

**POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA AND IRAN :
EMERGING TRENDS (1990-94)**

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled, "POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA AND IRAN : EMERGING TRENDS. (1990-94)", by CHITTARANJAN, which is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of Master of Philosophy degree, is an original work to the best of our knowledge. It has not been previously submitted in part or full for any other degree or diploma in this or any other University.

We recommend this dissertation to be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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"I SEEK THY GRACE. THOU, O GOD SHOULDST BEAR WITH ME
AS A FATHER TO A SON, A FRIEND TO A FRIEND....."
Bhagawad Gita 10:44

TO LOVING MUMMY AND DEAR DADDY

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This dissertation has been carried out under the subtle, careful supervision of Dr.K.Warikoo Associate Professor in the Central Asian Studies division CSCSEASWPS, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India.

बन्दे गुरुपद पदम परागा । सुरुचि सुवास सस अनुरागा ॥

This couplet from Tulsī's Ramacharita Manasa indeed encapsulates my sincere gratitude and reverence to "Guru" Dr. K.Warikoo. Of course, I was quite interested in doing research on the Central Asian region, but it was he who goaded me to work on the relationship emerging between this region and Islamic Republic of Iran. He gave me great latitude in developing and concentrating many of my hypothesis and did not unduly impose his ideas as is wont of serious research supervisor. He was simply kind enough to take extreme pain to go through my rough draft (hear I am reminded of the scolding from my Bhai with regards to handwriting during my childhood) coming up with incisive comments which went a long way in shaping the work. Working under him has been a privilege and quite a genuine education for me. To fight against all odds- I have learnt this from the live example of my parents. Perhaps I will never face such an odd time during my whole life but the light of inspiration which flooded me came constantly from my parents, and it resulted in the shape of this dissertation. I owe the success of the completion of this short work to my parents only. Of invaluable help have been my numerous seniors per se. They Dr. Sharad Kumar Soni, Sushil, Dharmendra, etc. Indeed owe me a special debt which I am eager to pay at the very first instance. My thanks are due to friends Rajesh and Dipoo Bhaiya whose presence all the while has been a source of comforting care and intellectual stimulation. The dictum "A friend in need is a friend indeed" holds good for my friendship with Vinoo and Anurag. No words would be sufficient to express the care and concern they had bestowed on me. I also remember on this occasion Deepak, Sanjit, Amitabh, Manoj, Alok, Arun, Sanjiv, Buchi, Vishal, Ashutosh, Mustafa, Anwarul, Biplov and many others for their concern towards myself and my work. And how could I forget Kishore Bhaiya whose very presence gives immense strength during the weak hours. My thanks are due to the personnel of our JNU library, the Ministry of External Affairs Library and IDSA, for their active cooperation. I am obliged to my Programmer R.N. Kumar and his family assisted by my friends Vinoo and Sanjiv, who really ran against time to complete the typing work.

(Ranjana)
CHITTARANJAN 21/7/95

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PREFACE

First in 1989 and then in 1991, the walls came tumbling down thereby providing a face lift to the international politics. In November, 1989, the once inevitable Berlin wall was breached-symbolizing and accelerating the collapse of communism throughout eastern Europe. In late 1991, the Central Asian states declared themselves independent following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. These momentous changes produced a geopolitical earthquake of immense proportions throughout the globe and particularly in the Middle East. In 1989-90, the Soviet Union's international power declined as domestic political and economic crisis ate away at the foundations of Moscow's international power. In December 1991, the same power was pushed into oblivion and was referred to as 'once upon a time.....'. The Soviet Union ceased to exist and fifteen new sovereign States emerged in its place with the name -The Commonwealth of independent States(C.I.S)

The collapse of the Soviet Union naturally leaves a power vacuum in Central Asia. And with the emergence of newly independent and sovereign Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, this whole region has been pushed in state of flux. Geography alone would dictate that 'The New Five' becomes part of an enlarged Middle East State system. Moreover, the fact that they are traditionally Muslim, has evoked tremendous interest especially neighbouring from Iran neighbouring Muslim countries of Turkey, Pakistan and also from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Even the

geographical proximity of India, China, Russia and Afghanistan have lent them a hand to meddle in the affairs of the 'New Five'.

At issue is whether or not these new successor states will follow the Muslim but secular and pro-western, Turkish model or the Iranian fundamentalist example. Saudi Arabia and Egypt, both U.S. allies and fearful of Iranian influence in Central Asia, have provided money and religious teachers to explain mainstream Sunni Islam to the Central Asians. Israel, also anxious to prevent the radicalization of the Central Asian States provided much needed expertise in irrigation techniques and has established diplomatic relations with several Central Asian States.

As said, in the power vacuum that the Central Asian region passing through these days, the old clients, such as Iraq have lost their patrons and none of the successor Muslim states is currently in a position to fill the void left by the Soviet Union's disintegration apart from Pakistan. This new situation raises a series of question about the participation of the Gulf; in Central Asia in particular and in the global politics in general. Here it must be made clear that this work will concentrate upon the 'New Five' and its relationship with Iran, as it is not plausible to take into account the whole of C.I.S. in this short work.

At this juncture, an infrastructural analysis of this dissertation may be provided, the first chapter explores the historic linkages of this whole Central Asian region with that of the state of Iran. This historical aspect assumes importance when one keeps in mind the point

that it is upon this basis of Islam that Iran is trying to rediscover its historical moorings with these Central Asian States.

Second chapter titled Political and Strategic Relation details Iranian efforts to penetrate in this region in political and strategic realms.

The third chapter of this work titled Developing Economic Relations focuses upon the economic ties and agreements which have evolved after the demise of the Soviet Union, between Iran and the Central Asian States. Here Iran's role in the organisations E.C.O., the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone etc. has been dealt with. Due emphasis have been laid on the strategies chalked out by Iran to keep the other Islamic countries at bay on this front, with special reference to Turkey. This chapter provides an analysis as to whether this economic equation between the "New Five" and Iran is going to help the Central Asian Republics by any means or not.

