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THROBBING STATE OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS: AN INTROSPECTION

INTRODUCTION

"One of the hallmarks of human history in the last of twentieth century is the increasing internationalization of the world: in production, trade, finance, technology, threats to security, communication, research, education and culture. One major consequence of this is that the mutual penetration of economic, political and social forces among the governments of nation-states are progressively losing degree of direct control over the global forces that affect them. For social scientists, this phenomenon of internationalization poses a kind of conceptual challenge; to re-think the fundamental assumptions, long established in our disciplines, that the primary unit of analysis is the nation, the society, or the culture." - Niel J. Smelser.

The crumbling of the iron-curtain proved that the change is inexorable and a constant factor in any environment. Especially in its international dimension with interaction of nearly 200 sovereign states, it is unrealistic to expect statism. However, there comes a time when cataclysmic or revolutionary changes alter the premises of international order and generally compel a search for fresh paradigms. Such a change is at hand with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and hence,

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the emergence of new independent Central Asian Republics. "The former Communist elite of the republics of Soviet Central Asia viewed the disintegration of the Soviet Union, in 1991, as an undesirable and dangerous phenomenon."¹ But in course of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* the Central Asian states got independence, and subsequently there emerged the new independent Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan besides the Caucassian state of Azaerbaizan.

This landmass of unparalleled geopolitical significance to which Sir Halford Mackinder had said as the "natural fortress in the world", has been searching itself for a stable future since its independence. Further, having been a region of unstable frontiers, the balance of power between its own population and the surrounding states has determined its political status in the past. It had its manifestation as a zone of triangular contest between Britain, Russian and China during the 19th and the first two decades of the 20th Century, which has been romanticised as the "Great Game". Later on also it came into sharp focus with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Ironically, the seismic waves of disintegration of the Soviet Union have unleashed a flux of change and uncertainty in this region. And this game may be replayed in future if the policy makers of this region do not stand firm with conscious and reasonable viewpoints.

Whereas the Central Asian states have earnestly begun to rediscover their rooting postulates of prosperous future on new basis, three groups of states besides Russia have been trying to step into this new diplomatic region. In this way they may resume the "Great Game". Those groups are (i) U.S., Turkey and the West European countries; (ii) Islamic countries, especially Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and (iii) the two Asian giants—India and China. The contours of a new world power equation has been emerging gradually and the respondent Central Asian states are in

1. Igor P. Lipovsky, "Central Asia: In Search of a new Political Identity", *The Middle East Journal*, volume 50, Spring 1996.

search for best suited alternatives. They have to choose and settle for a democratic set up or to establish such pattern of governance, which may amicably settle the demand of domestic issues with the desires of external world. The inter-state cohesiveness of this region is the demand of time. But in doing so, they should not succumb to the greed for suppressing the other's weakness. This might create an unseen trouble for them. Cooperation and encouragement - these two words do matter a lot for them. They have to recognize and measure the degree of advancement of relation with the outside world very carefully.

In fact, for the protagonists of the New World Order, "Caution and moderation are the guides of the American and West European countries policies in this Central Asian region".² They have more concerns other than market benefits and denuclearisation in this region. Set-up of democratic governments, prevention of any regional conflict, establishment of fundamentalism and terrorism are the issues in prominence in American policy agenda. The United States seems to have a plan to familiarise the peoples of newly independent republics with American history and culture. They are very much aware of not to create any anti-American feelings among the peoples, who have been trying to assert a new identity.

At the same time, Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan (the so called centres of Persian and Mughal empires), in the absence of Cold War patrons have stepped in to fill the vacuum by playing Islamic cards with temporary economic assistance to the newly emerged states. Turkey (the old Ottoman empire) obviously comes as an important actor in the region. Firstly, it counteracts Iran's policy through its brand of democratisation, industrial development and market-oriented policies and secondly, it serves as a perfect alter-ego to the U.S.A. Besides, due to their geographical proximity to Turkey, Iran, Afgha-

2. Firuz Kazemzadeh, "United States Policy Towards Central Asia: Caution and Moderation", *Vital Speeches of the Day* 58 (22); 1 September 1992, pp. 678-81.

nistan, Pakistan, China, Russia and India, the Central Asian Republics have to understand its important role in the geopolitics of this region as well as the whole world.

In the following discussion, the domestic conditions of the Central Asian Republics with their needs and compulsions are outlined first. The external factors influencing the Central Asian policies are discussed next and these are juxtaposed with how these republics have been responding to external impulses in the following section. The analysis of facts are vividly based on views and opinions.

DOMESTIC FACTORS

(i) Ethno-religious resurgences:

Identifying the ideological tenets of Central Asia, either at the level of the region or the state of national societies has been a complex task. It has its dignified varieties and classes to pose impediments for an immediate establishment of peaceful civil and political society. "Ruling elites throughout Central Asia have been searching for some form of ideological identification in order to gain legitimacy within their respective political jurisdictions. This search has been complicated significantly by the fact that, without exception, the composition of the ruling elites in Central Asia has not changed much since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Although there have been personality changes at the highest level of the executive in Tajikistan as well as in Azerbaijan, the administrative and military establishments have remained largely as they were prior to independence".³ National exclusiveness and ethno-centrism have more implications on the increasing tendency of centrifugal behaviours of the people of this region. They are reasserting their old identities with prejudices to give rise to inflammable situations. "Demonstrations were organised by Uzbeks in Tashkent as early as in May 1969 and by Tajiks in Dushanbe in May

3. Gharabaghi Kiaras, "Development Strategies for Central Asia in the 1990s: in search of alternatives", *Third World Quarterly*, 15(1), 1994, p. 104.

1978 demanding the Russians to get out."⁴ Such incidents also took place in Dushanbe in large scale in the end of 1995.

