

Pakistan and the Central Asia Hinterland Option: The Race for Regional Security and Development

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Pakistan seemed to ride the tide of history when on December 18, 1991 a beaming Sardar Assef Ahmed Ali, Minister of State for Economic Affairs, proudly reported to the Pakistani press about establishing diplomatic relations and formal contact with the five Central Asian Republics (CARs) of the Soviet Union after he had completed a three week tour of the region just two weeks before the Soviet Union formally ceased to exist.¹ This surprisingly crisp and apt response by the Pakistani bureaucracy to regional challenges raised questions about Pakistan's motives and the prospects of its endeavor.

Central Asia and South Asia

There have always been close cultural ties between the larger area of India, or, more specifically, the north of South Asia and Central Asia. Babur, the last Timuride from Central Asia, founded the Moghul dynasty that ruled over large parts of India from 1526 until the last Moghul Emperor Bahadur Shah II died in exile in

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1 The 24 member delegation traveled to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenia, Kazakhstan and also to Azerbaijan and Russia from November 24 to December 14, 1991. Central Asia: Islamic World's New Frontier, [Supplement], in *Dawn*, Karachi, January 15, 1992.

Burma in 1962.² For most of the time the nature of links between the two regions had probably been more cultural than political. However, the nineteenth century saw a Central Asia power game in which Russia, Britain and its crown jewel, India, were involved.³ An imperial 'Forward Policy' was formulated to defend British interests in India against the perceived threat of expansionist Russian ambitions beyond Central Asia.⁴

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 British-Indian attention shifted to Communist subversion and the threat it allegedly posed to Colonial rule over India. Indian troops from British-India participated in the British intervention in 1918-19 during the Civil War in Transcaspia.⁵ During the twenties and thirties of this century armed Islamic resistance to Soviet power in Central Asia – the 'Basmachi' guerrillas, found sanctuaries across the border in Afghanistan and northern India.⁶

Cultural and political affinity between Pakistan and Central Asia could be observed ever since Pakistan came into being. It saw its more spectacular moment in 1966 when the Tashkent declaration put a temporary halt to the confrontation between India and Pakistan after the 1965 war. The choice of the negotiation site was significant and crucial to the success of the talks. Less prominent though not less important has been political and cultural exchange. A substantial part of Soviet delegations who had visited Pakistan as well as of Soviet diplomats stationed in the Soviet diplomatic missions in Pakistan hailed from Central Asia. It was not without

2 Cf. Herbert Härtel, 'Geschichte Vorderindiens seit 1525,' in B. Spuler (ed), *Geschichte der islamischen Länder*. Neuzeit. (Handbuch der Orientalistik, 1. Abtl., Bd. 6,3), Leiden/Köln: Brill: 1959, pp. 234-273, esp. p. 235ff.

3 For a detailed exposition of the 'Great Game' as the Anglo-Russian rivalry in the 19th century was called, see Gerald Morgan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia, 1810-1895*, London: Cass, 1981, 264 pp.

4 For a classical assertion of British imperial interest in the region cf. George N. Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1889, 477 pp. Morgan suggested that the threat perception on both sides was more imaginary than real since neither of them was capable or willing to go beyond Afghanistan. Morgan, *Anglo-Russian Rivalry in Central Asia*, p. 213.

5 For a thorough account of the events cf. C. H. Ellis, *The British 'Intervention' in Transcaspia 1918-1919*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963, p. 175.

6 On the *Basmachi* resistance see *Central Asian Review*, 1959, No. 3, pp. 236-250; G. Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964, pp. 107-111.

foundation that they expected they would find easier access to public opinion in Pakistan.

A Changed Environment

But history and Pakistan's cultural ties with Central Asia and with Islam alone would not sufficiently explain Pakistan's thrust towards that region. It was an irony of history that Pakistan throughout its existence defined itself in terms of its connections with West Asia and Islam, trying to break loose from the South Asian subcontinent, only to discover that all that it wanted was to come to terms with its South Asian ancestral neighbor, India. All foreign policy options of Pakistan's various administrations have been governed by it. It was the vastly enhanced military and strategic imbalance in favor of India after the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 that intensified the search of Pakistani politicians for viable strategic depth towards India. The perceived task was to create a critical mass to neutralize India or even to avenge the loss of East Pakistan. With the major powers standing by in 1971, Pakistan's SEATO and CENTO membership had not been able to avert its bifurcation. Thus Pakistan's ties with both blocs were reduced by Bhutto and Zia, respectively.

Bhutto tried to create a formal Third World group of nations which he intended to lead. He also tested the Organization of Islamic countries and succeeded in hosting its Lahore Summit in February 1974.⁷ After 1977, Zia relied more heavily on conservative Islamic Countries shifting emphasis from the Iran-Libya-Algeria-PLO connection to Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf Sheikdoms.⁸ It was Zia who believed that the 'strategic depth' his country needed in its confrontation with India was best achieved by building an Islamic block between the Arabian Sea and the Urals.⁹ For him, the Muslim bloc was an ideal combination of potential and ideology, yet little effective so far:

7 Cf. Islamic Summit 1974, *Pakistan: Address by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, 22 February 1974*, Islamabad: Department of Films and Publications, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Auqaf and Haj, Government of Pakistan, [n.d.] p. 26.

8 This switch in allegiances is described for the 1976-78 period in Marvin G. Weinbaum/Gautam Sen, 'Pakistan Enters the Middle East,' in *Orbis*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (Fall 1978), pp. 595-612.

9 Cf. 'Pakistan: Looking North,' in *The Economist*, London, February 22, 1992, p. 57.

*The Muslim countries occupy a pivotal position in the world from the political, economic and defense points of view. They lie astride the important land, sea and air routes of the world. Nature has blessed them with unlimited material resources which are essential for the progress and welfare of Islam so that its people could fashion their lives in accordance with the teachings of Islam, But it is a pity that we have lost a considerable time after independence.*¹⁰

Deriding Bhutto's Third-World initiative as selfish and ascribing to it an adverse impact on public opinion in the developing countries, he modestly offered himself for the role of a leader of the Islamic world.¹¹ Talking about the difficulties to achieve Muslim unity, Zia proposed

*to leave personal preferences and individual interest aside and select one of the leaders as a force of unity, as a man of God and as an inspiration for at least directing the Muslim world towards one God.*¹²

Bhutto had sought to cautiously distance himself from the U.S. He intensely courted China and accorded diplomatic recognition to Eastern block nations like Vietnam, Korea and Eastern Germany. The Afghan imbroglio after the 'Saur' revolution of April 1978 and the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979 made it possible for Zia to partially revert back to the U.S. for underwriting Pakistan's security. But this was done only to a limited extent and for a specified period of time.

Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the cold war heralded a global and regional reappraisal of security options and guarantees, leaving Pakistan with a rapidly declining strategic value for the global powers, and the U.S. in particular. Pakistan had

10 Zia-ul-Haq, *President calls for Islamic Society: Address to the Nation*, Rawalpindi: [Government of Pakistan], November, 1979, pp. 7-8.