" Strengthening Cultural Links" is the theme of the Fourth chapter. The cultural similarity along with the differences between Iran and Central Asian States have been taken in to account in a broader perspective. This evolution of a new civilization, the emergence of "Pan - Islamic " feeling, for which Iran is trying hard, have been discussed in this chapter.

The study is rounded by providing conclusion in its Fifth chapter.

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

"Central Asia is of fundamental importance for understanding Eurasian History . It is the missing link in World History."

'Chirstopher Beckwith'.

Today Central Asia, with a population of more than fifty five million is demonstrating its potential to shake off the [^]top_^ of the past centuries per se. This gives to the five Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan Turkmenistan, Tazikistan to exercise leadership in the region. Preipheral to these five republic and a part of the same religious and cultural world area:

- a) Tarfar settlements along the volga and in Siberia . The Vloga Tartars, whose intelligentsia were once leaders of reform and revelutionary movements among the Muslims of Russian empire are still a force to be reckoned with among the Muslims of this region.
- b) A zerbaijan lying westward across the Caspian. As the only major shirte people (about 5 million) and with an equal or even greater co-ethnic group of Azeris across the border in Iran have come into special prominnence after the Soviet disintergration.
- c) Muslim peoples of the northern ~~slopes~~ slopes of Caucasus. Perhaps too small in number to be a major political force today, the fiercely North Caucasian muslims and their Muslim Mullahs have historically played a disproportianately large role in keeping the faith alive.

d) Just beyond the borders, the Muslim communities of Turkey Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Northwest China.

As is clear due to its geographical proximity to Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China and Russia plus India, these Central Asian Republics are going to play important role in the geo-politics of this whole region. Central Asia at the same time acquires importance ^{due to THE} fact of being an area of the globe that had been turbulent throughout history. However, the recent developments have pushed the 'New Five' into a situation which may lead to the reversion of its earlier tempestuous phase. And the situation gets further aggravated when one keeps in mind the point that the country which is having more than enough interest ^e in these Muslim successor states is fundamentalist Iran, with her desire to rewrite her historical moorings with these Republics on the basis of its Islamic connection. In the historical contacts between the five Central Asian Republics and Iran.

THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION

The Central Asian nomads have played an important role in the differentiation of the near Eastern tenets of civilisation. Encompassing the Turkic world that was Asia interior and surrounded by the Chinese, Indian and Iranian worlds, Central Asia and its settled nomadic Turkic elements had a symbiotic relation with the surrounding territories. Brief survey of history of the region will suffice to show the close links that have been existing between these adjacent territories.

It is a well known fact that for over two thousand years Iran has been the main path shower of Western Asia in the face of cultural, economic and political force. Today it encompasses an area of 1,648,500 sq.km, but in the ancient days it was the master of much larger territories. Much of this expansion was to the north east across the Kopet Dag mountains into the river valley and oases of the regions that now form part of the neighbouring, infant independent republics of Turkmenistan, (whose border elopes with Iran) and Uzbekistan. There were thus long periods when southern Central Asia fell within the orbit of the Iranian world, though on the outer periphery 'Central Asia' is here taken to refer to the territory of five former Soviet Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. 'Southern Central Asia' refers, in broad outline, to the territory of historical ^{KHWAREZM} Transoxiana and Terghana, later occupied by the Khanates of Khiva, ^K Bukhara and Kokand and currently forming part of ^{NE} Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. ^{ABROAD} ^U

Even the earliest inhabitants of southern Central Asia were nomadic Iranian tribes, some of whom went ^{ABROAD} towards the area of development and founded the first Urban settlements and founded the first urban settlements including ^U Merv. The archaeological evidence from those burial sites suggest that by 1,000 B.C. Zoroastrianism was well established in that region. By the middle of the century B.C. much of this territory had been incorporated into the Achaemenian empire, even though the authority of the Persian satraps was probably little more than nominal.

1. Shirin Akiner, "Relation Between Iran and Central Asia : An Overview, in. K. Warikoo (ed) Central Asia, Har-Anand Publication, 1995, p. 247.

The power of the Great defeated Darius II in the 4th Century B.C.. The same Alexander, who marched through Central Asia with his energetic armies is still remembered popularly by his Eastern name 'Alexander' or 'Iskander Rumii' ("Alexander the Greek"), particularly in place names and in legends where he figures as the ideal ruler, often with religious overtones.

Early contacts between Iran and Central Asia have been established through various scholarly writings. Donald claims, "The Iranians included the groups of Medes (MADA), Persians (PARSA), the Parthians, Bactrians, Soghdians, Sacians and the Sythians. The Medes settled Western Iran at first, along with the Persians to the south, were dominated by the Assyrian Empire" ² Here it must be clear that these group of Medes were from the Central Asian region who had established their rule way back during 8th century B.C. in parts of Iran.

This 'migration syndrome' among the Central Asian has been mentioned by a few scholars also. From an European perspective, Gimbutas records radio-carbon evidence of three major westward thrusts of migratory waves by the stepp pastoralists in 4300-4200 B.C.; 3400-3200 B.C.; and 3000-2800 B.C. ³ For more recent periods McNeill ⁴ Phillips ⁵ and Hambly ⁶ have also observed recurrent waves of migration emerging from Central Asia towards all direction. However, the predominant ⁱⁿ direction was westward.

2. Donald, N. Wilber, Iran-Past and Present, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1958.

3. Eisler, Raine, The Caliph and the Blade, Our History our Future, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1987, p.44.

4. McNeill, William, The rise of the west, A History of the Human Continuity, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963

5. Phillips, E.D., The Royal Hordes: Nomadic Peoples of the Steppes, Thames and Hudson, London, 1965

6. Hambly, Gavin, Central Asia, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1969.

As Khazanov⁷ suggests it was because that there lay the more fertile and richer regions. Each of these waves was about 200 years long and they occurred at intervals of about 500 years. Huntington attributed these recurrent migrations to a 640 years cycle of climatic change in Central Asia, but this point is quite debatable, which is not possible here to be done with justice.