The ethnic problem in Central Asia assumed serious proportions in the past few years when violent inter-ethnic clashes rocked Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tazikistan and Kyrghyzstan. Various factors such as ethnic recession, nationalist and religious resurgence, growing unemployment, low agricultural and industrial production that resulted in shortages and decline in standard of living and instabilities among youths are stated to be responsible for the heightened inter-ethnic tensions in this region. The problem is compounded by the ethnographic complexity too. Uzbeks, Turkemen, Tajiks, Kazakhs, Kyrghyzs, and Kara Kaplaks inhabit definite territories where they form a predominant majority. This is the result of the territorial delimitation which began in 1924 and was completed in 1936. This drew the map of Central Asia by creating separate national republics and autonomous oblasts whose population acquired greater homogeneity. In this manner, although each republic was dominated by one main ethnic group, the indigenous peoples were divided further by the boundaries of the new republics. It led to another dimension of ethnic problem. There occurred a series of violent clashes, such as Russian-Kazakh, Kyrghyz-Uzbek, Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Mewshkitian Turk clashes in Alma Ata, Osh, Dushanbe and Ferghana during the period 1986 to 1990. As per 1989 census figures "Uzbeks formed 71.04% of population of Uzbekistan and they are also scattered in Tajikistan, Kyrghijistan, Turkministan and Kazakhstan at the ratio of 23.44%, 12.8%, 2.01% respectively. Similarly Kazakh settlers in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan formed 4.05 and 2.49% of their population respectively. Russians constituted 21.37%, 9.45%, 8.30%, 7.59% of the population of Kyrghyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As regards Kazakhstan, the Kazakhs represent 39.45% of the total population in 1989 whereas non-Kazakhs were in majority

4. K. Warikoo, "Soviet Central Asia in Ferment", *Ethnicity and Politics in Central Asia*, 1991, New Delhi, p. 63.

(Russians - 37.60%, Ukrainians - 5.40%, Germans-5.78% and others - 7.08%).⁵ There are still a number of small other ethnic groups like Turks, Tatars, Dungans etc., scattered in each of the Central Asian Republics in varying proportions.

The linguistic heritage of various ethnic groups is as varied as their cultural and social origins. Though Turkemen, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrghyz, Kara Kalpak and Uighurs belong to Turkic group Kipchaks, Uighurs, Taranchis, Arabs, Kalmuks, Meshkitian and there are substantial differences not only between these languages and the old Turkish language but also among themselves. But the Persian speaking Tajjiks, who represented an urban tradition and rich cultural heritage, are of Iranian stock as against all Central Asian ethnic groups who belong to the Turko-Mongol origin. Ethnic jigsaw in their region is further complicated by the trans-borders settlement of Tajjiks, Uzbeks, Turkemens and Kazakhs, who have been living on both sides of Soviet Central Asian borders with Iran, Afghanistan, and China. "There are four and a half million Tajjiks, one and a half million Uzbeks and half a million Turkmens in Afghanistan. In addition, some 700,000 Kazakhs and 80,000 Kyrghyzs are living in adjoining Xinjiang region of China. Five hundred thousand Turkmens are settled in Iran."⁶ Any cross border fraternization of this Central Asian population on ethnic and religious lines will result in politico-economic and social instability in this whole region which is ultimately a threat to global peace and security. The policy makers have to be cautious so as to avoid bringing the situation in similarity with Kurdish problems and many a like.

(ii) Power and Politics in the Region:

In view of the international environment, the politicians of this region are still more in flux than to concretise their political goals.

5. *Central Asia Today* (Moscow State University of African and Asian Studies), No. 3, 1993.
6. B. Brown, "The Public Role in Perestroika in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1990, p. 88.

However, despite several constraints they are trying to cope up with the multifarious socio-economic impediments. But their little delay may send wrong or unclear political signals to the world community, because old communist remnants have still been carrying skeptical attitudes. "It is realistic, not merely cynical, to observe that Karimov, Nazarbajev and Niyazov, the first secretaries turned presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, are product of a society which expects strength and firmness in its leaders."⁷ But certain tools and techniques in intelligence and ministries still have been carrying the old communist party coatings. Therefore, the leaders are gradually coming out with new ideas and beliefs. Niyazov has been eager to emphasize his preparedness to accommodate both ethnic diversity and an Islamic belief system. With respect to the former, he has confidently asserted - "The Russian speaking population is slowly being freed from anxiety about its future. Moreover, those who, living into the general panic, left Turkmenistan in past years are beginning to return, not having found happiness in their historical homeland."⁸ It is to the credit to the constitution and Niyazov that people are striving for a secular state model. He favours gradual political and economic reforms as opposed to any Shah's 'White revolution' or the contemporary Western rapid adjustment programmes. In support of this attitude he responded, "No one knows or problems better than we do; consequently, we should determine the rhythm and pace of our reform ourselves on the basis of local conditions, and not according to the demands of some sort of classic, democratic formulas or prescriptions worked out in some prosperous western countries."⁹

Predictions about the role of Islam in Uzbekistan is not very clear despite the presence of historical Islamic centres such as Samarkhand and Bukhara in the country. However, the Islamic influence may

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7. Anthony Hyman, "Moving out of Moscow's Orbit: the outlook for Central Asia", *International Affairs*, 69(2), 1993, p. 290.
 8. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLIV(42), p.6
 9. *Ibid.*, XLIV(42), Note 9, p. 6.

highten its degree if the politico-economic reforms are set in better tunes. President Karimov is more keen to adopt "Southeast Asian models such as of Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan - under a political system of guided democracy i.e. one strictly controlled and supervised from above."¹⁰