11 What I am trying to project is something without selfishness (like, for example, we had in this country in the past, where in the name of the Third World, a certain personality wanted to project himself, something that was not taken well not only within the other developing countries but also in the Muslim world).' Zia-ul-Haq, 'Interview to Syed Hasan Mutahar, 'Muslim World League', Makkah, 13-3-78, in *President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, Interviews to foreign media*, Vol. I, March-December 1978, Islamabad: Directorate of Films & Publications, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, [n.d.], p. 118.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

ceased to be vital to U.S. national security.¹³ The unwillingness of the U.S. to continue the delivery of military aid to Pakistan since 1991 in the face of suspicions about nuclear production capabilities. This originated much less from Pakistan's nuclear option than from the rapidly receding need for the U.S. to maintain this quasi-alliance in the face of severe budgetary constraints and a crying need for the 'peace dividend' to be spent on the home front.¹⁴ Also, according to Selig Harrison of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, the United States did no longer need access to facilities in Pakistan to monitor Soviet military activities. Pakistan's bilateral problems with the U.S. were compounded by the absence of any significant pro-Pakistan lobby, of a political constituency of its own in the U.S. as John Canham-Cyne rightly observed in his background reporting on the issue.¹⁵ Robert G. Wirsing noted:

*It has been Pakistan's distinct misfortune to have needed foreign allies far more than they have ever needed Pakistan. It has been Pakistan's additional misfortune to have as its principal adversary, India, an appealing strategic alternative to itself . . . Pakistan's extraregional reach for allies has always exceeded its grasp. Its strategic dependence was never matched by the dependability of its alliance partners, upon most of whom the power realities of the subcontinent forced a troublesome ambivalence in outlook.*¹⁶

Russia and other post-Soviet states could not be considered a hopeful alternative source of security guarantees, either. Though Russia was willing to look beyond the polarized vision of the Cold War world, it takes some more time for a distinctive Russian foreign policy to emerge. In a more even-handed approach Russia was ready to intensify relations with Pakistan, but not at the expense of

13 John Canham-Cyne, 'The Bomb Again,' in *Newsline*, Karachi, December 1990, pp. 53-55.

14 U.S. Ambassador John Manjo, though emphatically in favor of continued close relations, was quoted to have told the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee during confirmation hearings that 'the end of the Cold War and of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan have changed the strategic content of our long standing relationship. Some, pointing to a number of critical problems we face, have questioned whether it is still in our interest - and indeed, whether it is possible - to have such a strong relationship.' *Dawn*, September 25, 1992.

15 John Canham-Cyne, 'The Bomb Again,' pp. 53-56.

16 Robert G. Wirsing, *Pakistan's Security under Zia, 1977-1988*, New York: St. Martin's Press 1991, p. 7.

its relations with India.¹⁷ This was the message conveyed by the Russian Vice Premier Burbulis during his talks with Indian leaders in Delhi in May 1992.¹⁸ India concluded new treaties of friendship and co-operation with Russia and the Ukraine. Boris Yeltsin visited India in January 1993. Even if the Russian-Indian entente may not regain the closeness and warmth for which it was known when the Soviet Union still existed, Russian affinity towards India is deeply rooted in history and will eventually prevail.

The newly emerging political class in Russia takes a strong interest in India's economic management experience of what they call a 'mixed economy' of private and public enterprise. High level delegations from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenia have visited India since.¹⁹ The resilience of the Russia-India connection and parallel Indian advances towards Central Asia are additional incentives for Pakistan to balance it with close contacts to the CARs.

It was the aftermath of the last Gulf war that brought the hard truth home to Pakistan that the new global arrangement was going to favor strong regional powers like India and that regional alliances acquired a new meaning and importance. In the face of a crumbling world order of superpowers, the Chief of the Army Staff General Mirsa Aslam Beg, addressing Pakistan's top military staff officers on the repercussions of the Gulf War for Pakistan on January 28, 1991, demanded a 'strategic consensus' of all regional states. He envisaged that regional states guarantee their mutual security in an act of 'strategic defiance.'²⁰ Under these circumstances Iran and Turkey were a natural choice. The pro-Western and yet Islamic politics of the Nawaz Sharif government were designed to

17 After returning from a six-day visit to Moscow, Pakistan's Secretary-General of Foreign Affairs Akram Zaki said Moscow had assured that Pak-Russian relations would not be allowed to be influenced by the relations with other countries. A declaration of principles governing future relations was envisaged to be signed at a higher political level. *Dawn*, October 3, 1992. This was confirmed by the Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev in Islamabad in April 1993 announcing a visit of the Russian Prime Minister later in the year. *Dawn*, April 8, 1993.

18 *Asian Recorder* 1992, p. 22343.

19 Cf. *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, Harlow/Essex; Longman, pp. 38811 (Kyrgyzstan), 38868 (Turkmenia); *Asian Recorder* 1992, Delhi, p. 22226 (Kazakhstan).

20 *Dawn*, January 29, 1991. For a more detailed exposition of Pakistan's policy before and after the 1991 Gulf War see Dietrich Reetz, 'Pakistan's Engagement in der Golf-Region. Islamische Solidarität oder regionale Machtpolitik?' in Ferhar Ibrahim/Mir A. Ferdowsi, *Die Kuwait-Krise und das regionale Umfeld: Hintergründe, Interessen, Ziele*. Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1992, pp. 147-162.

encourage both closer ties with the more secular Turkey and stronger co-operation with the Islamic-minded authorities in Iran. The cooperation of Islamic countries was believed to be an attractive alternative to the superpower support of the past.

Pakistan hoped it would be able to tap the resources of Islamic solidarity. However, to that point the Islamic alternative had been lacking in effectiveness. Addressing a group meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in January 1990 in Islamabad devoted to 'Confidence and Security Building in the Islamic World,' Pakistan's President Ghulam Ishaq Khan spoke of the wind of change blowing across Europe and said that it could inevitably have important repercussions for the Islamic world. He emphasized the need to activate the OIC with a view to transforming it into a really effective missionary for resolving differences within the ummah and give a practical shape to the claims of Muslim unity.²¹

At the same time, Pakistan's desire for close links with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics had a much less ideological dimension. With the European Community Pakistan pleaded that it deserved a special status of regular consultations (as enjoyed by India) because its strategic position, 'particularly its proximity to the Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union, and the role it can play in the region with its cultural and religious links with these and other countries like Iran and Afghanistan, places it as an important contact point.²² Thus Pakistan claimed that its significance had not waned but only been transformed and that it was not less useful or important to Western interests than before. In relation to Afghanistan it maintained that it controlled the situation and that the West had to rely on Pakistan to ensure that no fundamentalist Islamic government comes into place in Kabul. Displaying traditional ambivalence, Pakistan's professed Islamic government was trying to woo the West with the perspective of curbing Islamic radicalism in the region. On this account there was no evidence that the opinion held by the Islamic-minded President Ishaq Khan differed much from his more liberal Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in getting access to EC or U.S. funds at the price of pronouncing some liberalism.

21 *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, January 29, 1990.

22 *Dawn*, July 16, 1992.