Whatever be the reasons for these migrations, it has been accepted that by 1900 B.C. and certainly between 1700 and 1500 B.C., Hittites and Kassites moved to Asia Minor, the conquest.⁸ And around A.D. 500, new movements of peoples from Central Asia spread in all directions and had domino effects. Cephtatites moved into India, Goths and Huns into Europe, Tang China, Western and Eastern Byzantine Rome, Persia and the later spread of Islam, among others, would not have become what they did without the impact of these migrants and invaders from Central Asia. And by A.D. 700, the Turkic tribes from the east were already established in northern and eastern Central Asia and were in the process of taking possession of the southern belt.

At approximately the same time, that is during mid 7th century, the Arab invaders from the south, intent on converting the region to Islam, conquered Iran. The campaign was led by Kutayba Ibn Muslim, The Governor of Khorasan (705-715). His military prowess and religious fervour enabled him to carry the new faith up to the borders of China into what is today Xinjiang.

7. Khazanov, Anatoli M., *Nomads and the Outside World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, p.173

8. See "Khurasan at the time of the Arab Conquest", M.A. Shaban, in "Iran and Islam", C.E. Bosworth (ed), Edinburgh, 1971, pp.479-90

These feats of arms brought southern Central Asia into the cultural as well as political sphere of the Caliphate. At the same time, it gave a new momentum to the relationship with Iran, since although Merv was a regional Arab capital, the administration of Transoxiana fell within the jurisdiction of Khorasan. Aryans moved into India and Iran and the neighbouring areas. However, the point to take account here is that these migrations out of Central Asia affected each of the receiving regions and peoples. The consequences also altered the relations among these outlying peoples and regions themselves, as for instance between Mesopotamia and Egypt.

Around the beginning of the Christian era migratory movements emerging from Central Asia contributed to far-reaching changes. On China's 'Inner Asia Frontier' the Chin and Han rulers fought off the Hsuing Nu in Zungaria across the Tien Shan Mountains. However, the Hsuing Nu defeated the Yue chi, who migrated westward. It is still disputed whether the former became the Huns who later invaded Europe. However, the latter did conquer the Saka people and the Bactrian successors of Alexander the Great. Their descendants founded the Kushan empire which ruled over the north and south western India. The Parthians invaded Persia from the north to conquer the Seleucids who had taken over there from Alexander.

In the early 3rd century A.D. Southern Central Asia was again brought under the Persian rule when Ardashir I (226-241 A.D.), founder of the Sasanian Empire recognised Merv and Khwarezm. The Murghab river was to form the eastern - most boundary of the Sasanian lands up to the time of Arab. Ismail Samanid, a member of the noble family from

Sasanian lands up to the time of Arab. Ismail Samanid, a member of the noble family from Khorasan who succeeded in freeing himself from the clutches of the governor of Khorasan. He went ahead and established an independent state in Transoxiana and Khwarezm. Even his title to these lands was confirmed by the Caliph Mutadhed in AD 892.⁹ That way, the first Muslim dynasty with an aura of independence in Central Asia was of Persian origin. During his^{time} Bukhara, the capital of the Samanid realm, became one of the most renowned centers of science and scholarship. It had a reputation that it was to retain even in the post Soviet era, the name of Bukhara, which still evokes memories of the glories of the Muslim culture.¹⁰ Even when the power of the Samanids was dislodged by the Karakhanid Turkes in the waning years of tenth century, links with Persia remained strong. The southern Central Asia and Khwarezm often formed part of a single entity, as was under the rule of the Mongol Khans during the mid-thirteenth century¹¹ and the Timurids that is during the 14th -15th centuries.

However, the Persian territorial ambitions in the Central Asian region re-surfaced in the early 16th century during the Safavid period. During this period, Shah Ismail succeeded, though briefly only, in installing one of his vassals as the Governor of Khwarezm¹². This act was again repeated during the first half of the 18th century when Nadir Shah conquered the Khanates of Khiva and Bukhara.

9. F.H. Skrine and E. Denison Ross, The Heart of Asia, London, 1899, p.109.

10. Al-Bukhari (AD 810-817) and Ibn Sina (AD 979-1037) were two of the many outstanding Muslim Scholars from this region.

11. Sprine and Ross, op.cit. p.192, The Persian element still very strong in Uzbek today

12. F.Kamol, Hozirgi Zamon ozbek tili, Tashkent, 1957, pp.89-108. Quoted by Shirin Akimer, op.cit. p.250.

But one must keep in mind the fact that firstly, these adventures were short lived and secondly, they did not seriously threaten the Turkic physical domination of southern Central Asia, of far greater significance was the tenacity of the Persian culture. From the very early Islamic period onwards, it had intermingled with Turkic influences to form a rich, bilingual tradition. Both Chagatai and Persian were the literary vehicles and even the vernacular dialects of these two languages were in common use. The Turkish literary language adopted many loan words from Persian especially in areas connected with Science and Culture.¹³ The Central Asian urban and court arts-architecture, music, miniature, painting and the like arenas also bore a strong Persian imprint. The interesting point is that there was hardly a rivalry between the Turkic and Persian traditions. Even the differentiation on the ethno-linguistic ground was not having a space. Instead there was a fusion of these various elements, the sum total of which produced a culture that was particular to the region itself¹⁴ and this remained the same until the twentieth century.

Time is the tiresias of history. The scenario began changing its course during 19th century. The Tsarist empire completed its conquest of Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Samarkand was taken in 1868. Bukhara and Khiva were observed as protectorates in 1868 and 1873 respectively. By 1886, the Turkmen land had been subjugated too. And by the end of the 19th century, Russia was all set to extend her influence to Iran. The Russian Govt. Even had acquired some political and economic privileges which included a stranglehold on foreign trade in Khorasan. Even their military prowess was much stronger.

13. Shirin Akiner, op.cit. p.250.

14. M.Sicker, *The Bear and the Lion: Soviet Imperialism and Iran*, New York, 1988, pp.14-18.

In this formidable background of Russian came the treaty of Akhal khorasan in between Russia and Iran (1881) where by Iran agreed to renounce its territorial claims on the southern Turkmenistan which reached upto the Meiv oasis.¹⁵

Once the collapse of the Tsarist empire became a reality, Iran renewed and extended its territorial pre-tensions in Central Asia. As if Iran was seeking some 'interest', her demand now included not only Meiv but the Khivan Khanate upto the Amu Darya. This was an attempt to re^{state} this river as the national boundary between Turan-the land of the Turks, and Iran the Persian world.