Besides, President Nazarbaev has consistently supported the continuation and greater institutionalization of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). After the re-organization of legislature in mid-1995, he reaffirmed the concept of Central Asian region as a region of cooperation and no nuclear weapons. He has adopted somehow a conciliatory approach to its domestic and foreign policies. This compulsion is the result of demographic composition as well as geo-political location of Kazakhstan. Russia has always been and will keep on influencing its major policy making decisions due to its being immediate big brother. "To leave Russia now would mean losing Russian-speaking East Khazakhstan."¹¹

Further, "the problems which exist between the Kirgizians and the Uzbekis, both of whom belong to the Sunnite branch of Islam, manifest themselves in cultural, ethnic, language and religious differences. Whereas Mongolian and Kazakh culture elements prevail over Iranian influences in the case of Kirgizian, the Uzbekis were strongly influenced by the Persian Islamic culture."¹² However, the government of Kyrghyzstan, headed by Askar Akaev, has been trying to manage and defuse the prevailing conflicting domestic situation. For this he also had once vetoed the proposed preamble to the land code, which read "the land belongs to the Kyrghyze people".¹³ This increasing xenophobia amongst the Kyrghyz had invited severe criticism from its neighbnouring states, especially Russia. Hence, it needs a close perusal into this potential affairs. A media observer had

10. See, Hyman, *op. cit.*

11. V. Migzanyan, "Migzanyan looks at ex-Soviet republics future", *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, XLIV(43), p. 13.

12. *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* (CDPS), XLV (5), p. 279.

13. *CDSP*, XLIV (10), 1992, p. 4.

argued that "although the ethnicity dimension in Kyrghyzstan is presently calm, the potential for ethnic conflict explosion is still high. Kyrghyzstan, therefore, is the most likely candidate to replay the bloody and seemingly endless war in neighbouring Tajikistan".¹⁴ And the situation of this aggravated phenomenon had to be somehow "reconciled by the Russian statesmen" so as to avoid any situations like Chechnya. The President of Kyrghyzstan believes that this mountainous land with a diverse population, capitalist reforms and a liberal political regime can rapidly create a Central Asian Switzerland where prosperity and democracy can flourish, enjoying the stability which it seeks for.

In Tajikistan, the elections in 1995 has projected that religious factors might play an important part in future in the political development of the country, though it could not convince the voters substantially. "One important cause of Islams enduring influence in Tajikistan is the fact that a large proportion of the population wants Islam to remain a part of their way of life".¹⁵

The encouragement to the Islamic sentiments has presumably two sources - one, Islamic Revival Party (IRP), whose suspected role is to build the nation modelled in Iranian style and the other, is Afghanistan which is suspected with "a plan for some type of Islamic Afghan-Tajik territorial union".¹⁶ But this plan may be said to be far from reality because Afghanistan itself has been in the process of settling the dusts of bloody civil war on its land. Juxtaposing this, Tajikistan has to learn not to deviate from a peaceful reconciling attitude of policy making, than to engulf itself in the civil strifes as in its neighbourhood. But the time will say as to whether the people has chosen good postulates of Islam or they have distorted all good to prove their own

14. Igor Rotar, "Could Tajik war be replayed in nearby states?" CDSP, XLV (3), p. 11.

15. Muriel Atkin, "The Survival of Islam in Soviet Tajikistan", *Middle East Journal*, 43(4), p. 606.

16. CDSP, XLIV (38), 1992, p. 17.

viewpoint. The later may prove to be a catastrophe in the region. The Chinese authority, who recently established diplomatic contact with Tajikistan, has been extending loans and political support. "Clearly the Chinese are concerned about the potential spread of Islamic activism into the Xinjiang region".¹⁷

The religious factor by itself does not provide an adequate understanding and suggestion to the political allegiances in Tajikistan. Clanship also has its own role. "Clan allegiances are divided between three major groups: the Leninabad clan (traditionally the clan of the ruling elites), the Palmir and the Kulyab clan[s]".¹⁸ They have been influencing the policy making in very unclear manner, with hidden or unhidden significant postulates.

In the midst of such unstable circumstances and several conflicting attitudes, it has been aptly remarked, "state-society relations are effectively non-existent, as in any form of regime legitimacy. Reversing these tragic realities may well prove to be an insurmountable challenge".¹⁹

EXTERNAL FACTORS

(1) U.S., Japan and the West European countries:

"For countries not geographically close to the region, the emergence of Central Asian states has not been treated as a major strategic priority. Nuclear proliferation and threat of Iranian expansion were the principal exceptions... the West and the wider world have tended to focus their energies on their more pressing international issues and have found it hard to focus much attention on the problems and difficulties facing the Central Asian states."²⁰ From this viewpoint it

17. *CDSP*, XLV (10), p. 18.

18. Gharabaghi, "Development Strategies for Central Asia in the 1990s; in search of alternatives", *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 15(1), 1994, p. 111.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Roland Danneruther, "Creating New states in Central Asia", *Adelphi Paper* (228), p.67.

seems that the US and its western allies are more interested in pursuing *ad hoc* policies than to come out with clear cut policy paradigm. This makes the recipient Central Asian policy-makers more optimistic as well as doubtful of their future course of action.

Especially, the U.S. foreign policy predictions for this region is not as much bold and pro-active as in the Middle East and the Gulf including the Iraq-Kuwait dispute. The recent American missile attacks on "interlinked Kurdish region and intervention 'in no fly' zone" affairs, has again raised a series of speculations. Bob Dole said in his campaign, "Saddam Hussein is testing American leadership".²¹ But such a demand on humanitarian grounds has not come up in the case of Central Asia. The Central Asian people have to be more careful in dealing with their own ethno-religious strifes. As pointed by an American Professor in hearing before the Sub-committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, "Since inter-ethnic antagonisms and rivalries would be the most likely cause of problems among the republics of Central Asia, the U.S. should be even handed in its dealings with them, offer mediation, promote stability and offer inducements to the peaceful resolution of disputes ... one should make it clear that American commitment and support do depend on the treatment a given state affords its citizens".²² In this way Americans are trying to influence the people of this region with their set ideologies. And hence in absence of any potential opponent in this field, except Russia to an extent, U.S. will try to make an image of global leader. In case the Central Asian Republics would like to confront the will of the U.S.A., they will have to be more careful in seeking or extending any help from or to — as the case may be — undesirable corners.

