solely due to the pragmatism of Russian President Vladimir Putin and on the understanding that the deployment would be temporary. It remains extremely unpopular with the Russian military, which has been eager to counter America's unwanted influence in what they regard as their own backyard.

Although once part of the famous Silk Road and home to over 55 million people today, the five Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – were little known internationally before the terrorist attacks. As people outside the region found it difficult to tell these countries apart and had an even harder time pronouncing their names, they

¹ Ariel Cohen: New Russian Deployment Marks Changed Strategy, in: Eurasia Insight, December 17, 2002 <www.eurasianet.org>.