Although the Russian Empire had since the 18th century come to exercise a loose hegemony over the Turkic nomads of the steppes extending south ward from Siberia, its conquest of the sedentary heartland was not completed until the second half of the last century. Even at that point of time, there were some attempts by the Russians to convert the Muslims to orthodox Christianity. But by and large the Muslims remained free to practice their own religion and customs, except when provision of the Sharia (Koranic Law) were "repugnant" to Russian justice.¹⁶

This political and cultural continue that evolved between Central Asia and Iran since time immemorial, has been underpinned by trade links. The Great Silk Routs of antiquity criss-crossed the region, thereby enabling a reciprocal east-west and north-south traffic of

15. Count, K.K.Pahlen., *Mision to Turkistan* (ed) Richard, A.Pierce, Oxford University Press, London, 1964, p.229.

16. Toynbee, Arnold., *Between Onus and Jumna*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961, p.2.

goods. The Central Asian Bactria was long known as the 'Paradise on Earth, and the land of thousand cities and its capital Bactria, as the mother of cities'. Toynbee¹⁷ wrote about this region as a place where 'routes converge from all quarters of the compass and from where routes radiate out to all quarters of the compass again'. These routes connected China, India, Iran, the Mediterranean, and, of course, other parts Central Asia itself.

In Western Asia, three nexus corridors have played a particularly pivotal and central logistical inter-linkage role :

1. The Nile-Red sea corridor (with canal or overland connections between them and to the Mediterranean sea and open access to the India ocean and beyond.
2. The Syria-Mesopotamia-Persian Gulf corridor (with overland routes linking the Mediterranean Coast through Syria, or Via the Orontes, Euphrates and Tigris rivers to the Persian Gulf, which gives open access to the Indian ocean and beyond. This nexus also offered connections to overland routes to Central Asia.
3. The Aegean-Black sea-Central Asia corridor (connecting the Mediterranean Via the Dardanelles and Bosphorus to the overland 'Silk Roads' to and from Central Asia, from where connecting routes extended over land to India and China.

17. Shirin Akiner, *op.cit.*, p.252.

One of the chief branches of the 'Silk Route' as said, traversed Western China and then followed the oasis route-Khotan, Kashgar, Samarkand, Bukhara. Merv, across the Southern Central Asia into Northern Iran, and hence westward on the Black sea or the Mediterranean sea. However, this transcontinental trade dwindled into insignificance after the development of sea routes in the 16th century . But the advent of the railway gave new importance to the terrestrial links. As soon as the Russians had secured control of Central Asia, they embarked on an ambitious programme of railroad construction. This was aimed at facilitating the economic integration of the region into that of the empire as a whole.

The transcaspiian rail road from Krasnovodask to the Ferghana valley via Samarkand and Tashkent, was completed in 1885-99. The Orenberg-Tashkent line was completed in 1906. Inevitably, the Russians soon began to consider the feasibility of extending the Central Asian network south-wards and thus, through the Iranian system, to gain access to the Persian Gulf. Here one should be aware of the fact that the drive to establish warm water outlets had long been a concern of the Tsarist foreign policy. Hence the opportunities that were offered by this potential route to South were too attractive to be ignored.

The outbreak of the first world war, followed closely by revolution and civil war in the territories of the Tzarist empire, caused a temporary halt in the expansion of the railway network. During the Soviet period, however, it was resumed. The first priority was to consolidate transport links within the USSR. The Turk-Sib railroad connecting the Central Asian System to the Trans-Siberian one was completed in 1930. New inter regional railway links were also expanded along with the arterial road networks.

Meanwhile, economic co-operation between Iran and erstwhile USSR was on a positive side despite the occasional friction in the political arena and from time to time ,mutually hostile media coverage. ¹⁸ However Iran was simply using the USSR as a transit channel for her goods destined for Europe, Since this route was very much shorter than that via the Suez canal. At this point again, the question of linking Central Asian railway network to the Iranian system was raised. This was given added impetus by the increase in the volume of Soviet -Iranian trade that followed the call of the Shah in 1979. It eventually resulted in a formal announcement in December 1987 of the launch of the Mashhad-Sarakhs (Turkmenistan) Lines.

The declared intension behind this act was to aid the development of the Khorasan province by providing it with newer outlets in South -east Asia and Japan by means of the Trans - Siberian line, as well as by giving the region direct access to Central Asia and the Transcaucasia. The work, which was commenced from both the ends proceeded slowly, but did not dampen the Iranian enthusiasm for the project. In February 1987, during Velayati's visit to Moscow, an agreement was reached on an additional linking Yazd and, Afghan in Central Iran to Sarakhs. ¹⁹

18. Ibid.

19. Sicker, op.cit., p.122.

As can be discerned from the preceding pages, intervention between Central Asia and Iran has been going on for a much longer time. Apart from the cultural, social and economic bondage in between these two regions, the religious and political camp too is shared from times immemorial. The fifty five million Central Asian population of which nearly forty five million are Muslims really had a time of relief after the demise of the Soviet-Russia. But the Scenario after this disintegration has been much complex. Now ensued a struggle for influence and the increasing interest in Central Asia by the Islamic countries. A new Great Game with pan-Islam as its vital ingredient has started. Whereas the Central Asian Republics have earnestly begun to rediscover their roots on a newer plane, Iran and Pakistan have stepped into fill the vacuum by playing the Islamic card. Turkey, on the other hand, is strengthening its linkages with these states on the basis of common historical, cultural and ethnic ties. But Iran is leaving no stone unturned to turn the tide towards her ship on the same basis of common socio-cultural and religious affinities. Whether Iran is trying to exploit the general meaning of Marx's dictum-"Religion is the opium of the masses" or not will be analysed in the later part of the work. And what the Central Asian Republic are witnessing at these juncture is ethnic-religious resurgence, it is not merely return to the scriptural literalism. The cohabitation between the State and the mosque, commonly ascribed as fundamentalism has more importantly political and strategic implications for the whole region.

