

*Nasreen Ghufra*

## **THE ISLAM FACTOR IN PAKISTAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS**

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The emergence of five Muslim Central Asian Republics on the world map in December 1991 was an important development, having implications not only for the Muslim world but also the West. The regional Muslim neighbours welcomed the freedom of their co-religionists in Central Asia but the West did not show great approval because of their fear of Islamic fundamentalism. The objective of this article is to find out the role being played by 'Islam' in the emerging relationship between Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics (CARs). A total of over 60 million Muslims has been reported to be living in the former Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The Uzbeks lead by having about 19 million Muslims, followed by 16.5 million Kazakhs, 8 million Tartars, 5 million Tajiks, 4.5 million Kirghiz and 4 million Turkmen. Other groups constitute about 10 million.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistan shares the same religion with the CARs. It is, therefore, pertinent to ask whether Islam is the decisive factor in their relations. In order to find this out, I shall be investigating the

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1. Anwar Khan, "Signals from Central Asia", *Research Journal-Central Asia* [University of Peshawar] No. 30, Summer 1992, P. 52.
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
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**Nasreen Ghufra** is Lecturer in International Relations, University of Peshawar, N.W.F.P., Pakistan.

role of religion in the politics of both Pakistan and the CARs, beginning with a brief history of Islam in Central Asia and the role of Islamic ideology in Pakistan. This is essential for a full comprehension of the religious dimension in Pak-CARs relations.

### ISLAM AND CENTRAL ASIA

Islam came to Central Asia in the 7th century when the Arabs invaded the area. Before Islam the prevailing religions were Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Buddhism.<sup>3</sup> Although the Arab conquests and direct Arab rule may be said to have come to an end in the middle of the 8th century, the advance of Islam and Islamic culture proceeded apace. This can be attributed to the Muslim traders, who propagated Islam more as a way of life than as a creed,<sup>4</sup> and unlike Buddhism, Christianity and Manichaeism, Islam was at times unsupported by missionaries. Politically, the Arab conquest made Central Asia a part of the Umayyad Caliphate.<sup>5</sup> It led to the final dismemberment of the Turkish nomad empire, even though the Arabs did not pursue the nomads on to their steppes. However, the local ruling dynasties were allowed to rule, though completely subjected to the Arab governor of Khorasan (Persia).<sup>6</sup> The governor looked after the administrative affairs of the eastern part of Caliphate. With the exception of the Steppe Region (now Kazakhstan), most of the area presently occupied by the CARs could be described as Muslim by the beginning of the 12th century. The practice of Islam had not become at all widespread among the Kazakhs until the 14th century.<sup>7</sup>

3. Geoffrey Wheeler, *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, Morrison and Gibb Limited, London, 1964, p. 21.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
5. V.V. Barthold, *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, trans by V and T Minorsky, E.J. Brill, Leiden, Vol. 1, 1962, p. 11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
7. *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

For Western, including Russian and Soviet historians, it was Islam which, as it were, put Central Asia on the map as a region inhabited by peoples who had to some extent succeeded in organizing their society and were thus qualified to 'enter history'.<sup>8</sup>

The 14th and 15th centuries may be regarded as the heyday of Islamic culture in Central Asia. During this period learning and the arts were inseparably associated with Islam and derived great benefit from the close contacts which Central Asia was able to maintain with the whole of the Muslim world. This development was mainly due to the fact that the local princes vied with one another in attracting men of literary and scientific distinction to enhance the lustre of their courts.<sup>9</sup> The state of learning and even of popular education was probably at par with that of Western Europe, and far above that of Russia which was then under the domination of the Mongols who, although converted to Islam, communicated nothing of their spiritual culture to the Russian people.<sup>10</sup> Central Asia produced a large number of mystics and saints, who moved out from this region to the far corners of Asia to spread the message of Islam. Maulana Jamaluddin Rumi, Khwaja Qutubuddin Kaki, Sheikh Usman bin Hasan Marandi etc. were amongst the luminaries who are still revered in all Muslim countries. In the field of science, Mohammad bin Musa Khwarzmi, who invented the Arabic numerals Ahmed bin Katheer Alfarghani, who measured the diameter of the earth in the 10th century A. D. and Abu Ali Sina who wrote several books on medicine etc., have all left indelible marks on the Central Asian history.<sup>11</sup>

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8. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

9. *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

10. *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

After the demise of the Timurid dynasty at the beginning of the 16th century, the creative power of Islamic culture declined; but the influence of Islam and particularly of the clergy on the lives of the people increased. This process continued even during the Tsarist regime when the authorities were slow to recognize the strongly entrenched position of Islam.<sup>12</sup> During the early stages of the Russian advance into the Steppe Region in the second half of the 18th century, the Russian government regarded Islam as a stabilizing and pacifying influence and actually ordered the building of mosques in the Kazakh Steppe.<sup>13</sup> Later, however, when the authorities realized to what extent justice and the agrarian system were tied up with Islamic law, they began to regard the clergy and particularly the Kazi or administrator of the Shariah (Islamic law) with strong disfavour. Kaufman (Governor General of Turkestan 1867-1882) while looking on Islam as a dangerous influence, considered that it could best be countered by a policy of indifference. He did not advocate any interference with religious observance or in the educational or legal systems except where the latter was concerned with taxation. He thought that in this way Islam would eventually wither away.