Pakistan's Initiative

Against this background, strategic concerns got the limelight of the first official visit by a Pakistan government delegation to Central Asia in December 1991. Significantly, the visit was given extensive coverage in Pakistan only a few days after American Senator Pressler visited India and the Indian media highlighted his warnings about Islamic fundamentalism being on the rise in Central Asia and about the threat it constituted to India. Pressler, author of the 'Pressler Amendment,' a law curtailing U.S. military and economic aid to Pakistan in view of its nuclear program, was on an eleven-day official visit to South Asia in January 1992. In Delhi he declared that the 'fundamentalist belt' of the Muslim nations could include Pakistan, five central Asian republics of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Afghanistan, Iran and parts of Turkey.²³ With Islamic fundamentalism 'on the rise in the world,' Pressler said the group of seven to nine geographically contiguous Muslim States, including Pakistan, could get together into a 'confederation' and – could be a major force in this part of the world causing problems for India.²⁴

The U.S. was looking for allies to find a remedy to address their major worry at the time: the fate of the nuclear weapons arsenal of the erstwhile Soviet Union. One of its principal objectives seemed to be to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons into the hands of a fundamentalist anti-western Islamic group of states. Some sort of conditionalities would have to be attached to the foreign economic aid to the non-Russian republics 'so that they hand over their weapons to the Russian Federation,'²⁵ Pressler warned. Against this background Pakistan was probably not the chief American concern. The U.S. was playing on India's fears of a Pakistan-led Muslim bloc in order to mobilize India as a regional source of containment to be directed more against Central Asia than Pakistan. At the same time, Pressler strongly emphasized the need to prevent Pakistan from becoming a nuclear power and even suggested an early 'Camp David type' meeting of the leaders of India, Pakistan, China, the USA and the erstwhile USSR for this purpose.²⁶

23 *The Hindustan Times*, Delhi, January 12, 1992.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*

Pakistan must then have decided to go on the offensive to get the most out of its Central Asian initiative in terms of its equation with India and the U.S. Central Asia was supposed to provide Pakistan with the kind of strategic hinterland that it had constantly been lacking in its previous conflicts with India. It was the strategic depth of the immense geographical scope and material resources that bestowed India with an undue advantage in the eyes of Pakistan. In the face of adverse geographical conditions Pakistan is likely to lose in any serious military confrontation with India. Now Central Asia was supposed to offer Pakistan 'the opportunity of new strategic alliances' as Ahmad Rashid put it in a leading article for the semi-official newspaper supplement brought out on the occasion by the Karachi-based *Dawn* and *The Pakistan Times*.

*The military's pre-occupation with 'strategic depth' vis-a-vis India can also be met by expanding ties with the Muslim heartland of Asia. Central Asia is a natural ally for Pakistan if Islamabad is prepared to offer it the right conditions and the new republics are also the natural allies of a new regional bloc that could join the present regional cooperation arrangements (RCO) [Regional Cooperation Organization] between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.*²⁷

The direct military benefit was believed to come in a conflict situation with India from the access to military supplies over possible Central Asian land routes that were not controlled by the Indian sea or air forces. It was particularly the sea lanes to Karachi which seemed to be indefensible by the 'gallant but hopelessly inadequate Pakistani fleet,²⁸ as Naeem Sarfraz, another member of the delegation put it. In his write-up on the visit on 'the new strategic scenario,' he reasoned that at least \$2 billion were required in equipment alone to create a fleet that can keep Pakistan's sea lanes open and give the country the ability to bring the oil necessary to keep its military moving beyond its exhaustion point of its three weeks oil reserves. The opening-up of various routes to Central Asia would provide Pakistan with safe lines of communication that were believed to constitute in themselves, a major deterrent to India.

²⁷ Ahmad Rashid, 'Seizing a historic opportunity,' [Supplement], *Dawn*, January 15, 1992, p. I.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. V.

Cooperation

During the Assef Ali visit of December 1991 several avenues of cooperation were explored. Pakistan wanted to reap the windfall of orders emanating from the need of creating market economies in the CARs and revamping their administrative systems. So far most of their production capabilities were tied to Russian or Ukrainian industries. Pakistan believes it can offer service industries like banking, insurance, management and English language training, as well as a market for raw material from these republics. It could supply many basic consumer goods which are now in dire need. It was particularly interested in selling textile products to an area where textile quotas were hoped not to be applied soon.

The Pakistani delegation took special notice of the large resource base which these countries have; unlike Pakistan. It complimented them for the high standard of literacy and education, for their modern technical, scientific and cultural infrastructure which afforded them more opportunities in the race for development than many South Asian or African countries. Pakistan signed memoranda of understanding and joint declarations on exchange in culture, education and the economy with all the countries visited and invited their Presidents to come to Pakistan. In short term aid the CARs needed credits for food, engineering goods and medicine. To get trade rolling, Sardar Assef Ali during his visit offered the republics long-term credits of between \$10m and \$30m each.²⁹ Pakistan also wanted to establish joint ministerial commissions.

Keeping in mind its history of tensions with India, Pakistan seemed to be supportive of the perceived need on the part of the CARs to build security forces and armies of their own as they feel threatened by the overwhelming superiority of Russia or by territorial and other claims advanced by neighboring republics. Pakistan would be able to offer training and small armory for which it claims approaches have already been made. On the conclusion of his visit, Assef Ali briefed all related government agencies, including the General Head Quarters (GHQ), the National Defense College, and the Chambers of Commerce. Pakistan wanted to open embassies very soon, though funds seemed to be scarce and the delegation pleaded to trim down big embassies in the U.S. and the free staff for Central Asia.

²⁹ *The Economist*, February 22, 1992, p. 57.

A stream of delegations started flowing thereafter. (See tables 1 and 2) A large variety of projects were being studied with special emphasis on cooperation with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Noteworthy was the power import agreement with Tajikistan from April 1992 under which Pakistan would recommission the Tajik hydel power station at Ragoon which was standing idle due to the departure of Russian labor. Pakistan would receive up to 3600 mw electricity for the next 30 years. The barter-type deal included assistance of up to \$5,000 million by Pakistan, 25 percent in cash and 75 percent in goods manufactured in Pakistan. The assistance would be financially adjusted against the sale of power to Pakistan from 1997 onwards.³⁰ That was the kind of cooperation envisaged, combining the resource potential of the central Asian republics with Pakistan's expertise and capital. Also, the tripartite arrangement with Uzbekistan and Afghanistan is worth mentioning here as it could form the nucleus of a practical regional partnership on the ground. The draft proposals covered a wide range of issues from satellite communication, telecommunication equipment production, highways, railways to power, hydro-electric stations, irrigation and banking.³¹

Table 1:

**Delegations from Central Asia and Azerbaijan
visiting Pakistan (Dec. 91-May 93)**

13/15-2-92	Uzbekistan	Civil aviation delegation – civil aviation agreement, air link
22/24-2-92	Kazakhstan	President Nazarbayev
17-4-92	Tajikistan	Energy authority – power export agreement
1/4-7-92	Tajikistan	President Nabiyev – protocol on Joint Ministerial Commission
9-7-92	Afghanistan	Minister of Planning Sayed Muhammd Ali Javed-MOU on Joint Ministerial Commission
14/20-7-92	Uzbekistan, Afghanistan	Transport and communications delegations – tripartite agreement on highways

³⁰ *Dawn*, April 20, 1992.

³¹ *Dawn*, July 18, 1992.

Table 1: (continued)

**Delegations from Central Asia and Azerbaijan
visiting Pakistan (Dec. 91-May 93)**

2/6-8-92	Iran	Minister of Roads and Transportation Mohammad Saeedi Kya – Joint Ministerial Commission meeting
13/14-8-92	Uzbekistan	President Karimov
12/15-8-92	Afghanistan	President Rabbani
7/8-9-92	Iran	President Rafsanjani
24/25-10-92	Turkey	Prime Minister Demirel
6-1-93	Kazakhstan	Transport delegation – Joint Ministerial Commission
7/14-1-93	Kazakhstan	Judicial delegation – protocol on cooperation

Source: *Dawn*, Karachi.