CHAPTER - II

POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC RELATION

The disintegration of the ex-Soviet Union and subsequent emergence of the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) is an unprecedented event of the present times which nobody ever predicted or anticipated. It has not only resulted in the obliteration of communism from Europe and the collapse of the USSR like a house of cards, but it is going to be of far-reaching implications for the new emerging global order.¹

The Central Asian republics (CARs)-Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, emerged as independent states some what reluctantly, barely a year after the end of the cold war. This quietly led to the period of heightened uncertainty and unpredictability, for major changes such as the dissolution of an empire leave in their wake enormous turbulence and disorder. These five states form a geographical contiguous and compact block in Central Asia, all having predominantly Muslim population, thereby changing the balance of power in this region.

Determinants of Iran's Foreign Policy

While Central Asia has witnessed momentous changes, the post-revolutionary is witnessing distinct trends of change and continuity in its state system and politics. Iran under Rafsanjani Islam continues to pervade as an ideology not only as a guide for

1. For further details see, I.K. Gujral, "USSR: The contemporary scene", main stream, annual No.26 Oct. 1991, pp.59-65; R.K.Narayanan, "Soviet changes: Multi dimensional impact", Ibid, pp. 66-67; Rajani Kothari, "Soviet developments in wider perspective", Ibid., pp.71-74., and Aric Gonzales, "Lessons from Soviet Revolution," Ibid; pp.83-84.

action but also legitimizing the political process in Iran. According to an Iranian scholar the Iranian society is characterised by three-co-existing cultures, namely FARHANG-E-MILLI (national culture) FARHANG-E-DINI (religious culture) and FARHANG-E-GHARBI (western culture).² But he ignores another abiding segment FARHANG-E-BAZAARI (market culture) which has been a historical mainstay in the evolution of Iranian political behaviour. Though this sort of segmentation is not unique to Iran, these thought processes are represented by various social classes and political groups who have vested interests in protecting their cultures and interest. This quadrilateral interaction produces social, political, cultural and ideological fermentation. In effect, this phenomenon reflects the inherent plurality and complementarity in Iranian political culture. The very example of this sort of compromise in Iranian polity is reflected in the new name of the state JAMHOURI-E ISLAMI-E-IRAN (Islamic Republic of Iran) which recognises each of Soroush's trinity of culture. Perhaps this very synthesis of cultures explains the otherwise conflicting stance of the Iranian leaders.

President Rafsanjani, during the last five years has cut a new path in Iranian polity. The hallmarks of transition have been pragmatism, relative liberalism, consensus building, and a new spirit in administrative infrastructure all within religious syndrome.³ Indeed, all these features give the impression that Iran has entered a new face of life. However, the pace and extent of opening up is no doubt cautious as the move is cautiously watched by the dogmatist die-hards although some of them have veered to

2. Abdul Karim Soroush, "Seh Farang", *Aynche Andisheh*, Tehran Nos. 3&4, February-March, 1991.

3. Yet, no political party is recognised or allowed to function since Ayatollah Khomeini's order in mid-1987 disbanding the Islamic Republic Party (IRP).

the prevailing Rafsanjani line.⁴ The election for the fourth MAJLIS (April-May, 1992) patently boosted the new course and re-election of Rafsanjani for a second presidential term (June, 1993) ensured continuity of the process. His election was perceived as a referendum on his policies during his first term. Having won, president Rafsanjani declared that he would continue and improve upon his domestic reform.

It is a well known fact that the foreign policy as much reflects the domestic trends and the thought-process of a Government at a given point of time in any state as it is moulded by the contemporary global political and economic environment. It is true that the partially talented objective *initiating* domestic reforms in Iran was to improve its image abroad and to break its isolation. Since the 1980s, Iran's foreign policy displayed traces of realism, moderation, caution and activism. There appeared relative diminution of the erstwhile religious thrust in official pronouncements and actions. Rafsanjani emphasised the need for developing friendly relations with estranged states and his implied acceptance of the existing international relations and organizations system alarmed his dogmatic detractors.⁵ The chief point of contention was the nature of Iran's relations with the western countries. However, the Iranian elite took a differentiated view of these powers. Whereas the United States government remained the "villain" and evil power, certain other European States were seen as benign with whom Iran could cultivate relations on a level of national interest and mutual

4. This group seems to have fallen in disarray. There is a qualitative void in clerical leadership. Old generation is dying out or does not believe in political activism and the new generation lacks charisma. Yet there is speculation that Ayatollah Sheikh Husain Ali Montazari-one time designated successor to Ayatollah Khomeini, may stage a comeback.

5. Hojjatolislam Ali Akbar Mohatashemi, while admitting defeat of his hardline group, was rather caustic when he commented, "It is natural that Iran's relation with the west, and with the U.S are likely to be strengthened and become more solid than in the past. The goodwill in relation will be strengthened so much that Rafsanjanis Govt. will probably have to ask the Majlis to slow down." Interview with the Associated Press. The Times of India, New Delhi, 16 April, 1992.

advantage. The general Iranian approach was that if foreign countries do not attempt to subvert Iran's political and economic independence, there was no problem in improving relations with them.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the 'New five' in the Central Asian region, for the first time since its revolution, Iran found itself sought after in regional and international politics. Accordingly, it gave a thrust to its foreign policy in different directions in the Persian Gulf as well as in the Central, South and East Asian Regions. Iran worked on the political, diplomatic, economic and military planks. Iran has activated its diplomacy drive for strengthening bridges with the Arab Sheikhdom.⁶ However, after not being able to secure a formal endorsement of its position by the GCC States, Iran veered and widened its approach and turned towards cultivating closer relations with the newly emancipated states in the North. There is, of course, a sequential link between Iran's policies towards the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian States. These efforts should be viewed as Iran's sincere desire to project itself as a regional power.⁷ Of Iran's foreign policy priorities, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Moscow, Nematollah Izadi, singled out the near East. He said, "We think that this region is very important for the Muslim world."