Besides, the activities of Islamic groups in Central Asia against political *status quo* are also disturbing for the United States. Turkey is

21. John King, "Clinton may gain for showing guts", *The Times of India*, 5 September, 1996, p. 12.

22. Firuz Kazemzadeh, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50.

being encouraged by the U.S. to play an active role in this region both to act as a bulwark against Islamic force and to promote a secular model of governance. Coincidentally, Turkey itself is in trouble as in its own ground Islamic parties have gained tremendous support. But in any case, they will carry on their secular principles as long as it could travel. Also, U.S. has been trying for another tool, e.g., Pakistan as model Islamic state in the modernist mould. But fierce battles between Shia and Sunni inside Pakistan make itself weak on inter-state agenda. In this sense, U.S.A. as well as its tools are in a phase of seeking change as well as continuity. In such circumstances the Central Asian states as being the new actors on the international platform need thorough understanding of the contemporary situation.

Further, Central Asia provides a market of 52 million people and Washington can help the states to build a modern economic and technological infrastructure. "The Central Asian region could be a source of attraction for the United States given the immense deposits of natural resources. Uzbekistan has 25% and Kazakhstan has 9% of former USSR's gold reserves. Kazakhstan has the second largest unexploited oil reserves of the former Soviet Union".²³ Really the raw materials and minerals, especially cotton and oil have been of immense market importance in this region. But it lacks in infrastructural set ups.

Technological expertise and hard currency are two important needs of the Central Asian states and given its technological and economic clout in the West, the United States would be of much help to these state.

The West has similarly given most of its attention to the economic situation in Central Asia and has generally received favourable response. The Central Asian states have been energetic in trying to tempt western investment. Overcoming their initial suspicions, the leaders of these states have supported the involvement of the World

23. "Confidence building in Central Asia", *Strategic Studies* 16(3), Spring 1994, p. 78.

Bank, the IMF and other development agencies . Kyrghizstan has led way in economic reforms, Kazakhstan has not been far behind, and so IMF and World Bank officials remain hopeful from more participation of these states as well as rest of the Central Asian republics.

"Ignoring the reservations of the Muslims and Arab world, Israeli diplomats and businessmen have been welcomed in the Central Asian countries".²⁴ And hence Israel has been signing several technical assistance agreements, notably in drip-irrigation and bilateral trade agreements.

The West can most realistically hope to influence the politics and attitudes of the Central Asian region through support for structural economic and institutional reforms and programmes. However, the window of opportunity will not last forever. Donor countries will not indefinitely proffer disproportionate generosity to the countries of former Soviet Union when the claims from Africa and the rest of the Third World are just as urgent. This suggests the desirable time frame for the Central Asian states because the developed countries help their lesser partners as long as their policy impulses work after that they project a very different kind of reluctance at negotiation platforms. Right now these republics have other options also to work upon. If the West is popularly perceived to have failed to live up to its promises on aid and economic support, the attraction of the anti-western rhetoric of some of the Central Asia's neighbours will increase. Hence, in future, both the sides have to be careful in any economic exchange.

Visible support for economic reforms is even more vital since the Western record in its policies towards Central Asian security cannot be judged as a glittering success. The extension of the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) and the both North Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC) to the Central Asian states did little to alleviate the security concerns of its immediate neighbours. Its neigh-

24. Shaul Eisenberg, "Investments made by the Israeli entrepreneur", *Financial Times*, 28 January 1993.

bours have already been preoccupied with bilateral and multilateral negotiations. Until any serious point of difference crops up in this region inter-state war is far from reality.

One cannot, however, ignore the security concerns of the region. "The failure of the United States to contemplate any substantial involvement in the Tajik Civil War, despite requests from a number of Central Asian States, has similarly limited the influence of the West and the international community in the region. Even the mildest criticism of Russian peacekeeping operations appear hypocritical in Moscow which the West is in effect leaving Russia with the sole responsibility for resolving conflicts on the periphery of the former Soviet Union. Although UN secretariat has rightly been concerned about its excessive commitments elsewhere, its *de facto* policy during 1992 of leaving the former Soviet Union out of bounds for peacekeeping operations did send the wrong signals. Even though the political obstacles to large troop contributions will undoubtedly continue to be insurmountable, the sending of smaller missions such as UN military observers, can have significant value."²⁵

As far as the involvement of individual states are concerned Japan and Taiwan are also exploring opportunities. "While South Korea has been particularly active in Central Asia, largely because of the business initiatives of prosperous entrepreneurs from the ethnic Korean community deported under Stalin and resettled in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan".²⁶ Private investments are getting more and more openings for mutual benefits. It will facilitate this region as long as the policy makers will have right sense of regulation of the market economy.

25. Roland Danneruther, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

26. Michael Kaser and Santosh Mehrotra, "Central Asian Economies after Independence", Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1992, p. 16.