Table 2:

**Delegations from Pakistan visiting Central Asia
and Azerbaijan (Dec. 91-May 93)**

24-11/14-12-91	CARs, Russia Azerbaijan,	Minister of State for Economic Affairs Sardar Assef Ahmad Ali
16/17-2-92	Turkmenia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan	Tehran meetings with President Ghulam Ishaq Khan – ECO summit
28-3-93	Tajikistan	Finance Minister Sartaj Aziz – agreements on electricity export, on banking and on training of officials.
9/10-5-92	Turkmenia	Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif – ECO summit
27/28-6-92	Uzbekistan	Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif – opening Pakistan's embassy
29-9/1-10-92	Turkey	President Ghulam Ishaq Khan

Source: *Dawn*, Karachi.

Transport and Communication

The lack of communication turned out to be the major obstacle to Pakistan's Central Asian ambitions as Pakistan had no direct access to those territories. That problem was compounded by the turmoil in Afghanistan which was sandwiched between the two regions. The railway lines of South and Central Asia ended at the Afghan border. It was, therefore, not surprising that a substantial part of Pakistan's efforts were directed at overcoming this obstruction.

Air traffic was easiest to develop. From May 1992 onwards, *Pakistan International Airlines* started a weekly service between Islamabad and Tashkent, the Uzbek capital just over an hour away. This was after a Civil aviation agreement had been signed on February 15, 1992.³² Also, regular air service to Kazakhstan is in the offing. Repeatedly, there was talk of a Central Asian Airline which would feed all the Central Asian republics and connect them with Kabul, Istanbul, Teheran, Islamabad and Karachi. Uzbekistan proposed to employ some of its ex-Soviet share of airplanes standing idle at present.

However, it is the rail and road link which is crucial for trade and potential military use. There are three rail-heads on the Pakistan side, one each near Peshawar (Landi Kotal) and Quetta (Chaman), facing Afghanistan, and one terminating inside Iranian Baluchistan at Zahidan, not far from the Pakistan border. On the Central Asian side, Chaman would be linked with Kushka at the Turkmen-Afghan border, leading the railroad through southern Afghanistan, Landi Kotal with Termez at the Uzbek-Afghan border and Zahidan with Kirman inside Iran. Considerable time would elapse before any of these gaps could be filled as these are capital-intensive projects.

An immediate alternative suggested by Pakistani experts was a railroad container service bridging the missing links with road transportation.³³ The road from Chaman, Kandahar, Herat, Torhundi to Kushka was extensively used during the years 1969 to 1980, when it was disrupted with the invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. The route, therefore, remained closed from 1980

to date and could be reopened with the situation returning to normalcy in Afghanistan.

The second connecting road from Landi Kotal/Peshawar, Kandhar, Kabul, Kunduz, and Hairatan to Termez had also been widely used for trading. Eventually linking the rail-heads of Landi Kotal and Termez may face far greater difficulties as the route would have to cut through a rugged and mountainous terrain. Also, the third route extending inside Iran could temporarily be covered by road. The grand design of the transport scheme is to be topped by the construction of a modern deep sea port to be built on a new Pakistani Railways extension at Gwadar/Pasni. This new port could be commissioned in 1998 to relieve the busy port of Karachi. On the completion of the project a new important transport and communication linkage would have to be created between Asia and Europe bearing strategic dimensions.

Before any of these plans can materialize, however, roads inside Afghanistan would have to be restored. It was announced that Pakistan's National Highway Authority would soon start work on the Afghan section of the highway rehabilitation program covering six major Afghan highways.³⁴ Afghanistan had asked Pakistan to reconstruct all its highways which had been battered by the 14-year war, though Afghanistan stated it had no money. Finance for the project was to come from Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Development Bank.³⁵ There are two other highways leading around Afghanistan. One is the Karakorum Highway on the easterly route via Kashgar in China which passes through high mountains and the other is a westerly route via Iran which is very long. If instability in Afghanistan continues for some time then Pakistan may be severely hampered in its access to Central Asia.

Looking at the probability of the plans, road traffic via Afghanistan will be restored very soon if political conditions improve. Railroad connections may take between six and eight years to be completed. In order to finance the railroad link, the World Bank is being approached. Russia could also be involved in this project to make it a seven- or eight-nation project estimated to cost between \$3 to 5 billion and stretching over seven or eight years.

³² *Dawn*, February 16, 1992.

³³ S. Akhtar Ali Shah, Addl. General Manager, Pakistan Railways, 'Rail Link with Central Asian States,' in *Dawn*, July 7, 1992.

³⁴ *Dawn*, July 29; August 5, 1992.

³⁵ *Dawn*, August 23, 1992.

A Regional Bloc

From the very beginning of the emerging prospect of independent Muslim states in Central Asia there was an element of competition between the three regional powers-to-be Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Turkey got the advantage of a common cultural heritage of the Turkic peoples inhabiting large areas of the former Turkistan, while Iran relied on the common Persian roots with Tajikistan. Pakistan's cultural and political affinities were of a much more general nature.

Turkey was obviously leading the field. On a trip to the region in May 1992 the Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel committed credit agreements worth up to \$1.2 billion.³⁶ Turkey proposed a Central Asian development bank embracing the Muslim republics of the former Soviet Union.³⁷ The May 1992 visit by Demirel coincided with the initiation of a Turkish television channel broadcasting Turkish language programs to the republics.³⁸ Documents for a *Black Sea Economic Cooperation Region* were signed in Istanbul on June 25, 1992. It groups together eleven littoral states, including Azerbaijan and Turkey.³⁹ The comprehensive nature of the Turkish approach partially raised suspicions about Turkey's intentions. It was loose talk from Central Asian leaders about a Pan-Turkic state embracing most of the CARs that caused considerable irritation.

Demirel was always quick to stress the secular and open nature of the project. Keeping close contact with the U.S. administration on the issue, the Turkish model received the nodding of the Americans who hoped with the hands of Turkey to keep Iran and other fundamentalist Islamic influences at bay. When U.S. Secretary of State James Baker started on a 10-day tour of the former Soviet Union in February 1992, beside defense conversion matters, he concentrated on building up relations with the Islamic states (a shift in policy prompted partly because of the fear of Iranian activity in the region). On Feb. 19 it was announced that the USA would have embassies in Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenia and Uzbekistan. Baker's visit coincided with the Turkish Prime Minister's visit to the USA, during which US Turkish collaboration on activities in Central Asia was discussed.⁴⁰

36 *Dawn*, May 7, 1992.

37 *Dawn*, May 7, 1992.

38 *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, p. 38874.

39 *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, June 26, 1992.

40 *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, pp. 38771-2.