Bilateral Relations : With the break-up of the former Soviet Union, Iran found an unique opportunity to re-establish its ties with the CARs. The new states in order to evoke a new

6. For a comprehensive essay on this aspect, see, M.E. Ahrari, "Iran, GCC and the security dimensions in the Persian Gulf," in Amirahmadi and Antessari, No. 10, pp. 193-211.

7. Sreedhar, "Factors leading to India, Iran, China proposed by Iran: An indocentric view, paper presented for the seminar on Indo-Iranian relations in the 90s, March 24-25, 1994.

shape of ~~their~~ political destiny looked towards Iran's with which borders have also posed a great challenge to Iranian diplomacy. Nevertheless, they quickly adjusted to the new situation and moved towards establishing close ties with these new states. Iran allocated ~~real~~ three billion in its 1992-93 budget for the re-construction of Embassies consulates and other necessary infra structures.⁸

Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati paid a ten day visit to the newly independent CARs in November, December 1991. The aim of the visit was the promotion of friendly ties with the Muslim neighbouring countries. Velayati claimed that 'the expression of relation with Muslim countries has a special place in the foreign policy' of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

But as regards the Central Asian States, Iran has put more emphasis on its relations with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The first shares a common border with Iran where as the second has a common historical, ethnic and cultural background. Various highlevel delegations including ministers, businessmen, technocrats and high officials have exchange visits between Iran and CARs. After the proclamation of independence by Tajikistan, Iran was the first country to establish diplomatic ties with the republic. The Iranian Embassy in Dushnabe was the first foreign mission in that country. In June 1992, the new president of Tajikistan, Rahman Nabios accompanied by high level officials paid

8. Iran Today, Vol. 1, No. 1, May 1992, P.B

his maiden foreign visit to Tehran. The visit was an important event in the course of relation between the two countries. In that visit, several economic, political and educational agreements were signed between the two countries. Then in March 1993, Iranian president Rafsanjani visited the CARs which led to further strengthening of ties between these countries. Iran signed a Memorandum of mutual understanding and co-operation with Kazakhstan in November 1992. Both the sides agreed to take long term steps towards the 'expansion and deepening' of relations and widening mutual co-operation in the field of politics, trade, economics as well as those of scientific, technical, cultural, humanitarian and information.

Iran have been using the ECO for her ambitions to emerge as a regional power. Iran has revived the ECO, CSCZ and strongly supported the membership of the CARs. The Tehran summit of ECO in Tehran 1992 witnessed the expansion of ECO membership. In his ^{inaugural} speech Rafsanjani said, "In reality you are not simply regarded as guests. This gathering here is actually an assemblage of the members of family".⁹ Further role of these organization and Iran's efforts to use these have been discussed in the according section.

THE RELIGIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its border touching Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, has natural geographical advantage as it can provide the land locked Central Asian States

9. J. Anhoori Islami, 17 February, 1992.

access to the sea. The people of Tajikistan and Afghanistan have close historical-cultural affinities, as they speak Persian language and cherish the Persian literary heritage. Even Iranian cultural influence though most Iranians are Shi'ite Muslim as against the Sunni majority of the Central Asian Muslims, Iran has exercised its influence in Tajikistan. However, other neighbouring Muslim countries particularly Turkey and Pakistan are also in the race to extend the political and ideological influence in Central Asia. Both Turkey and Iran have opened their Embassies in all the five CARs. Iran has even offered diplomatic mediation to solve the Azerbaijan-Armenian dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh. In their overtures to woo the Muslims of Central Asia, Iran has started to use the media for propaganda. Iranian Radio Broadcasts in the languages of the five CARs and Azerbaijan, call upon the Central Asian to revive their Islamic identities. Iranian Radio has not only attacked the Russian influence in Central Asia but also seeks to counter Turkey's cultural ambitions in the region. ¹⁰

In January 1992, Iran denounced Turkey's step of screening anti-Iran films by the state-run Turkish Television. Tehran warned Ankara to behave itself so as not to arouse the wrath of the Muslims. Iran further accused Turkey of Colluding with American Imperialism which has been a 'part of cultural plots of global arrogance against the Islamic revolution'. ¹¹ Even Tehran Expects that Ankara will put hurdles in its bid to expand ties with its 'backyard friends'. It also reflects Tehran's considerable awareness about Turkey sowing dissension among the newly independent Islamic states particularly

10. P.Stobdan, 'Islamic Reawakening in Central Asia : Towards Stability or Conflict?' *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.XV, No. 6, September 1992, pp.503-518.

11. *Tehran Times*, 30 January, 1992, p.1.

Azerbaijan and Turkmenia, which may foment unrest in Iran's vulnerable border. Another phenomena of no mean significance is the manner in which Iran is penetrating into Tajikistan, Iran is virtually playing the role of 'Big Brother' in the strife torn and beleaguered republic of Tajikistan. Through careful and calculated moves, Iran is making deeper inroads into Tajik life, society and politics. The Tajiks and Iranian are from the same racial and linguistic stock and the point is that Iran is trying to encash this aspect to achieve its political ends. The commonality of language and culture is an effective instrument with Tehran to make deeper inroads in Tajikistan. Of course, it is an exclusive advantage to Iran and she scored it over her rival, Saudi Arabia, in furthering her interests in the Central Asian Republic. It has facilitated her in supporting Qazi Torodjon Zadeh, the replaced chief Qazi, to raise a militia of 8,000 armed men. Even the Democratic Party of Tajikistan receives material assistance from Iran. Indeed, Tehran seeks to camouflage these clandestine but dangerous moves of destabilising elected government in Dushanbe under the carefully built up facade of common religion language and culture. Iran has even deputed a large army of experts in various fields - electronics, printing and electronic media, agriculture, tourism, chemical and petrochemicals industry, printing technology, civil administration, sports, mass communication to recast the Central Asian State on the Iranian model.