The 19th century witnessed the 'great game' played by the Tsarist and British empires on the Central Asian chessboard.<sup>14</sup> The Muslim Khanates, weakened by internecine warfare, fell by the wayside as Russian and British invaders fought for spheres of influence on territories which belonged to neither of them. The British policy was mainly concerned with the defence of India; it aimed at keeping Russian influence out of Persia and Afghanistan,

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

13. Helen Carrere Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Reform and the Revolution in Central Asia*, trans by Quinton Hoare, I. B. Tauris and Co. Ltd., London, 1988, p. 63.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

but steered clear of going to war with Russia over Russian aspirations in the Central Asian states.<sup>15</sup> But 'the Russian threat to India' continued to exist in the minds of many British statesmen and soldiers until the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which defined Russian and British spheres of influence in Persia, Afghanistan and Tibet.<sup>16</sup>

In the initial years of the 20th century important events convulsed the internal and external life of Russia and had deep repercussions upon the Muslim peoples of the Tsarist empire. In 1905 the Russian empire, apparently strong and victorious, was defeated by Japan. This defeat was significant not only for Russia but also the whole world, it was the first time for many centuries that a conquering power from the Christian West had collapsed before a 'non-white' and 'non-Christian' people.<sup>17</sup> From this period onwards, Russia's Muslims envisaged a possible end to colonial domination. It accelerated the awakening of national consciousness among them. Thus the situation prevailing in Turkestan and the Steppe Region at the beginning of 1917 seemed conducive to the rapid success of a revolution designed to overthrow the Tsarist regime. The inconsistent policies towards the Muslims followed by the Tsarist government since the death of Kaufman in 1882 and the enormous increase in Russian and Ukrainian settlement in Muslim lands since the turn of the century, greatly contributed to the Muslim resentment against the Tsars.

The Muslims, therefore, joined hands with the Bolsheviks to overthrow the oppressive regime of the Tsars. Before April 1917, only Lenin had supported the idea of national self-determination, but a resolution passed on this question in April by the Seventh

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15. *The News*, (Islamabad) 12 April, 1993.

16. *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

All Russia Conference of the Bolshevik Party stated the point clearly:

The right of all the nations forming part of Russia freely to secede and form independent states must be recognized. To deny them this right, or to fail to take measures guaranteeing its practical realization, is equivalent to supporting a policy of seizure or annexation. Only the recognition by the proletariat of the right of nations to secede can ensure complete solidarity among the workers of the various nations and help to bring the nations closer together on truly democratic lines.<sup>18</sup>

The Bolshevik adoption of such positions won the Muslims of Turkestan to their side. It was necessary to win over the Muslims at all costs, because they needed Central Asia for economic as well as political purposes. Accordingly, one of the first acts of the Bolshevik leaders when they assumed power was to make, in December 1917, the following conciliatory appeal:

Muslims of Russia, Tartars of the Volga and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Chechens and mountain Cossacks! All you, whose mosques and shrines have been destroyed, whose faith and customs have been violated by the Tsars and oppressors of Russia! Hence forward your beliefs and customs, your natural and cultural institutions are declared free and inviolable! Build your national life freely and without hindrance. It is your right. Know that your rights, like those of all the peoples of Russia, will be protected by the might of the Revolution, by the councils of workers, soldiers peasants, deputies!<sup>19</sup>

This conciliatory attitude, however, did not last for long. Events quickly showed that Islam as a religion came under the

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18. *Islam and the Russian Reform and the Revolution in Central Asia*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

general fire directed against supernatural beliefs and was not subjected to any special treatment except that since Islam, like Communism, had claims to universality, it was regarded as potentially more dangerous than the Orthodox Church. Whether Tsarist or Bolshevik, they saw their task as bringing to superior civilization to the inferior and did not see any need to understand or appreciate Muslim culture or contribution. There was also some tendency to see the people themselves as inferior.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, they were also unable to see that, for Muslims, the relationships between law, religion and social mores were much more complex and closely intertwined than they were for the Christians. Although the Bolsheviks had declared separation of Church and State in 1918, to the Muslims such separation was inconceivable.<sup>21</sup>

As part of the campaign to discredit all religions in order to create a new Soviet man, a particularly strong assault was launched against Islam. Karl Marx's writings were the basis of this anti-religious attitude among the Soviets. Marx had uttered his famous pronouncement against religion in *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Theory of Right* in 1844:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusion. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.<sup>22</sup>

This argument of Marx was frequently used by the Soviets in their anti-religious propaganda, and Islam was singled out as the

20. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

21. *The Modern History of Soviet Central Asia, op.cit.*, p. 188.

22. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion*, Chicago, 1964, p. 42.

most conservative of religions that had been imposed from abroad by alien invaders and which preached fanaticism and intolerance, setting 'believers' against 'infidels', thus creating obstacles to friendship between different peoples of the Soviet Union.<sup>23</sup> The Soviets launched a series of anti-Muslim attacks, banning Muslim religious courts, seizing *waqfs* (religious foundations) and allowing or perhaps encouraging the Red Army to destroy mosques.<sup>24</sup>

However, all this does not mean that the Central Asian Muslims did not resist the Communist suppression. For almost a decade, various movements of opposition to the extension of Communist central control developed. They received support from modern educated Muslim Central Asians as well as the more traditional groups of tribal and religious leaders. This general cluster of opposition movements came to be called *Basmachi* or Freeman's Movement.<sup>25</sup> Although at times there was a region-wide coordination, usually the *Basmachi* revolt was a scattering of groups that had the same goal of opposition to the Communist control and had some sense of unity based on the common adherence to Islam. There was little long-lasting coordination of efforts. As a result, it was finally defeated, but it created an important legacy for the Muslim communities in Soviet Central Asia. Thus at the beginning of the Muslim experience of being a minority within the Soviet Union, there was a clear linkage, at least in the Central Asian communities, between territorial and national identity and the Islamic faith of the people.<sup>26</sup>

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23. See, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1992, Published by Brassey's for IISS, London, p. 35.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 35

25. Martha B Olcott, "Basmachi or Freeman's Revolt 1918-24", *Soviet Studies*, No. 3, July 1981, pp. 352-369.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 352-269



Thus nationalist deviation was a continuing part of the position of most Muslim communists, but they were all purged in the era leading up to the Second World War. By 1939, the old Muslim communist leadership had been effectively replaced by a new generation of intellectuals and administrators, who were more fully in accord with the 'orthodox' communist doctrine.<sup>27</sup> Thus the crackdown on Islam continued until the Second World War, when it took only a brief respite. The anti-Islamic campaign was extremely violent, with mosques and books in the Arabic script burned and many clergy arrested and killed.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of the closing down of mosques, the secularization of education and the steady stream of atheist propaganda, the vast majority of the Central Asians would still have readily admitted to being Muslims.<sup>29</sup> Muslims, though restricted in religious and political terms, were able to practice religion in adverse circumstances through hundreds of clandestine, illegal religious schools and unofficial prayer centres and through the work and faith of thousands of itinerant, unofficial clerics.

The Sufi brotherhoods, that around the 12th and 13th centuries in the Middle East and Asia, played an important role in the preservation of Islamic values among the Central Asians. In the early days of the Islamic community, some Muslims paid special attention to lives of piety and devotion. Although these people usually conformed to the prescriptions of Islamic law, they emphasized the meditative and devotional dimensions of Islamic life rather than its legal aspect. By the thirteenth century, distinctive organizations developed within this mode of Islamic

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27. John Obert, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Muslim World*, Longman, London, 1982, pp. 165-266.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 265.

29. Gowher Rizvi "Islam and the West, a World Apart", *Strategic Perspectives* [Islamabad], Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992.

life. These groups followed particular devotional paths (*tariqahs*) that were identified with some great teacher or pious leader.<sup>30</sup> This general Islamic mode is called Sufism and the *tariqahs* are the Sufi orders of Islam. In Central Asia, these brotherhood movements not only served as the focal point of traditional opposition to the Russian presence but also helped to maintain the notion of the Muslim belonging to pan-Islamic brotherhood.<sup>31</sup>

The Soviet anti-Islamic propaganda was reversed during the Second World War. When Germany attacked the USSR in 1941 the support of Islam, as other religions, was actually enlisted. Mufti Abdur Rehman Rasul, the so-called leader of the Soviet Muslims, issued a manifesto which urged Muslims to rise in defence of the Fatherland against the enemy threatening destruction and misfortune to all Muslims children, brothers and sisters in religion.<sup>32</sup>

In the post-War period, the Soviet authorities either became undecided in their attitude towards Islam, or changed their views to accord with contemporary political considerations. At the time, the Soviet Government too seemed to incline towards the view held by Kaufman,<sup>33</sup> that the best attitude to adopt toward Islam was one of indifference, since it would inevitably die out when confronted by a more dynamic and progressive civilization.

The Russification of Central Asia was to a large extent successful and did away with the traditional way of life. The standard of living improved because in the post-War period there

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30. John L Esposito *Islam in Asia: Religion Politics and Society*, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 134-135.

31. Park Alexander, *Bolshevism in Turkestan 1917-27*, New York, 1957, p. 213.

32. *Central Asian Survey*, *op. cit.*, p. 45

33. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

was a powerful and successful drive to speed up technical training, industrialization and the mechanization of agriculture in Central Asia. The Soviet Government became more tolerant of Islam as the Communist Muslim leaders of Central Asia passively followed the dictates of the centre. During this period the peoples of Central Asia were effectively segregated from any political and cultural influence which might have emanated from Turkey, Iran or Afghanistan.

It was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, that brought about a major shift in the policies of the Soviet Government towards its Muslim population. The same year had earlier seen the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The turmoil in Afghanistan resulted in the direct involvement of Central Asian Muslims, since the Soviet Government initially found it necessary to send large number of Uzbeks and Tajiks to run the administration in Afghanistan which was almost wrecked by purges and the exodus of cadres to Pakistan and Iran. It was estimated that Central Asian soldiers formed nearly 30-40% of the Soviet forces sent to Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> However, within a few months, it was decided to replace them with forces from the European republics of the USSR. The iron curtain created between the Soviet Muslims and the adjoining Muslim countries began to crumble and the authorities in Moscow became fearful of a Muslim backlash.