Yet, obviously, Turkic politicians were not averse to using the issue of the revival of a large Turkic state for the first time since the Ottoman Empire to return some grandeur to their otherwise dull internal politics. During a visit to Pakistan in October 1992, Prime Minister Demirel, when asked about Turkey's new role in a world without the Cold War emphasized that Turkey was contributing to the efforts for establishing a lasting world peace 'and we will serve as a bridge between the 200 million people of Europe and 300 million people of E.C.O. and the Middle East countries.'⁴¹

A pan-Turkic accord, however, did not materialize so far. When the leaders of the former Soviet Turkic states met in Ankara on October 30, 1992 for a summit hosted by Turkish President Turgut Özal, they could not agree to go much beyond existing bilateral agreements 'towards multilateral cooperation.' This was as Turkey had desired when it proposed a European Community-style measure of commitment to the free movement of labor, goods, services, and capital. Though their joint declaration pledged closer cooperation and they agreed to meet annually in future, the former Soviet states were unwilling to commit themselves to what would amount to a 'Turkish version of the Arab League.' Kazakhstan was particularly reluctant to jeopardize possible future relations with other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and with the rest of Europe.⁴²

Iran was quickest to open embassies in the CARs. It concluded oil deals with Turkmenia and others.⁴³ An Iranian-inspired *Casnian Sea Treaty* was announced on February 17, 1992.⁴⁴ It brought together all Caspian Sea littoral states, linking Iran, Turkmenia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Russia. Lacking the economic drive of Turkey, Iran made the appeal to cultural affinity the mainstay of its strategy. Iran organized the first International Congress on Scientific

41 *Dawn*, October 26, 1992.

42 *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, p. 39192.

43 Following a visit by Iranian President Rafsanjani to Turkmenia for the Central Asian summit in May 1992, agreements were announced (i) to construct a gas pipeline to Europe via Iran and Turkey (existing pipelines ran to Russia and Ukraine); and (ii) on transport, banking and trade. Iran had announced a \$50 million import credit to Turkmenia in April and an annual import of 150,000 tons of diesel oil from Turkmenia. Iran was also to cooperate on oil exploration and refining with Turkmenia, whose offshore oil extraction in the Caspian sea was suffering disruption because of shortages of hitherto centrally supplied materials. *Keesing's record of world events 1992*, p. 38969.

and Cultural Cooperation in Central Asia in November 1992, attended by scholars and officials from 30 countries.⁴⁵ The Iran-based *Association of Persian Language* was another newly-created grouping in the region, connecting Iran with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Cultural agreements with Turkic Central Asian states like Kazakhstan followed soon.⁴⁶ While Turkey felt it could play a larger regional role, linking the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe, Iran saw itself as the centerpiece of an expanded Middle East, referring to increased cooperation with the former Soviet Central Asian republics, Turkey and Pakistan and voicing new ambitions to control Persian Gulf security.⁴⁷

With Turkey and Iran exploiting their ancestral ties with Central Asia, Pakistan was somewhat disadvantaged. It was, therefore, left to Pakistan to revive the sleepy regional council of the Economic Cooperation Organization, the E.C.O. It had remained dormant since its inception in 1984 when it replaced its inactive predecessor, the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) founded by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan in 1964. At the time the RCD was meant to add an economic dimension to the security cooperation of the CENTO military alliance created in 1954. Mutual trade of the member states hardly ever surpassed the five percent benchmark. On Pakistan's insistence, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan met his Iranian and Turkish counterparts in Tehran on February 16-17, 1992 to invigorate the E.C.O. by inviting the Central Asian Republics and Azerbaijan to join.⁴⁸ Afghanistan was another likely addition to facilitate reconstruction of the war-torn country.⁴⁹ Azerbaijan, Turkmenia, and Uzbekistan were promised full E.C.O. membership at this summit. Tajikistan participated as an observer, Kyrgyzstan was also invited but did not attend.⁵⁰

44 *Arab News*, Jidda, February 18, 1992.

45 *Tebran Times*, Tehran, November 15, 1992.

46 *Tebran Times*, December 5, 1992.

47 Any Persian Gulf security arrangement excluding Tehran would be a recipe for failure, Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati declared to Pakistani media. *Dawn*, October 13, 1992.

48 *The Economist*, February 22, 1992, p. 57.

49 Its charge d'affaires delivered its membership application to E.C.O. Secretary General, Ali-Reza Salari in Tehran on July 8, 1992. *Tebran Times*, July 12, 1992.

50 Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, Impact of Central Asian Changes, in *Regional Studies*, Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, p. 25.

Kazakhstan made a late entry decision shortly before the E.C.O. Council of Ministers meeting in Islamabad on November 28, 1992. This meeting formally amended the Treaty of Izmir and extended membership from three to ten, including, beside Pakistan; Iran and Turkey, the five Central Asian states, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. The population covered by the bloc had then increased to 300 million and the territory of member states stretched over 6 million square kilometers – the largest economic bloc after the European Common Market.

It was the rapid decay of the old economic order of the former Soviet Union and the lack of viable alternatives which must have prompted this sudden change of heart by Central Asian leaders, some of whom not long ago had stoically supported a centralistic power arrangement in the former Soviet Union. In the race for a maximum of economic and financial assistance, the CARs entered all groups where it was possible to get membership. They agreed to intensify cooperation among themselves within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Leaders of the Central Asian states met in Bishek (Kyrgyzstan) on April 22-23, 1992 to create structures of a regional grouping within the CIS.⁵¹ As successor states to the Soviet Union with substantial European commitments they were trying to establish closer contact with the European community, NATO and the European Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE). Some joined the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. But first, they were members of the CIS, the Commonwealth of Independent States, where Russia still commanded considerable influence.

They signed the CIS member statutes in January 1993 establishing some kind of collective security arrangement. None of the CARs can afford to alienate Russia. Substantial Russian minorities live on their territories.⁵² They face the endurance of economic interdependence inherited from the Soviet Union irrespective of how flawed it is. Many of the Central Asian leaders are still well connected with the all-Soviet 'nomenklatura.' Some Central Asian countries were, therefore, reluctant to commit themselves to any binding agreement that could interfere with their relationship with Russia and Europe.

51 *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, p. 38874.

52 Cf. 'Russian Sahibs Go Home,' in *The Economist*, August 8, 1992, pp. 53-54.

This approach reflected a general concern shared by all member states of the E.C.O., as to how their new association would be judged by neighboring countries and other powers. Beside Russia, it was China, India and the U.S., which looked at the new formation with anxiety. The May 1992 Joint summit statement of the E.C.O., therefore, specifically mentioned they would not create any block 'impinging on the interests of other States.'⁵³ The summit also endeavored to 'study possibilities of initiating a conference on interaction and confidence building measures in Asia.'⁵⁴ This was a surprising reminder of the long-standing Soviet policy initiative to convene a conference on Asian security which, launched by Breshnev, was coldly received by most noncommunist Asian nations at that time. Again, mutual trade, tariffs and visa regulations were circumscribed by 'their international commitments' and 'international law,' taking cognizance of Russian interests.⁵⁵ At the May 1992 E.C.O. summit and at the first Turkic summit in Ankara on October 30, 1992, the CARs emphasized that those meetings were not aimed at undermining the Commonwealth of Independent States.⁵⁶

Pakistan had to take care of Indian sensitivities. Though the enlarged E.C.O. undoubtedly was meant to serve as a counterweight to Indian influence in the region, Pakistan was careful to avoid the impression of forging a Muslim bloc. During the November 1992 meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan's President Ghulam Ishaq Khan recalled the various historical, cultural and religious ties binding the E.C.O. members but remarked that 'while we must always be mindful of these linkages, we would be best advised to develop our cooperation along pragmatic lines.'⁵⁷ After that E.C.O. meeting, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Shaharyar Khan categorically denied that the E.C.O. was a Muslim bloc and stressed its economic dimension.⁵⁸ Pakistan was aware that an openly Islamist profile was not only unacceptable to many Central Asian leaders but would also invite criticism and suspicion. It therefore, followed a two-pronged strategy to create facts in favor of a strong Muslim bloc of nations and to camouflage the Islamic denominator with reference to economic cooperation.