(ii) Russia

With the re-election of Boris Yeltsin as Russian President in July 1996, the people of this country have reaffirmed its faith in ongoing policy decisions of the policy makers. As far as Russian role in Central Asia is concerned, three important points are taken into account. First, Moscow knows the fact that the newly independent states are still heavily dependent on Russian economic and military support. Russian troops deployed in Tajikistan showed support to the secular government of Dushanbe. Second, the Russian speaking population has a sizeable influence on the Central Asian politics. It is true that because of the rise in the activities of Islamic groups, the Russian population feels insecure and 500,000 Russians have fled from the Central Asian states (excluding Kazakhstan). Despite such a situation there is little possibility of any rupture in Russian-Central Asian relations. Nevertheless, the Russians have constantly been thinking closely over the Central Asian conditions. So much so that, one of President Yeltsin's chief advisors warned darkly in 1991 that "Kazakhstan could soon degenerate into one thousand Yugoslavia. The apocalyptic visions range from permanent chaos and civil war to violent Islamic revolution and genocide".²⁷ And the third point is that Russia is in no mood to lose its geo-strategically and economically important peripheral old friends in the hands of outside influences. However, "The protracted economic and ideological crisis in Russia is paralysing its Central Asian policy and creating a dangerous political vacuum there".²⁸ But to counteract this analysis of situation by political pundits, Yeltsin's decree on 14 September 1995 on : "The Establishment of the Strategic Course of the Russian Federation with Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), has intensified the concerns in various parts of the former Soviet Union".²⁹

27. Robert A. Lewis, ed., *Geographic Perspective on Soviet Central Asia*, London, Routledge, 1992.

28. Igor P. Lipovsky - "Central Asia: In Search of a New Political Identity" *Middle East Journal*, vol. 50, Spring 1996.

29. Rosemarie Forsythe, *Adelphi Paper* (300), 1996, p. 55.

It is coincidental that during internal needs and the external possibilities in 1995, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan rushed to embrace Russia by signing and immediately ratifying the relevant accords on double citizenship in their respective parliaments. *Vis-a-vis* the need of Russian security, Russia began signing a series of collective security treaties with the individual Central Asian states. However, Russia have failed at large in keeping promise of being an elder brother since it could not achieve total peace during attempts of coup in February 1996 in Tajikistan.

Despite failing in keeping the earlier promises well, Russia has still been trying to strengthen its hold more and more in this region. On March 29, 1996, Russia signed a treaty on economic and cultural integration with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It provided for an Interstate Council and Interparliamentary committee to carry out the work of integration. Kazakhstan is interested in getting free access to Russian pipelines for its oil exports to the West. Kyrgyzstan hopes that the pact will give it cheaper energy and help offset the domineering influence of neighbouring Uzbekistan, which has cast itself in the role of a regional superpower. Furthermore, it would restore a common economic market, extend Moscow's political sphere of influence and increase its international influence.

Economic dependency of Central Asian states has been a matter since long. They were the exporters of raw materials and importer of food and consumer goods from Russia. For example in 1989, Uzbekistan produced 5.2 million tonnes of cotton or 64% of Soviet production, alongwith about the same amount of crops. Nearly 85% of Uzbek cotton was exported to be treated in Russian Federation while most machinery and consumer goods were imported from Russia.³⁰ Still in 1989, Kazakhstan had 30% of agricultural land of the entire Soviet Union which produced 20.4 million tonnes of wheat or

30. S. Akiner, "The Republic of Uzbekistan, Regional Surveys of the World", *The Far East and Australiasia*, London, 1992, p. 102.

17% of Soviet production. And the same was with sheep rearing, with 36.5 million of sheep or 24% of the total Soviet staple, compared to 12.9 million heads of other cattle.³¹ Again about 55% of Kazakh production was to be treated in the Russian Federation. This is to say that their economic dependency on the Russian Federation was (and remains) very high.³² But despite having hopes of continued help from Russian, the Central Asian states are not getting satisfactory return.

It is not at all secret that Moscow itself has been passing through tough times on both the domestic and external fronts. While, on the one hand, it has been trying to reconcile its economic and political demands at home, on the other hand, in the hope of external economic help it has been conceding to more and more demands of the western countries. In this way to balance the relations with Central Asian states and the US and Western demands of time, Russia has been heading towards a tougher time. In such circumstances, it has become very difficult for Moscow, to give a clear-cut set of policies in favour of the Central Asian allies. In the meantime, the external actors of the Central Asian region are getting free access. To sum up, Central Asia has landed in a state of flux in view of changing attitude of its elder concern, Russia, and so the speculations have risen in the outside world.

(iii) Iran

The development of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with Central Asia presents an active neighbour's role. Earlier, "Iran was presented by the West, Russia and the Arab world as the greatest threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Central Asian states".³³ This sense of threat was further heightened

31. S. Akiner, "The Kazakh Republic", *op. cit.*, p. 1012.

32. B.A. Islamov, "Post Soviet Central Asia and the CIS: The Economic Background of Independence", in B.F. Manz, *Central Asia in Historical Perspectives*, Oxford, Westview Press, 1994, pp. 202-19.

33. Yaacov Ro'i, "Central Asian riots and disturbances" *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1991.

by the perceived Iranian moral and material support given to the Islamic groups in Tajikistan, particularly during the escalation of crisis in 1992. An icy cold-war atmosphere was reduced to minimum. Iran has a large continuous border with Central Asia and is unavoidable in its geostrategic presence in the region. "Niyazov was the first to realise this and has assiduously developed bilateral economic relations and advanced projects for connecting the Central Asian rail network to Iran and developing a gas pipeline through Iranian territory. Kazakhstan has also been promoting economic cooperation in the Caspian Sea and has viewed Iran as a potential route through which oil from that region might be transported."³⁴

In general, Iran has been trying to push through this region with presumably four tools: (a) Islam, (b) Petrodollars, (c) a common ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage with Tajikistan, and (d) an extensive sharing border with Tajikistan, and (e) extensively sharing border with Turkmenistan. However, there are few restraints also for Iran. For example, its population is overwhelmingly Shi'ite while the majority of Central Asian Muslims are Sunnis. And for this particular reason for sometime Iranians have to face the confrontations with both the West and the nationalist ex-communists. Nevertheless Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are under immense influence of Iranian postulates.