Although the Soviet model of political and economic management had been showing signs of strain for a considerable period, it was the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan that raised the Cold War to a new level of intensity and produced consequence which proved decisive in discrediting both the ideology and functioning of the Eastern superpower. The reform programme of

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34. *Dawn*, Karachi, 12 March 1990.

Mikhail Gorbachev, designed to save the Communist system, undermined the very instruments that were holding it together, namely the Communist Party and KGB, and eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Some interesting points can be deduced from the above discussion:

*First*, Islam has played a very important role in Central Asian history. It enabled the region to 'enter history' by bringing about the transformation of the nomadic life of the people. It became a cradle of civilization, a fountainhead of science and learning, which were all associated with Islam.

*Secondly*, it is this glorious cultural Islamic past that is being referred to by most of the Muslim Countries in signifying the importance of the CARs in making great contributions in science and the arts that still account for many of the region's greatest accomplishments and monuments. It was the Islamic culture that enabled Central Asia to maintain contacts with the whole of the Muslim world.

*Thirdly*, Islam has stayed in Central Asia, despite attempts by various invaders to eradicate it. The Soviet failure is the most recent example. The Islamic tradition continued to survive in the Soviet Union, but it did not have the visible dynamism of the late 19th century. Preserved in many ways by the conservative habits of personal life, it survived also as "a social bond of union which enabled the Muslims to differentiate themselves from the Russians".<sup>35</sup> Religious kinship that had been bottled up for several decades came out once the restrictions were removed. The

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35. Alexandre Benningsen and Chantal Lemerrier Quelguezay, *Islam in the Soviet Union*, trans., Geoffry Wheeler and Hubert Evans, Praeger, New York, 1967, p. 112.

Muslims in the Soviet Union had never ceased to consider themselves as part of the same Muslim *Ummah* (community).

*Fourthly*, it is the emergence of Muslim Central Asia that has aroused the interest and fear of Islamic and non-Islamic countries respectively.

As far as Pakistan is concerned, the Islamic and cultural bonds alone unify it with Central Asia. Islam has played a decisive role in the creation of Pakistan; therefore, it is but natural to invoke the Islamic factor in its emerging relationship with the CARs.

#### ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan, an ideological state, was created as a result of the nationalist efforts of Indian Muslims to have a separate homeland. The identity of the Muslims as a separate and distinct community had been built on, *inter alia*, through the writings of Allama Mohammed Iqbal (a national poet and philosopher) and culminated in Mohammed Ali Jinnah's (the founder of Pakistan) famous 'two-nation' theory.<sup>36</sup>

Jinnah had started as a member of the moderate wing of the Indian National Congress, but joined the Muslim League in 1913 and was one of the architects of Congress-Muslim League cooperation. He assumed the leadership of Muslim League in 1934.<sup>37</sup> He gradually became persuaded that only a separate and independent state for the Muslims would guarantee their rights, and therefore, he developed the idea of the 'two-nation' theory. This theory proclaimed that the Hindu and Muslim communities within British India constituted two separate nations. The British were, therefore, required to grant independence not to one but two states.

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36. *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World; op. cit.*, pp. 223-224.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 223-24.

The goal of a separate Muslim state was finally recognized by the British in 1947, British India was partitioned into two independent states. The partition was accompanied by large scale communal violence and a massive exchange of population. Certain territories were claimed by both countries, and some, such as Kashmir, became the basis for long-term tension and conflict.<sup>38</sup>

The Pakistan Movement was an assertion of an identity that everyone felt was self-explanatory, and thus at independence the Muslim leaders had created a "state of Muslims", without going into the query of *Shariah*.<sup>39</sup> With the creation of Pakistan, the ability of Muslims to create a clearly Islamic state was put to test. A significant characteristic of the role of Islam in the politics of the country was that it did not provide a commonly accepted, concrete programme of action. Islam was rather a broadly defined ideology which was, in different forms, common to virtually all Pakistanis. In British India, Islam, however defined, had provided a distinctive identity in contrast to the Hindu majority, but the process of becoming the dominant majority had eliminated that condition.<sup>40</sup>

The effort to create an Islamic state was part of the problem of instability. The leaders of the Muslim League and the Pakistan Movement were largely modern educated and relatively secularist in orientation.<sup>41</sup> Most of the conservative *ulema* (religious scholars) and the fundamentalists had opposed the concept of Pakistan, but took an active role in Pakistani politics after independence.