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But what is of utmost importance here is the fact that the Muslims of Central Asia have been sharing a common religious and political destiny which acts as a 'strong

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homogenising influence.' ¹² Throughout its past history, Central Asia has played a key role in the dissemination of Islamic civilization in Asia, particularly in the Indian sub-continent. Central Asia has never remained isolated from the Islamic rites and rituals, including festivals. Soon after their breaking loose from ex - USSR, there has been the resurgence of Islam. Restoration work of old and neglected mosques has gone up from a mere 18 to about 3,000 in Tajikistan just two years of time. ¹³ The sermons delivered by mulla^hs in mosques and technological schools preach a return to the fundamentalist Islam, reading and writing in Arabic script, official observance of Muslim holidays, in short, the local Islamisation of the Central Asian state and societal apparatus. In fact, even the younger breed and intelligentsia are now reviving Islam as a political force to be used against the communists, rationalist and secular force in Central Asia. ¹⁴

In such a scenario, Iran with her 'safe-guarding mission' is trying and playing all cards, so that a firm foothold could be established in this Central Asian region. However, there is no denying the fact that Iran is having an economic interest (which has been dealt in the succeeding chapter). It is trying to manipulate the whole balance both politically and strategically. Rafsanjani while speaking at the opening of the 16th Tehran International Trade Fair on October 1, 1990 spoke of Iran as the 'region's axis of stability' with a strong presence in the Gulf safeguarding the region's political and economic stability. As cited earlier, behind all these moves, the religious card is always there with regard to the Gulf region as a whole and Central Asian region in particular.

12. K. Warikoo, The Resurgence of Central Asia, Strategic Analysis, Vol.XV, No. 6, September 1992, p.542.

13. Ahmed Rashid, 'Central Asia,' Far Eastern Economic Review, 9 January 1992, p.18.

14. 'Islam makes a come back,' Asia Week, 4 October 1991, p.32

PURSUIT OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY/WEAPONS

Apart from the political penetration through her 'civilizing mission' Iran, at the same time, is trying to use the Central Asian region strategically to strengthen her military build-up. But to understand as to what has led Iran to have such an interest in the CARs with regard to military build-up, one needs to have an idea of the nuclear position of the Central Asian Republics. Out of the massive nuclear arsenal of roughly 27,000 weapons that the former Soviet Union accumulated over the past 35 years, Kazakhstan alone possessed 7 percent or 1,800 on its soil as on September 1991.¹⁵ In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Kazakhstan was party to the agreement signed by the 11 CIS members which committed themselves to "preserve and support common military and strategic space under a united command, including unified control over nuclear armament regulated by special agreement."

NUCLEAR WEAPON DEPLOYMENT, AS OF SEPTEMBER 1991.

STATES	STRATEGIC OFFENSIVES	GROUND FORCES	AIR DEFENCE FORCES	AIR FORCE	NAVAL FORCE	TOTAL
KAZAKHSTAN	1,150	450	125	75	0	1,800
TURKMENISTAN	0	30	75	20	0	125
UZBEKISTAN	0	30	75	0	0	105
KYRGYZSTAN	0	0	75	0	0	75
TAJIKISTAN	0	0	75	0	0	75
TOTAL	1,150	510	425	95	0	2,180

15. Bangkok Post, 25 May, 1992.

Source: The table appeared in the Rand paper, P.7762, The decline of the Soviet Military : Downsizing, Fragmentation and possible disintegration, Appendix A, p. 29 by Edward L. Warner III, based on Nuclear weapon Databook, Vol.IV, Soviet Military power, 1990, Defence Intelligence agency. Force structure summary.

In Kazakhstan, most of the Soviet nuclear weapons were tested at a site near Semipalatinsk, which had caused massive environmental hazards. This led to numerous protests and ultimately Kazakhstan decided to ban nuclear testing on its soil when it proclaimed independence in October 1990. And by January 1992, the command and control systems for the 180 silo-based SS-18 ICBMs in Kazakhstan were modified to preclude rapid launch.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev initially spoke of his desire to destroy the nuclear weapons based on their territory as rapidly as possible. However, later during US Secretary of State, James Baker's visit to Alma-Ata in December 1991, he changed his position, asserting that Kazakhstan would not relinquish its nuclear arms as long as such weapons are maintained in Russia. ¹⁶ This was indeed a diplomatic move by Nazarbayev to (a) gain support from the Islamic world and (b) to bargain for maximum help from the west. This revised position on nuclear weapons gave an indication of Kazakhstan's willingness to hold on to the weapons on its soil as a means to ensure its participation in the collective decision-making arrangements under the Commonwealth. With regard to

16. Edward L. Warner, The decline of the Soviet Military 1992, p.29.

its nuclear state status, The very article 9 of NPT declares that, "a state which manufactured and exploded nuclear weapons before 1967 is a nuclear state."

However, during his visit to Washington on 19 and 20 May 1992, Kazakhstan embraced a plan to implement a treaty reducing long-ranging nuclear missiles. His agreement to join a five-sided protocol to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), meant that it will eliminate all the weapons in seven years beginning with the treaty ratification. Apart from its nuclear capacity 104 of the former Soviet Union's 308 SS-18 missiles are deployed at two bases in Kazakhstan alongwith 40 Bear-H bombers capable of carrying AS-15 air launched cruise missiles.

Even though Kazakhstan decided to sign the NPT, as a nuclear-free-state, following the signing of a collective security part at the CIS summit in Tashkent, the enriched uranium stockpile available in Central Asia is likely to become accessible to external buyers. Kazakhstan and Tajikistan hold 30 per cent of the Uranium reserves of the former Soviet Union. But the recent CIA Studies show a wider significant distribution of Uranium reserves in even Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. And as all the newly emerged Islamic states are facing severe economic problems, the possibility of sale of uranium to raise hard currency is high and is causing serious concern to the West in particular and the whole global order in general. Perhaps this very concern of Washington resulted in an arrangement between the US and Tajikistan to limit the export of Central Asian uranium in February 1992.