These represent only cautious openings, but the opportunities for increasing Iranian influence are not unlimited. However, having significant financial resources at its disposal, it has been trying to influence the Central Asian states. More so, for not to be identified itself totally for Islamic cards, Iran is willing to project itself as an important export route to oil pipelines. This pipeline option of Iran has again brought it in confrontation with Pakistan which itself wants to be an important oil pipeline route to the Arabian Sea. And thus these bordering potential conflicting neighbours of Central Asian states might create a lot of troubles in future. Adding to it, the Russian

34. *Middle East Economic Digest*, 4 December, 1994, p.32

apprehensions regarding increasing Iranian influence might also create civil strifes in the region, the best option left for the Central Asian states is to adopt a secular approach to the inter-state economic and political relations. Otherwise, this catalyst of Islamisation might push the region in trouble.

(iv) Turkey

"According to some circles, national circles in Turkey are looking forward to a unified power of 200 million Turks stretching from Balkans to China. Pan-Turkish or Turk Islamic synthesis has always been a force in the Turkish politics."³⁵ Of course, Turkish policy makers have been primarily concerned to relish the historical and ideological links between the Central Asia, Turks and the old Ottoman Empire. Further the attractiveness of Turkish model of economic development and secular ethos, are providing an upper priority for Central Asian states. More so, Turkey is able to act as an intermediary in Central Asia's economic and political contacts with the West and hence a rapprochement with the U.S. government.

"Turkish television is operating in all the Central Asian region and Caucasus. 10,000 Central Asian students are studying in various Turkish universities and high schools. Turkey also granted one billion dollars of aid and trade credits to various Central Asian States and sponsored their membership in the U.S. and CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe)".³⁶ This approach of Turkey proves itself as ready reckoner for the Central Asian states.

But the suspicion that always hangs around in Central Asia is Turkey's one time hindrance for the functioning of the ECO. For instance, Ashkhabad summit on 9-10 May 1992 where a possible peace regulation for Nagorno-Karabakh and a major infrastructure

35. R. S. Akhtar - "Turkey and Central Asian Republics", *The Frontier Post*, Peshawar, 5 March, 1992

36. *The Economist*, 26 December - 8 January, 1993, p. 45

project were proposed by host country Turkmenistan. This project envisaged a pipeline from the Caspian oil fields over Askhabad and Mashhad to Bandar Abbas. In Mashhad the pipeline had to branch off to Tabriz and then on to Turkey. But as the largest part of pipeline went through Iran, Turkey firmly rejected the proposal. And so such kind of politics in economic affairs are destined to create unfaithfully environment amongst the Central Asian region and its neighbouring states. To avoid such confronting attitudes Turkey and Iran should work more for cooperation than opposition as what they have recently stepped into, for example, a deal - "Iran would deliver a yearly 5 million tones of oil and 6 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Turkey".³⁷

As far as Islamic sentiments are concerned, the Welfare Party or the 'Rafah' emerged as the single largest party with just over 20% of the votes in the elections held in Turkey in December 1995. This is the first time in 70 years that an Islamic Party has led the elections in this broadly secular nation. Even though the government has been working upon true secular principle such socio-political condition of a model-state may influence the Central Asian states in the manner that how people with Islamic beliefs can lead for prosperity, until any anti-set up elements rise to alarming fence.

In any case, the idea of Pan-Turkish concept must be an anathema for this region with diversified complexities and the nascent economies. More so, Turkey's distance from Central Asia rules it out as a militarily geo-strategic ally. But the competitive nature of international relations in this region might hinder a peaceful settlement in general.

(v) Afghanistan

Because "Afghanistan also borders Central Asia, its disintegration over the ten years of civil war and the worrying precedents has set for the fragile international constitution of the Central Asian states, has been

37. De Financieriel - Economisch Tijdschrift, 5 May, 1995.

a source of acute anxiety in this region".³⁸ The vigorous arms trade across the Afghan-Tajik border, fundamentalist training camps in northern Afghanistan and rumours of Afghan Mujahedin's participating in the Tajik fighting - provide the basis of apprehensions of instability and terror into the Central Asian region.

The politics of oil pipeline in this region is considered of significant nature. Without an Afghan peace settlement the projects are likely to fall in uncertainties. For example, on 21 October 1995, Unocal Corporation and Saudi Arabia's Delta Oil company signed an agreement with Turkmenistan that could one day provide an export terminal at the Indian ocean for Turkmen oil and conceivably for oil from the rest of the region. The agreement was for a one-year \$10 million study on an \$18 million project to transport gas and oil nearly 1,300 km from Turkmenistan to Pakistan. But the execution of the project seemed quite unfavorable since the midway has been in itself turmoils. Further, in Afghanistan there are several reports of hide outs of disturbing elements in Central Asia. This situation was predicted before in summer 1992. Pakistani academics openly said (at a conference on Central Asia, sponsored by the International University of Lahore and Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad) that if Afghanistan was an obstacle, borders should be changed to link Pakistan directly to Central Asia.

However, the degree of influence emanating from Afghanistan into Central Asia is more than matched by the influence flowing the other directions. "Uzbekistan, and to a lesser degree Turkmenistan, have developed a good working relationship with Rashid Dostum".³⁹ This has given a new dimension to Turk, Uzbek and Russian relationship of mutual cautions. Nevertheless, the demographic distribution along the borders is going to play a major role in this Central Asian region.

38. *Adelphi Paper* (288), March 1994, p.65.

39. "Iran to help Central Asian Muslims" *Frontier Post*, Peshawar, February 20, 1992.