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38. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

41. Vernon Hewitt, *The International Politics of South Asia*, Manchester University Press, U.K., 1992, p. 23.

Jinnah, a westernized and secular-minded veteran Muslim League leader and the first Head of the Pakistan state, declared in his inaugural address to the Constituent Assembly in August 1947:

if we want to make this state of Pakistan happy and prosperous, we should wholly and solely concentrate on the well-being of the people and especially the poor. You need to work in cooperation and forget the distinctions between the Hindu Community and Muslim Community. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of state. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state.<sup>42</sup>

Although this speech has been greatly criticised and argued upon, it did reflect nevertheless Jinnah's secular orientation. However, some are of the opinion that the circumstances demanded such an attitude. It was made at a time when the whole Indian sub-continent was swayed with communal frenzy; millions of people, both Muslims and Hindus, were victims of communal riots.<sup>43</sup> Such a trend still continues and bedevils Indo-Pak relations.

A radical change was observed in Jinnah's line of opinion six months later when he remarked, "you must prepare yourselves to sacrifice and die in order to make Pakistan a truly Islamic state".<sup>44</sup> This change has been termed by some analysts as his readiness to take refuge in Islam to survive the crossfire of provincialism and religious extremes.<sup>45</sup> However, he did not live long enough to

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42. Ghulam Choudhary, *Pakistan: Transition from Military to Civilian Rule*, Scorpion Publishing Ltd., England, 1988, pp. 86-87.

43. Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 280.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 281.

45. Burke and Ziring, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1990, p. 62.

overcome the major difficulties being faced by the newly independent country. He passed away in September 1948. The remaining Muslim League leadership, caught up in its class contradictions, abandoned its professed concern for the poverty of the Muslim masses and degenerated into feuding factions, leaving policy and planning in the hands of bureaucrats.<sup>46</sup>

This trend persisted throughout the years, and greatly affected the political stability of the country. Islam was often used as a political rite performed to grant periodical legitimation for those who were in power or aspiring to power.<sup>47</sup> It was also identified as a conservative force to suppress domestic dissent or to whip up public sentiment against the government. In the process, Islam lost much of its meaning and significance for the majority of political leaders.

President Ayub used Islam in order to strengthen the state apparatus to perpetuate an unjust and inequitable socio-economic order in the country. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's espousal of 'Islamic Socialism' was aimed at using Islam to pacify the religious people of Pakistan and escape the charge that he was 'anti-islamic'. During the 1977 general elections, the two major parties - Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) - stressed their past and future services to Islam. Zia-ul-Haq also used Islam to legitimize his autocratic military rule, as did the previous unrepresentative governments of Pakistan. The only difference was that Zia's obsession with Islamic ideology as a possible legitimization of his rule was all the more intense because he could not keep himself in power on the basis of a popular constituency.<sup>48</sup>

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46. *The International Politics of South Asia*, op. cit., p. 27

47. Gardezi and Jamil, *Pakistan: The Roots of Dictatorship*, Zed Press, London, 1983, p. 362.

48. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-79.



This brief discussion of the 'Islamic ideology' of Pakistan leads us to conclude that although created in the name of Islam, Pakistan cannot be termed as a true Islamic state', as far as the implementation of *Shariah* (Islamic law) and Islamic teachings are concerned. Islam has been a useful tool in the hands of the political leaders to legitimize their authority over illiterate masses, as they are more receptive to religious dogma.

As Vernon Hewitt has aptly remarked that "the tragedy of Pakistan is not that it is Islamic, but that Islam has become the cover for the political fudges and compromises of discredited and illegitimate elites-in which Quranic erudition has replaced critical reasoning."<sup>49</sup>

While Islam focuses on unity, Pakistan despite its religious homogeneity has remained divided on regional and ethnic lines. Sectarian clashes between Shias and Sunnis have further aggravated the dilemma of being an Islamic state. Even Jinnah's vision of a homeland for the Muslims of India finally broke down with the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>50</sup> This meant Islam had been the basis for the creation of Pakistan but it could not provide a sufficient basis for long-term national unity. In Bangladesh, religious nationalism uneasily clashed with linguistic or cultural nationalism.

It is the assessment of the 'Islamic ideology' of Pakistan that enables us to differentiate between the role of Islam in the history of Central Asia before it did not take the form of a political movement to seek independence as it did in case of the Muslims of India. Keeping in view the above analyses, let us examine how Pakistan and the CARs are cooperating on religious grounds.

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49. *The International Politics of South Asia, op.cit.*, p. 24.

50. Damodar P Singhal, *Pakistan*, Prentice Hall Inc. Englewood Cliff., N.J., pp.146-47.

## PAK-CARS RELATIONS: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

The Islamic component of Pakistan's foreign policy has been of significant importance. The trauma of partition and the strained history of subsequent Indo-Pak relations ensured almost an obsession with threats to national security, emanating from India. Full of Islamic fervour and confident of support, Pakistan first looked toward the Muslim countries on its West for friendship making overtures for alliance and assistance against India. Being the most populous Muslim state in West Asia, Pakistan hoped to be called upon to lead the Muslim states in the area.<sup>51</sup> Several non-official Muslim conferences were held in (then West) Pakistan, but attempts to hold official and inter-governmental conferences failed. In 1952, Pakistan invited the prime ministers of twelve Muslim countries to a conference in Karachi, to explore the possibility of creating a consultative machinery between the Muslim countries. Pakistan looked upon this as a stepping stone to create a commonwealth of Islamic countries under its leadership. However, the response was lukewarm and the project was dropped.<sup>52</sup> By 1953, however, it had become clear, that little of solid worth was emerging. New anti-colonialist, neutralist, Pan-Arab doctrines etc. obviously in practice, interested these countries more than the ideals of an ancient Islamic brotherhood.