53 *Dawn*, May 12, 1992.

54 *Ibid.*

55 *Dawn*, May 12, 1992.

56 *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, p. 38917 & 39192.

57 *Dawn*, November 29, 1992.

58 *Ibid.*

So far, cooperation within the framework of the E.C.O. is basically a declaration of intent. Since its re-emergence in 1984, the E.C.O. had taken a long time to agree on a rudimentary infrastructure and some projects. A system of preferential tariffs offering a mutual ten percent reduction had been under discussion since 1987 and has not yet been implemented. The proposed E.C.O. Trade and Development Bank shares the same fate since 1988 though it may be expedited now. The E.C.O. Chamber of Commerce may have started working already.⁵⁹ With a fresh impetus the Joint Communiqué, signed after the E.C.O. summit in Ashkhabad, Turkmenia, on May 9-10, 1992, laid down directions for future cooperation. The member countries strive for an increase in their volume of mutual trade and want to develop and implement joint investment projects. They accord each other most-favored-nation treatment. It is planned to create joint banks and joint ventures of small and medium scale enterprises. Transport and communication links as well as the gas and oil infrastructure are to be developed. The creation of better border crossing facilities and the introduction of a common preferential customs for the circulation of persons and goods is to be studied. Their national cultures and history are going to be explored.⁶⁰

The May 1992 summit agreed to share responsibility for development activities between Pakistan, Turkey and Iran. While Turkey took mainly care of education, administration and industrial management, Iran looked after oil and mineral resources and Pakistan specialized in the transport and communication sector, in banking and services. A general development plan for Afghanistan was also on the agenda. An E.C.O. Chamber of Commerce was created at the Islamabad summit in November 1992.⁶¹ To enhance its international standing E.C.O. member states applied for an observer status with the U.N. General Assembly.⁶²

Pakistan may well benefit from its detached position if the hesitance amongst Central Asian leaders to respond to the cultural and Islamic embrace by Turkey and Iran prevails. The idea of an Islamic Common Market, voiced, among others, by Pakistan's President Ishaq Khan during his visit to Turkey in October 1992,

59 *Turkish Daily News*, Ankara, October 25, 1992; *Dawn*, February 29, 1992.

60 *Dawn*, May 12, 1992.

61 *Dawn*, November 29, 1992.

62 *Tehran Times*, March 13, 1993.

may be somewhat farfetched right now but remains an important motivating force behind all activities.⁶³

Impediments and Hurdles

No matter how irresistible the potential gain in strength may be, Pakistan's leaders demonstrated much realism in evaluating the situation. After his December 1991 tour to Central Asia, Assef Ali made it clear that he harbored no illusions about the difficulty of the task. He warned against any rash effort of embracing these republics in the name of Islam to which their present leaders might be allergic. He correctly observed that the elites governing the Central Asian Republics are conservative in a sense of taking their roots from the previous government set-up. This induced them to slow down any possible change that could challenge their established authority. That would be the major reason why they would not be amenable to an Islamic system of governance, irrespective of their praise for Islamic tradition and culture.

A universal reference to the Turkish model emerged from Assef Ali's conversations with political leaders of the CARs. The Turkish way not only appealed to pan-Turkic sentiments of many of their people, or to pan-Islamic feelings as such. It seemed to be attractive for its combination of an Oriental, or Islamic, or authentic, or indigenous, whatever one may call it, outfit with a secular substance.

'If anyone were to jump to the conclusion that the day after tomorrow they are going to start behaving like the Iranians, the Saudis or the Pakistanis, then they have a little surprise for them in store in Central Asia.'⁶⁴ Assef Ali emphasized that these were thoroughly modern countries, open to the Russian kind of Western influence more than to political Islam which according to them has not yet delivered the goods of development and stability anywhere in the region. The developed infrastructure and the Russian connection determined their mainly secular outlook, he stressed.

A major economic obstacle to increased cooperation may come from the economic interdependence of the former Soviet republics. Attempts to retain their common market will hold down tariff barriers between them while keeping them up with other countries

on a unified policy. Pakistan's trade with Central Asia will then meet with the same obstacles as any other part of the world. It would have to compete with non-tariff imports from Russia and maybe even from the Baltic republics as the former Soviet republics will need and try to use any market share they can get. Pakistan tried to put a bold face on, assuming they initially will go with Russia but 'they will begin to pull out of that as they see the advantage in dealing with the outside world.' Ali believed if they want capital they can't get it from Russia and they will have to go to the West. They cannot have one tariff for Russia and another for the rest of the world. This the industrialized world will not accept.⁶⁵ The current disintegration of the common Ruble territory may prove Ali right.

The December 1991 delegation also concluded that all cooperation efforts between Pakistan and Central Asia would be doomed, if the Afghanistan problem was not solved quickly. Ahmed Rashid, member of the delegation, called an Afghan settlement 'a crucial factor.' Summing up the talks with Central Asian leaders on this topic, he emphasized:

It is not only the fact that the major route to Central Asia must be through Afghanistan but that Central Asian suspicions of Pakistani intentions in the region have been fueled by the Afghan war that the ISI [Inter-Services Intelligence] and the Jamaat-e-Islami are bent on undermining their region and that Pakistan favors fundamentalist regimes in Central Asia.⁶⁶

'Their perception was' as Ali put it 'that if you have a reactionary government in Kabul then there would be bloodshed in Tajik areas, in Turcoman areas and in Kabul. Additionally, all these people who are not in favor of such a government would be persecuted and as a result there would be a movement of refugees from Afghanistan to Central Asian republics and this will cause an enormous dislocation.' The President of Tajikistan told them point blank: 'If you try to bring a fundamentalist solution to Afghanistan then you would be responsible for the break-up of Afghanistan because our Tajiks would not live in that kind of Afghanistan. Even Ahmed Shah Masud, who is an important commander, and a Tajik, will not accept an extreme rightist government. He will be persuaded to

⁶³ *Dawn*, October 2, 1992.

⁶⁴ Supplement, *Dawn*, 15 January 1992, p. III.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* Shortcite.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p 1.

create an independent Tajik enclave in Afghanistan.⁶⁷ If Pakistan wants to keep its hinterland option open as far as Central Asia is concerned it obviously has to tread a cautious line of not alienating either side in the Afghan imbroglio, the Islamist and the nationalist forces, the Pakhtun and the non-Pakhtun groups. Ali stressed 'we must show to them through active policy that we are serious about resolving the Afghan problem and that we are not trying to impose any government in Kabul; and that our maximum effort would be to facilitate a U.N.-based solution, which, of course, is a broad-based provisional Islamic government followed by general elections held after two years.

The enduring civil war in Afghanistan between various factions of the Mujahideen and remnants of the old regime in many ways hurt local ethnic and political sensitivities in Central Asia, particularly in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. A significant part of the Soviet invasion force was drawn from these areas. The fate of the Uzbek and Tajik minorities in Afghanistan cannot but have direct repercussions on the local political situation in the CARs. And, they are still suffering from the political and economic fallout of the Afghan conflict. They have to deal with the smuggling of goods across the border from Afghanistan, including drugs and weapons, and they have to address the economic and social rehabilitation of the 'Afghans', the disillusioned as well as sometimes demoralized and sometimes renitent agents on the local political stage, demobilized soldiers who had been fighting in Afghanistan. The climate of the talks on the Afghan issue during the December 1991 visit had been bordering on hostility as Assef Ali confessed, though he maintained he had been able to convince his partners of Pakistan's good intentions and of the futility and non-viability of the Najibullah option. He took note of the deep concern for the fate of Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups in Afghanistan who were afraid to lose out in the new power accommodation engineered by the Pakhtun-dominated Peshawar-based emigrant groups.⁶⁸

The concerns of Uzbek and Tajik leaders from Central Asia for their kinsfolk in Afghanistan proved to be somewhat misjudged and misdirected. First, their new-found ethnicism was sheer expediency to serve their power ambitions as elsewhere in the post-communist world. Second, the Islamic challenge to their power which

67 *Ibid.* Shortcite.