(vi) Pakistan

Considering the local and international scenario, it is clear that the independence of Central Asian states has come to a crucial time both for Pakistan and Central Asia. Recently, the U.S. Senate, on 21 September, 1995, voted 55-45 in favour of an amendment to release military equipment worth \$368 million, for a one time waiver of the 1985 Presser Law (which has barred military and economic aid to Pakistan) moved by Senator Hank Brown. This historical event has definitely manifested a clear green signal to Pakistan by America despite several media reports that it is training Islamic fundamentalist groups for interventionist wars in different parts of the world.

Basically Pakistan works on two basic premises - (i) enrolment as an American frontline state and (ii) the historical connection between Pakistan and Central Asian states extends so far into their past of 5000 years old Harappan civilization.

Earlier Pakistan made energetic attempts to re-Islamise Central Asia, it was just to touch the sentiments of the people of that region and to attract more and more closeness through religious sentiments. Americans also kept mum on this because of being a silent spectator of the disintegration of Eastern bloc. But when Pakistan failed to extract much satisfactory outcomes, it switched over to offer itself as a mediator of peaceful settlements in this region with an Islamic state with democratic mould. And for that reason, of late, Americans have started supporting Pakistan as an alternative to Turkey as well as an anti-Indian and anti-Iranian tool as balance in the time of need. After all what Pakistan is looking for, is the control over the rich mineral and raw resources, especially the oil and gas pipeline schemes of the Central Asian states.

Meanwhile, the Russians expressed concerns at the rapidly increasing influence of Iran and Pakistan - "The Russians realized that, on the one hand, Iran was trying to push Russia out of the region, on the other hand, Pakistan was trying to set up an anti-India alliance with

the help of Central Asian states".⁴⁰ India would not like to see its historical rival, Pakistan emerge victorious with the Taliban (a Muslim group that emerged in 1994 and became very active since the end of 1995 to rise as a very powerful political clout in Kabul), or any Pakistan-backed group in Afghanistan and in the Central Asian region. For this, Indians are being careful to deal with the minority issues in domestic affairs which represent the opinion of a large population of Muslims *vis-a-vis* New Delhi seeks for better ties with Iran so as to undermine the Pakistani interference to oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia to Indian territory.

Again, to some extent in anticipation of their mistrust of Iran on account of the rhetoric of its Islamic regime, the Central Asian states are attracted towards Pakistan as the outlet to the Arabian sea. This again may give rise to suspicions in Iran-Pakistan relations and the speculations of India-Pakistan rivalries might heighten in the future. Hence, the overall impact will be fallen on the immature policy makers of Central Asian states and will make them more vulnerable politically as well as economically.

(vii) China

Unlike Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan, China do not claim any ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious affinity. However, the fear that independence of the Central Asian states might be just as much a threat as an opportunity is also felt in China. Also, the interests of China, which has common borders with three Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are both political and economic. It has led to concerns over the potential destabilising effect of independence on China's Central Asian imperial appendage in the Xinjiang autonomous region. "China's Muslim Turkic minorities, who are mainly to be found in Xinjiang, include around 7 million

40. P. Stobdan, "Central Asian Regional Security", *Strategic Analysis*, August 1992, p. 476.

Uighurs, 1 million Kazakhs and 150,000 Kyrgyz. Ethnic unrest in Xinjiang has occurred periodically, such as in April 1990 and early 1992; and the Chinese authorities resorted to force to repress these demonstrations".⁴¹

At its juxtapose, China given its size and nuclear status, its unreconstructed imperial pretensions and its traditional historical claims on the region, represents a threat far exceeding that of Iran. Earlier the size of threat had so enlarged that it led Nazarbaev to consider retaining its nuclear arsenals. The series of earthquakes between 1992 to 1995 in southern Kyrgyzstan due to Chinese Nuclear tests in Lop Nor region has also been the issue of anxiety in the Central Asia. But in course of time, some strains in the relations have been removed since the mid-1995. In addition China has also consented to CTBT (Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty) proposal at the Geneva Conference 1996. Still, China remains the second military power in the region after Russia, and off and on have been claiming parts of Central Asian territory.

However, China as well as the Central Asian republics are trying to overcome their mutual misunderstandings in view of the changing world order. Both are oriented to the market economy. Rail link between Urumchi and Alma Ata has been expanded. Chinese need of oil has an eye on the Tarim Basin.

Moreover, any assessment of China's future role in Central Asia revolves round two things : (i) China's internal socio-political conditions and degree of conformity in political and economic liberalization, and (ii) the future relationship between Russia and China. If it were to deteriorate, the resultant of this power struggle will be unfortunate for the Central Asian region.

Nevertheless, according to one Western analyst, "Beijing fears the influence of militant Islam, inspired by Iran and Pakistan, but appears

41. J. Richard Walsh, "China and the New Geopolitics of Central Asia", *Asian Survey*, vol. 33(3), March 1993, p. 274.

to be even more concerned over Turkish backing for the concept of a greater Turkistan".⁴² In this context, Central Asian republics have to be more firm in dealing with the wrong signals of Islamisation so as to avoid any bitterness in relationship with China. And, it has also been manifested well in the 1995 elections in this region.

(viii) **India**

It is the strategic location of the region that holds special significance for India. India wants a stable Central Asia, free from external interferences as any stability in the area can impinge on India's security, particularly in the context of Kashmir. As the conflicts in Tajikistan and Afghanistan show, instability could spread southward, along the lines of religion and ideology, which will have spill over effects. Moreover, Central Asia provides a challenge to Indian diplomacy to neutralise Pakistan's sphere of influence in the region. The republics can be brought around to play a moderating role of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

As soon as the republics became independent, Turkey made it known that Istanbul was replacing Moscow as the hub of Central Asia. However, these countries did not get out of the Russian grip to subserve to Turkey. Even, they do not like the over-weaning Turks. This attitude makes their own region more accessible to Indians. Indians rely mainly on two issues to approach the Central Asian region. Those are : (i) cultural and traditional historicity of Indian-Central Asian relationship i.e, it is believed that about 5000 years ago people from Central Asia came and settled in the Indus Valley region, then after between 9th to 15th centuries warriors as well as civilians from that region kept on pouring in large numbers to the Indian subcontinent, settled here permanently and have been mixing herewith indigenous people, and (ii) India provides a secular and democratic form of government with a belief in the market economy, which is the need of the hour for Central Asian states.