In search of ways to enhance its military capability, the Pakistani leadership looked toward the only major source of assistance available at the time - the US. Even as Pakistan entered into alliance relationships with the West, it regularly expressed a desire to cultivate its Islamic ties, reminding the Muslim world that Pakistan was the only modern state created exclusively in the name of Islam. However, the military pacts had inevitably alienated

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51. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

52. *Pakistan : The Roots of Dictatorship, op. cit.*, p. 362.

ted her from those Muslim nations that had declined to join such alliances, Afghanistan and Egypt, for example.

As Pakistan gave more priority to its security requirements, the Muslim world looked weak and incapable in the 1950s of fulfilling that need. This view was reflected in Prime Minister Suhrawardy's comment in 1956 that Pakistani cultivation of ties with Islamic countries was difficult because 'zero plus zero equals zero' has to be taken in the perspective of overall defence needs.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the formative years, Pakistan's political, military and bureaucratic elite, who constituted the policy making group, invoked the nation in directions that were contrary to the fundamental Islamic ideology that was officially espoused by the state. However, even during these years Islam was routinely used by the elite to justify foreign policy chosen for other reasons. In its rivalry with India, for example, Pakistan stressed its ties with the Southwest Asian Islamic states. During the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971, most of the Islamic states adopted positions publicly sympathetic to Pakistan.<sup>54</sup>

The failure of Islam to provide a sufficient basis for national unity had provided an opening for more secularist and radical leaders to assume control of the two states that emerged from the war of 1970-71, Pakistan (the old West Pakistan) and Bangladesh (the former eastern wing of the country). The leadership in both countries after the war was committed to programmes that were radically socialist rather than Islamic in nature. Bhutto led Pakistan in the effort to recover from the trauma of the defeat in 1971. His radicalism was carefully balanced with Islamic themes, although there was little formal formulation of an Islamic socialism. Bhutto's foreign policy helped to reduce the religious

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53. *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-325.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 324-25.

opposition at the domestic level. He had initiated programmes of agrarian reform and nationalization of industries, which led him into conflict with the conservative religious forces.<sup>55</sup> He moved Pakistan away from the formerly close alliance with Western powers and brought the country into a more intimate relationship with other Muslim countries.<sup>56</sup>

1969 also witnessed the founding of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) with the objective of liberation of Palestine. The formation of the OIC coincided with Bhutto's general disillusionment with the US and with the reliability of the West as allies. Pakistan openly condemned the Israelis for the latter's attitude toward the Arab states and favoured the setting up of a Palestinian state. In turn, it not only received diplomatic support against India over the Kashmir issue, but also material and financial help from the Middle Eastern countries. Pakistan adopted a high profile within the OIC over the Afghanistan crisis, while the Islamic Conference provided the forum for Pakistani diplomatic initiatives such as the mission to try and mediate over the Iran-Iraq war in 1980.<sup>57</sup>

These few references demonstrate that careful use of Islam can indeed mobilize not only the population of Pakistan, but also the Islamic world within which the Pakistani role is seen to be increasingly dynamic. Hence recent regimes in Islamabad have laid great emphasis on maintaining strong ties with Muslim countries and recognized that self-interest dictates that Pakistan should ensure that their relations are not jeopardized. It has mainly been this continuing trend in Pakistan's foreign policy, that aroused the country's interest in the emergence of Muslim CARs.

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55. Dalton and Wilson, *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, Hurst and Company, London, 1982, p. 266.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 206

57. *The International Politics of South Asian*: op. cit., p. 20

Even since the independence of CARs from the repressive yoke of the USSR, great hopes have been raised in the Muslim world, in general, and Pakistan, in particular, about the future of these Republics in the "Islamic bloc". Prior to their independence, these Republics were deemed to pose potential danger to Russia by virtue of being Muslim. Some zealots were of the opinion that these Republics with their fast growing population would one day take over the Russian population in the former Soviet Union. For the Muslim fundamentalists, the Muslims of these Republics were just about to launch a *jihad* (a holy war) against Russia.<sup>58</sup>

Their emergence as independent entities, therefore, created great euphoria among the Muslim countries, who naturally want to see them enter the mainstream of the Islamic World. Are the CARs showing as much enthusiasm in forging ties with them? A clear-cut answer is difficult. The Central Asians have all zealously guarded and clung to their religious faith and practice regardless of the local deviations and re-adjustments over the years. However, devotion to their Islamic faith cannot be equated to a commitment to pan-Islamism. The Islamic *Ummah* itself remains more of a vision or a dream than an organic or constitutional reality, with varying conflicting perceptions and definitions. The traditional Arab-Ajam (non-Arab) divide, is as much a reality today as in the past.<sup>59</sup> It would be, therefore, only rational to view the emerging situation in the de-Sovietized Muslim Central Asia in the light of their distinctive language, culture and, above all, of their prolonged exposure to the Communist ideology.