68 *Ibid.*, p. III.

obviously was their main concern, did not come from outside but from inside their republics. Between twenty and thirty thousand Tajik refugees were fleeing the civil war in their country, crossing over to Afghanistan under conditions of great personal hardship in December 1992. Some groups of them even strayed into Pakistan with no means to survive.⁶⁹ And, third, their ethnic kinsmen in Afghanistan seemed to take advantage of the new regional equation, appearing stronger than ever before.

Pakistan's government was far from happy with a fundamentalist solution to Afghanistan's dilemma, as well. Nawaz strived to back the moderate Afghan Interim President Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, chief of the Afghan National Liberation Front (ANLF), and his successor Burhanuddin Rabbani, head of the Afghan *Jamaat-i-Islami*. They sought to keep the balance with the help of groups based in Northern Afghanistan like the Uzbek militia controlled by General Dostum from the Mazar-e-Sharif area and the Tajik Defense Minister Shah Masood against the radical Islamist *Hezb-e-Islami* led by Gulbadin Hekmatyar whose forces are predominantly Pakhtun. His radical Islamist ideas were seen as potentially destabilizing not only Afghanistan but also Pakistan and other neighboring countries, including the Muslim Central Asian states. Commanding the largest contingent of *mujahideen* forces and a one-time major recipient of military aid, Hekmatyar demanded the lion share in the new power arrangement in the name of the Pakhtun population majority. The April 24, 1992 Peshawar Accord laid down the basis for the political transition. Accordingly, an interim Presidential administration was formed, headed by the rotating President of the Leadership Council of the seven *mujahideen* groups based in Peshawar. The less powerful though still important post of Prime Minister was promised to Hekmatyar. The interim President was to convene a nominated Assembly which in turn would elect a formal Interim President for a two-year term to prepare general elections in Afghanistan. The Hezb and Gulbadin Hekmatyar, representing the Pakhtun faction of the guerrillas, insist on early election where they hope for a clear majority based on Pakhtun dominance among the population.⁷⁰

When the fighting between the various factions of the mujahideen intensified Pakistan pointedly decided to support the

69 *Dawn*, February 20, 1993.

70 *Dawn*, September 10, 1992.

government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, a decision shared by the government of the *Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI)*, President Ishaq Khan and the ISI, 'to ensure that the fruits of the 14-year war do not go waste.' The ISI reportedly suggested the closure of all offices of the *Hezb-e-Islami* in Pakistan and especially in the NWFP 'Afghanistan could pose a security threat to Pakistan, hence it was necessary to use all practical means to support the present Afghan government.'⁷¹

Pakistan did not succeed in cutting Hekmatyar to size. In a new peace accord between the warring factions mediated by Pakistan and signed on March 7, 1993, he was confirmed as Prime Minister of the transitional government.⁷² The accord was to be monitored by a peacekeeping force of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Yet, the agreement did not hold. Ethnic cleavages and personal ambition seem to prevail. As diplomats predicted right after the settlement was arranged, the bloodshed would continue 'unless Hekmatyar and Rabbani can agree on who should be defense minister.'⁷³ Rabbani consistently refused to consider allowing Masood, the most powerful commander in his *Jamaat-i-Islami* party, to step down.

The Nawaz administration in the meantime pushed for further normalization of the Afghan situation. The Afghan Refugee Commissionerate was wound up by the end of 1992. In November 1992, Pakistan withdrew preferential facilities and quotas for Afghan refugee students.⁷⁴ Pakistan declared in January 1993 that it intended to repatriate the remaining 1.7 million Afghan refugees 'by May by all means.'⁷⁵ Pakistan rescinded from its earlier pledge of rehabilitation of the refugees on the grounds that the required amount of \$250 million was not forthcoming from international donors.⁷⁶ In another move, Pakistan ordered all Afghan political parties as well as unregistered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to close their offices and branches in Pakistan, particularly in the Frontier Province, by January 31, 1993.⁷⁷

71 *Dawn*, August 25, 1992.

72 *Dawn*, March 8, 1993.

73 *Dawn*, March 16, 1993.

74 *Dawn*, December 1, 1992.

75 Ihtashamul Huque, 'Pakistan unable to support Afghan refugees any longer,' in *Dawn*, January 16, 1993.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Dawn*, January 7, 1993.

Thus Pakistan was meeting a demand by the U.S. administration that Pakistan prove within 120 days that it had nothing to do with terrorist acts, committed by mercenaries and former *mujabideen* and emanating from the Frontier Province or from Kashmir.⁷⁸ The temporary dismissal of the Nawaz administration raised the spectrum of a new offensive of the Islamist faction both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the long run Pakistan's bureaucracy and military is more likely to aim at the removal of all obstacles to closer ties with Central Asia. Yet, Pakistan's potential to influence the situation in Afghanistan seems to be exhausted. Observers believe that nothing except crude force can bring down Hekmatyar in his destructive and desperate quest for power. The restoration of the Nawaz administration allows Pakistan to follow up on its design to return the region to normalcy in order to settle down for building up regional cooperation.

Islam

Right from the beginning of its involvement with the affairs of Central Asia Pakistan's administration understood very well that the question of Islamic solidarity was a sensitive one: on the one side, Nawaz Sharif wanted to exploit the appearance of an Islamist foreign policy towards Central Asia to placate the anger of his smaller radical coalition partners from the *Jamaat-i-Islami* over his being too soft on the implementation of Islam. On the other side, he knew fully well that if Pakistan appeared to be a crusader for the spread of Islamic fundamentalism it would meet with stiff resistance in the post-Soviet bureaucracies of Central Asia, where the dominant attitude was secular and pragmatic. A Pan-Islamic policy was also seen as potentially destabilizing the present regimes where mostly (except in Kyrgyzstan) former Communists controlled political transition. The situation in Tajikistan was a strong reminder of that. Therefore, the December 1991 delegation was anxious to caution both the politicians and the public in Pakistan that nobody should expect the leaders of these republics to become religious zealots overnight. In Central Asia, Islam was being looked at not so much as a religious commodity but as an expression of their cultural tradition which needed no special emphasis. It rather took the form of cultural nationalism to help them to restore their separate and distinct political identity.

78 *Dawn*, January 17, 1993.

This attitude was characteristic of the Nawaz Sharif administration which though being constituted by an alliance of Islamic parties of the *Islamic Jamhoori Ittehad*, was more pragmatic, liberal and pro-business and was itself fighting a protracted battle against fundamentalists to keep political and economic institutions intact. But in the delicate equilibrium of forces governing Pakistan, Islamist forces have gained significant influence on government policies independent of the major political parties.