42. Lillian Craig Harris, "China Considers the Middle East", I.B. Taurie London, 1993, p. 269.

India, therefore, has good ground on which to build political relations committed to secular politics both domestically and internationally. "Pakistan's attempt to mobilise Islamic sentiment there, with its patently non-religious state interests in Kashmir, is likely to have the limited impact of securing resolutions in certain Islamic meetings. The Central Asian states need to promote a secular Islam to attract Turkey and to reassure America and Russia. India will be beneficiary and should work toward this with confidence and energy".⁴³

Keeping in view the above possibilities, the then Indian Prime Minister, P.V. Narashimha Rao, pulled off a successful visit to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, 23 April - 2 May 1993, even as Western and Islamic influences buffeted the two former Soviet Republics. Rao and Karimov (Uzbekistan's President) expressed apprehensions about rising radicalism and cross-border terrorism. This treaty enlightened Uzbekistan to enjoy a most favoured nation (MFN) status with regard to India.

Again, the then Indian Prime Minister visited Turkmenistan and Kyrghyzstan in September 1995 and so strengthened bilateral economic and political ties. With Turkmenistan India's line of credit went up to \$15 million from the existing \$5 million.

Turkmenistan supported India's inclusion in the Security Council of U.N. as permanent member and offered cooperation in the field of hydrocarbon explorations. With Kyrghyzstan India signed three major agreements - (i) India's offer of a line of credit of \$ 5 million to Kyrghyzstan Republic, (ii) Kyrghyzstan's keen interest in opening up a surface transport from India to Central Asia, and (iii) joint declaration by both the countries opposing terrorist and separatist forces.

In the Indian diplomatic response, the Tajik President Emamili Rakhmanov came to India on five-day visit in December 1995. Both

43. Madhavan K.Palat, "India and Central Asia", *World Focus*, 1993, p. 25

the countries agreed for friendly ties, bilateral investment and protection, cooperation in the area of environmental protection etc. Apart from the above agreements, both the countries expressed their concern over foreign interferences in Afghanistan that is posing a threat to the peace and stability of the region. They also agreed to work for the expansion of the U.N. Security Council.

After the coming of United Front's government in power in June 1996, India has reasserted its firmness and boldness in international politics by putting objections to the discriminatory approaches of NP-5s in CTBT proposals at Geneva Conference in June 1996 and by criticizing U.S. attack on Iraq in the U.N. in September 1996. In this manner India has proven its pledge for upholding international peace and cooperation issues at high moral standards. At the same time it also urges the world community to work in the direction of total disarmament and economic cooperation between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. On this line Central Asian republics are also desirous to work upon but it depends how it could sustain the prevailing attacks of external and internal opponents.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion one can say that the state of Central Asian republics lies between the two words- 'caution and resolve'. Any myopic and shortsighted policy may plunge the actors into a cauldron and major conflagration. The frequency and degree of conflict, cannot be judged appropriately, it is better to resolve it through negotiations and reconciliations. The policy-makers of this region are needed to be more peace-oriented and bold than to wandering into uncertainties.

As far as extreme views of social phenomenon are concerned, the anti-socials of the civil society can easily be detected anytime and anywhere in the international arena. So, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism or fundamentalistic ethnic assertions could be dealt in a very pragmatic manner. More so, such situation has not come up until now

before the Central Asia republics. Be it Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan or for that matter Turkey, no country will support any extremist ideology. Of course, religious obscurantism is a complex matter in this region, but the adoption of a secular set of principles in policy matters will give a blow to unscrupulous designers. Setting up of democratic governments in this region has already manifested the desire of the masses to work upon secular modernity.

Transborder fraternization should be dealt immediately by providing legal rights and duties in the region. The counteracts of external actors are to be dealt bilaterally or multilaterally across the table with appropriate 'packages' and should be asked for non-interference in the region. If the world is entering into 21st century with more and more regional cohesiveness and collective security postulates, why not these Central Asian republics fight away their inter-state mutual distrust and disbeliefs.

The agenda for reform and renewal are to be set firmly along with respective transparency. One time dependent for technology and scientific support upon Russia, the Central Asian republics have to deal with the challenges individually with confidence and vigour. They will have to come out of the fear psychosis of colonial era of market exploitation. The essence of economic competition during the first half of the 19th century continues to wield influence on the present global economy. While success earlier could only be achieved by forcefully colonising markets, the will of the consumer is all important in present phase of market economy. And in no way it affects the traditional definition of sovereignty. In other words, the foreign investors, MNCs and more openness in the market of consumerism does not affect the ruling independence of any state till it has a regulatory sense of permissions. In this way the Central Asian republics should adhere to the principles of economic globalisation, and so they may exchange financial aid, technology or infrastructural support from outside world in lieu of their immense natural resources, especially oil and cotton. The consensus on the broad outlines of desirable domestic and

international economic policies must reflect the economic growth and incorporation of self-confidence in this region.

It seems fashionable to go for geo-strategic alliances and quantum conventional and non-conventional arms race, but in reality it faces the results like Soviet disintegration and the economic depression in the developed world in late 1980s and early 1990s. So any step taken towards engulfing in potential area of conflict or to show interest in between two country's conflict may lead to suicidal act for these newly independent states of Central Asia.

In a nutshell, the condition of health of the newly independent Central Asian republics is such, that even in case of any slightest indication of rain (unpredictability) in international arena, it must carry an umbrella (policy of non-interference and pragmatism).