CARs are largely dependent on neighbours to the north. Since their regimes are carry-overs of the Communist past, they are scared of the emergence of Islam as a political force that could

58. *The States of South Asia: op. cit.*, p. 20.

59. Adeed Dawisha, *Islam in Foreign Policy*, Cambridge University Press 1986, p. 68.

potentially present a challenge to the *status quo*. Given this context, one aspect which is currently dominant in the debate in Central Asia over the region's future direction is the role of Islam. A slow, regulated, officially sanctioned process of cosmetic Islamization is underway in most of Central Asia. This is reflected in the granting of religious freedom and opening of new mosques. A new mosque is opening virtually every week on an average, in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.<sup>60</sup> But currently both states have clearly delinked the political system and politics from religion in an attempt to maintain the secular character of their countries.

The Central Asian States clearly formulate their foreign policies with an eye firmly fixed on Russia. This has made the region's leaders proceed cautiously in establishing ties with the Muslim world. Russia is not only a powerful neighbour, it is the self-appointed guardian of the approximately 10 million Russians who still live in Central Asia.<sup>61</sup> President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan is determined to retain the link between Russia and Central Asia rather than risk becoming identified as head of an 'Islamic state.'<sup>62</sup>

Kirghizistan is also sensitive to the 'Islamic state' issue, especially since President Akaev enjoys strong support from a large Russian minority. Ednan Karabayev, Secretary of State of Kirghizistan said in an interview with Pravda that the "Kirghiz Republic is ready to cooperate with any Muslim country, since moral principles of any religion are a wonderful heritage of our ancestors".<sup>63</sup> Responding to a question about the influence of

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60. *Strategic Perspectives*; Vol. 1, No. 3, 1992, Islamabad, p. 16.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 16

62. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

63. See, *Pravda*, December 3, 1991, quoted in *Central Asia -Research Journal*, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

Islamic fundamentalism, he said: "fanaticism inherent in Islamic fundamentalism have always been alien to the Kirghiz people."<sup>64</sup>

Davlat Usman, Tajikistan's Vice Premier and Deputy Chairman of the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), remarked in June 1992 that the Republic was not yet ready to become an Islamic state. He shared the view of the Republic's Muslims leader, Hajiakhar Turadzhonzoda who stated that :

the decades of Communist rule have killed the trust of many people in God and they would apparently take more than a year to accept the idea of an Islamic Republic on their own.<sup>65</sup>

Since it declared independence from Moscow, Tajikistan, which is ruled by a coalition of pro-democracy groups, Islamic parties and former Communists, has drifted from one crisis to the next. Imomali Rahmonov, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan, believes that the main reasons for the national tragedy of the Tajik people are the collapse of the state and the weakness of the political institutions of power, which extremists have been able to exploit, first and foremost, the Islamic fundamentalists. In their struggle for political power and the establishment of an Islamic form of government in Tajikistan, the Islamicists have:

thrust tens of thousands of people into the fire of civil war, proclaimed whole regions their enemies and persecuted fellow countrymen on ethnic grounds. The authorities in Tajikistan, having set out to create a genuinely democratic secular state, are taking decisive measures to stabilize the socio-political situation, stop the civil strife and restore the economy of the Republic.<sup>66</sup>

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64. *Ibid.*

65. *The Frontier Post*, (daily) Peshawar/Lahore, November 7, 1992.

66. Marthad B Olcott, *Central Asia's Catapult to Independence Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 3, Summer 1992, New York, p. 123.

Interest in Islam at this stage is more a search for identity than embracing the Islamic doctrine. Even in Tajikistan, where Islamic militancy became particularly strong, it was more a tool of political protest than a doctrinal issue.

Although the CARs have been cautious in pronouncing their Islamic credentials, the Islamic factor of their policy nevertheless has been the subject of widespread international comment. Yuvenliy Polyakov, an expert of the Russian Foreign Ministry, has been apprehensive of some of the CARs turning into Islamic states.<sup>67</sup> He said there were certain grounds to justify these fears:

Nationalists in Uzbekistan speak of the renaissance of greater Turkestan and of plans to set up a confederation together with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. For their part, Turkey and Iran are now both active in the region. He, however, believes that the Islamic trend is just one of the many trends evolving in the newly independent countries of Central Asia and points to their membership of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, as an example.<sup>68</sup>

The West, too, is seeking to wield influence on the course of events in the CARs to prevent them from becoming Islamic states. The Western world remains deeply suspicious of the emergence of an Islamic bloc. The West equates Islamic fundamentalism with "aggression, terrorism and anti-Westernism". In order to justify their fears they usually point to the international political events, such as the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in an Islamic Revolution in 1979; the subsequent anti-Western posture adopted by Ayatollah Khomeini; American diplomats being taken hostage in Iran for 444 days from late 1979 to January 1981; the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat by a group of

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67. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

68. *The News*, February 20, 1993.