Pan-Islamic activities emanating from Pakistan towards Central Asia have been far from negligible. Mufti Sadyh, Chairman of the Muslim Board of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (July 1990, February 1991), and Tajik Imams of important mosques (Sept. 1989) paid consequential visits to Pakistan and to the International Headquarters of the *Motamar*, the World Muslim Congress, located at Karachi.⁷⁹ *Motamar* delegations participated in the bi-centenary commemoration conference of the first-ever Muslim Assembly of Muslims of the European parts of Russia and Siberia in August 1989 and in the regular conference of the Muslim Religious Board of Russia and Siberia in June 1990, both in Ufa, Bashkiriya.⁸⁰ During the visit of Mufti Sadyh to Pakistan in July 1990, a formal agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs was concluded, providing a Rs. 10 million donation for the construction of mosques and *deeni madaris* in Central Asia, for Islamic literature and videos, an Islamic printing press and scholarships for students of Islam in Pakistan's Islamic universities.⁸¹

The Islamists frequently mentioned as a favorable condition for spreading their influence in Central Asia that the majority of Muslims there belonged to the *Sunnite Hanafi* rite which is also the dominant one in Pakistan. Though the Muslim Boards were considered to be loyal to the old order of the Soviet Union they seemed to command considerable influence; or so they were treated by their Pakistani counterparts. Pakistan's Islamists, therefore, supported extensive contacts with the Muslim Boards and simultaneously cultivated Islamist opposition groups like the Islamic or Resistance Party with branches in all five CARs, being recognized strongest in Tajikistan where it can mobilize up to one-third of the popular vote.⁸²

79 *The Muslim World*, Karachi, Vol. 28, No. 5, p. 3; No. 34&35, p. 6. *The Muslim World*, Vol. 27, No. 13, p. 3; No. 11, p. 2.

80 *The Muslim World*, Vol. 27, No. 9, pp. 1/4; No. 10, pp. 1/4, No. 50, p. 1.

81 *The Muslim World*, Vol. 28, No. 6&7, p. 5.

Islamist forces seem to have pressed the government to go ahead with its first official visit to Central Asia of December 1991 and they helped to prepare it. In January 1990, the *Motamar* organized a well-attended seminar on Central Asia in Islamabad where the main speaker was Prof. Dani, an expert on the region, who also accompanied the Pakistan Government delegation to Central Asia in December 1991.⁸³ A follow-up seminar on Central Asia was organized by the *Motamar* in January 1992.

It may also be worth mentioning that the Islamist and the defense establishment were drawing closer over the years. Pakistan's defense rationale has been increasingly coached in Islamic terms of which a joint seminar organized by the *Motamar* and the top brass of the Pakistani military in January 1990 on its December 1989 military exercise called *zarb-e-momin* (strike of the faithful) provided ample proof.⁸⁴ Occasional apprehension in the West of Pakistan's army becoming the sword of a pan-Islamic crusade, (also referring to Pakistan's nuclear option) may be far-fetched and culturally biased. But it is undeniable that after the end of the cold war nationalism and Islam were looked at by the Pakistani establishment as an increasingly attractive justification to keep a huge military machine going with a proportional military spending far exceeding many countries in the region. This trend reached a new and surprising level when in January 1991 Pakistan's former army chief Aslam Beg criticizing U.S. military operations against Iraq compared the bombing of Baghdad with the battle at Karbela.⁸⁵

Islam may not be the only and not even the dominating driving force in Pakistan towards Central Asia. But Pakistan's politics have become so closely entangled with Islam that the terms of reference for any political discourse have visibly shifted towards an Islamic connotation. It is against this background that Pakistan's approach towards Central Asia has to be evaluated as pragmatic in the short

82 For a discussion of the background of interaction between Pakistani Islamists and Central Asia/Afghanistan, cf. Khalid Duran, 'Out of the Afghan Rubble a Greater Tajikistan? Regional Repercussions of the Mujahidin Take-Over in Kabul,' in *vierteljahresberichte*, Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 1992, pp. 343-349, and 'Islamism - ideological connotations and current trends of Muslim Fundamentalism,' *Ibid.*, pp. 59-70. Shortcite.

83 *The Muslim World*, Karachi, Vol. 27, No. 34, p. 4.

84 *The Muslim World*, Vol. 27, No. 30, p. 2.

85 *Dawn*, January 29, 1991.

run where the Islamist dimension could be invoked at any time. This need not be alarming for prospects of politics in Central Asia because of the internal compulsions of the region and because of the limitations on Pakistan to gain a foothold in the region.

Perspectives and Preferences

Pakistan's influence in Central Asia may not become effective very soon because of the considerable obstacles it has to overcome before it can safely rely on a Central Asian hinterland. In the meantime, Pakistan's interest in Central Asia should be given the benefit of doubt as it may strengthen bonds of regional cooperation which is a pressing imperative for the reconstruction of these societies as well as of Afghanistan, with the latter probably offering the greater challenge.

The repercussion for regional security are far less clear. Pakistan's design to gain some strategic advantage from the Central Asian connection is to some extent successful already. India feels threatened by attempts to create an Islamic bloc at its northern borders.⁸⁶ This has already contributed to reduce traditional Indian animosity towards the U.S. which will be increasingly looked at by India as a regional mediator in its quarrels with Pakistan. A gradual switch in U.S. allegiances towards India will in turn fuel Pakistan's anger and induce it to rely on the regional and Islamic equation more heavily.

India has managed to convince the U.S. to a certain degree of Pakistan's bad intentions on Kashmir. The U.S. has put substantial political pressure on Pakistan to renounce and discontinue its overt and covert support for the Kashmiri 'freedom fighters' less it is placed on a list of countries supporting or abetting terrorism which would entail negative consequences in terms of allocation of funds and political support. The pull factors to draw Pakistan deeper into an Islamic Middle Eastern security arrangement could only be reduced if the differences with India are solved and, particularly, the Kashmir question is put on the negotiation table. But for that, political stability has to return to Pakistan with a government confident of support from the bureaucracy and the military and secure from immediate political or religious challenges at home.

⁸⁶ During a visit to India in March 1992, Kyrgyzstan's President Akayev felt compelled 'to dispel concerns about the possible formation of a federation of Muslim states by former Soviet Central Asian republics' calling it 'impossible.' *Keesing's Record of World Events 1992*, p. 38811.

Ideology and Pragmatism in Iranian Foreign Policy

Jerrold D. Green

Introduction

The foreign policy orientations of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been shrouded in myth, ideology, and misunderstanding since the tumultuous events surrounding its creation in 1979. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini instantaneously became synonymous with the polity he helped create and an already difficult to understand political regime became further obscured. To most outsiders the Islamic Republic symbolized an uninviting and hostile political order impervious to understanding or rational investigation. This forbidding presence on the international scene was soon to be equated, by the unsophisticated, with Qaddafi's Libya as yet another renegade regime polluting the international system. Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger probably spoke for many of his countrymen when in 1987 he described the leadership of the Islamic Republic as "fanatical and irrational."¹ And indeed the behavior of the Islamic Republic and many of its most senior leaders did little to correct popular perceptions of it while seeming blithely unconcerned with the fashion in which Iran was perceived by the rest of the world. Iran's leadership tended towards hyperbole and sanctimony in a fashion that not only offended the West, but also many of its fellow states in the Islamic *ummah*.

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¹ United States Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations "U.S. Policy in the Persian Gulf," 100th Congress, 1st session, May 29, June 16, October 23 and 28, 1987, p. 124.