Muslim fundamentalists in October 1981; the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and President Saddam's avowed defiance of the West etc.<sup>69</sup>

With the demise of communism, Islam is thus increasingly and wrongly being perceived as one of the future ideological rivals to the West. Islamic resurgence in the CARs is thus seen with suspicious eyes by the West. However, Syed Riffat Hussain is of the opinion that the phenomenon of so-called 'cultural and religious' revivalism in Central Asia is not against the Western value structure as had been portrayed by the Western media. According to him, religious revivalism represents an attempt on the part of Central Asian societies to make a decisive break with their tyrannical past. Moreover, their attempt to 'bring in the past' is as much motivated by the contemporary need for cultural authentication as by their sub-conscious yearning to 'recover the lost paradise of Islam'.<sup>70</sup>

It is not easy to allay these fears of the West, which now even extend to the sphere of security as well. For instance, during his 24 February 1992 Moscow meeting with the Russian Orthodox Church patriarch, Alexei II, the late Secretary General of NATO, Manfred Woerner, warned that "Islamic fundamentalists are increasingly growing strong in Central Asia" and this development "does not meet the interests of NATO." He added that NATO wants to see 'secular pro-Western governments in Central Asia' referring to this as the 'Turkish scenario' since Turkey is the only Muslim member of NATO and has an avowedly secular pro-Western government.<sup>71</sup>

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69. See, Baylis and Rengger, *Dilemmas of World Politics : International Issues in a Changing World*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 325.

70. *The News*, February 16, 1992

71. *British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary World Broadcasts : Soviet Union (SWB SU) SWB SU*, 1642 B/16, U.K., February 20, 1993.

The West is supporting the 'Turkish model' against the spread of 'Iranian type' Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia. The frequency of exchanges between Iran and the CARs is less than Turkey's. Iranian officials forcefully maintain that they are spreading commerce and not revolution in Central Asia. As remarked by one of its officials that "Iran is keen to first dispel the notion of so-called Islamic fundamentalism and export of Islam, which is what the West is keen to label us with. We only want to emphasize our economic relationship and our cultural compatibility."<sup>72</sup> However, there is in fact little evidence to support rumours that Iran is engaging in a massive clandestine effort to support Islamic fundamentalism in the region.<sup>73</sup> On the contrary, it is Turkey which not only has Turkish Muslim missionaries in Central Asia, but also has been training preachers and funding the building of mosques.<sup>74</sup>

The Western fears and their open support of the Turkish model, restrain the Pakistani government to lay too much emphasis on Islam in their emerging ties with Central Asia. Soon after the independence of the CARs, the Pakistani Finance Minister, Sartaj Aziz, announced his willingness to sponsor the membership of Central Asian states into the ECO, an economic bloc of Islamic countries. The former Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, had stated that such moves would "revive our past religious and cultural relationship. Moreover, it will further strengthen the Islamic *Ummah*".<sup>75</sup> Pakistan also sponsored their membership in the OIC. Nawaz Sharif said that the Islamic *Ummah* must include in its fold the emerging world of Central Asia. Muslims there have waited more than three quarters of a century for this day and this

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72. SWB SU/ 1389 B/1, May 14, 1992.

73. *Ibid.*

74. SWB SU/ 1556 b/5 December 5, 1992.

75. *The News*, May 30, 1992.

opportunity. They are looking up to the rest of the world in hope and expectation. We must not fail them.<sup>76</sup>

While responding positively to Pakistan's gestures, the CARs have kept their options open. They have their own ambitions and problems; therefore, they are assessing a wide variety of alternatives available to them. They have no inhibitions in dealing with nations diametrically opposed to each other. Investments from the USA and China are both welcome and diplomats from Iran and Israel are treated alike. Pakistan and India can both enter the Central Asian market while opportunities for other nations to establish mutually beneficial relations with these countries exist, irrespective of their religious or cultural affiliations.

Pakistan will have to approach the matter of its future relationship with its Central Asian neighbours with a great deal of caution and diplomatic finesse.<sup>77</sup> The Islamic sentiment, no matter how real, universal and strong, often gets subordinated to factors more mundane and material.

## CONCLUSION

Pakistan has become aware of the fact that a commonality of religion does not form the basis of an automatic commonality of interests. Therefore, it is trying to separate the economic imperatives and options from the emotive appeals based on religion. The Central Asian Muslim Republics are currently going through their pangs of birth. Border disputes, ethnic tensions, racial differences, ideological conflict and economic strains, have all added up to their difficulties of independence. They certainly do not want to involve themselves in the partisan tendencies that often exist in the Islamic world.

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76. *Ibid.*

77. *SWB SU/ 1400 B/5 June 6, 12.*

The CARs do not deny of being Islamic nor do they want to be seen outside the Islamic *Ummah*, but they do not want to be seen as Islamic fundamentalists. This is mainly because Islamic fundamentalism has been equated with 'extremism', violence, intimidation, coercion and terror by the West. Unless, this line of thinking changes, Islam will remain the target. The CARs have, therefore, adopted a more pragmatic approach by striving to have a balanced relationship with Russia, the West and the Islamic world. This is important to overcome their security and economic problems.

Islam is an important linkage between Pakistan and the CARs, but facts prove that it is not a decisive factor in their relations. Economic considerations presently overshadow the religious dimension of their relationship. Pakistan should not be worried about the secular orientation of Central Asia. If Pakistan can have a cordial relationship with secular Turkey, then why not with Central Asia?