The past experience suggest the 'games' of Iran to be of decisive scenarios. During the late 1960s through the mid to late 1970s, Iran aligned herself with the west and supported the backed Oman's Dhofar rebellion on Oman's Southern borders against South Yemen while Iran generally supported the other conservative Gulf regions, the Shah's regional ambitions grew with the passage of time. And a time came when Iran's forces dominated from the United Arab Emirates. Hence the initiatives taken by Iran seeking to forge close cultural economic political and strategic relations with Central Asian republics can prove to be a pointer towards the future course of events.

The interaction of the Islamic States, especially Iran, in the nuclear field with the Muslim Central Asian States has been the focus of international attention. Although it has been denied by the concerned parties, the world community has been given to understand that Iran is in the final stage of assembling at least three nuclear weapons from disassembled parts acquired from the Islamic states of former Soviet Union.¹⁷ The Iranian leadership perhaps see the time as ripe for the realisation of the vision of a Pan-Islamic bloc, dominated by who else but Iran. As Yossef Bodansky claims, "Tehran's sense of urgency is based on the anticipation of a major crisis resulting from an attempt by the US to prevent the realisation of the revival of Islam."¹⁸

It has also been reported that the visit of Iranian intelligence delegation to Central Asian Muslim Republics began way back in the spring of 1991. Chambiz, and Iranian official

17. For further details consult, Anthony H. Cordesman, 'After the Storm : The changing Military Balance in the Middle East, West-View Press London, 1993.

18. Yossaf Bodansky, 'Iran Acquires Nuclear Weapons and move to Provide cover to Russia, Defence Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy, February 1992, p.1

and also an expert in weapons of mass destruction, met several officials from Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, who pledged support for the Iranian guest for an Islamic bomb. The other deal was carried on by Chamran a nuclear physicist, who was assigned the task to recruit former soviet experts for work in Iran. In a deal reached between Iran and Kazakhstan, Iran agreed to pay 130-150 million US dollars for three nuclear weapons.¹⁹ Iran is also reported to have recruited 50 experts and 200 senior technicians mostly from the Kurchatov Institute in Semipalatinsk (Kazakhstan) to build a nuclear weapon in Iran. These experts were offered an annual salary of 200,00 pound sterlings.²⁰ The Iranian recruitment list included Vladimir Kubov and Phillip Gurkhanian from the same Kurchatov Institute in Moscow, Arsen Hamidadeh from Kazakhstan and Alexander Ahmediadew from Turkmenistan.²¹ Isreal made a disclosure that a Russian nuclear expert had defected to Iran and that man would be able to manufacture a nuclear weapon by the end of the decade.²² After a lull of couple of y^hers it was reported that the United States had pre-empted any prospect of an Iran-Kazakhstan nuclear deal by shipping out 600 kgs of uranium, with Russian connivance , under "operation saphire".²³

Perhaps all these activities of Iran were due to the fact that it was one of the few countries to benefit from the Gulf war. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait gave her a new respectability in the new emerging world order. And apart from importing the military equipment Iran has been exporting Islamic fundamentalism, providing money and cadres throughout the

19. Ibid, p.3.

20. FBIS-SOV-9-031, 14 February 1992, p.4.

21. Yossef Bodansky, op.cit., p.3.

22. Andy Goldberg and Joseph Finkle Stone, Russian Nuclear Scientists Defect to Iran The Times of India, July 15, 1992.

23. The Times of India, December 3, 1994.

These efforts of Iran on the political front have led Turkey and Saudi Arabia to provide money and advisors to the Central Asian countries. But it will be premature to tell whether Iran has any real ambition to dominate any of the republics or it is simply seeking economic and cultural influence.

Iran has also been maintaining contact with anti-regime shē' it's in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia's eastern province and the United Arab Emirates, thereby displaying its active interest in West Asian affairs. It has even provided support to Islamic fundamentalist movements outside the Gulf, including those in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. It has been particularly active in backing the fundamentalist FIS movement in Algeria, although the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria is certainly of native origin and has been sustained largely by decades of mis-rule by Algeria's military junta. Iran plays a major role in supporting Sudan's hardline Islamic fundamentalist government now led by Lt. Gen. Omar Hassan at Bashir and religious leaders like Sheik Hassan - al - Tourabi. Keeping these aspects in view alongwith the unstable state of conditions in the Central Asian States due to ethnic-strife, economic depression and the political atmosphere, one can say that Iran is aiming at not only the expansion of its economic and cultural ties, but mainly to strengthen its political presence in Central Asian Region.

24. Washington Times, December 17, 1991, p.F-4.

CHAPTER - III

DEVELOPING ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The disintegration of the former Soviet Union has manifested itself in the independence of the 15 countries on the positive side but at the same time, certain social political and economic problems too were brought in by this tumult. There has been adverse impact of this collapse on the economics of all the former republics of USSR and more so on the Central Asian States. This was simply due to the fact that in the part there was a close economic linkage among the republics based on the principle of economic specialisation and cooperation since the Soviets considered the entire country as a single economic complex. And as the Central Asian republics were relatively less developed economically, they depended more on the centre for resource allocation and also for the supply of large number of consumer goods, machinery and equipments.

An idea about the economic impact of the disintegration can be had from the fact that in the opinion of the Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the collapse of production in the CIS countries including Central Asian Reupublics, is comparable to the catastrophe caused by the second world war. The Central Asian Republics have been struggling to survive on the economic front. And before we go deeper into the economic relationship between the Central Asian Republics and Iran, a quick look at the prevailing economic situation in the Central Asian Republics will be useful. Central Asian states are experiencing problems of inflation, unemployment, shortages and decline in production. This general slump can be explained primarily by a dramatic

decrease in agricultural and industrial productions volumes, reduction of investment activity, high inflation and a general decrease in the capacity of the consumer market. The rate of the growth of nominal monetary income of the people of Central Asian Republics is significantly behind the growth of the consumer prices of goods and services (calculated on the basis of change in the value of the family's market basket) in practically all the Central Asian Republics. The economic condition of the Central Asians can also be gleaned by the fact that in December 1992, the retail trade prices exceeded the December 1991 level by almost 17.8 times and when one compares it with the price level of December 1990 (the period preceding the 1991 reform and the price liberalization of 1992) then the consumer goods prices increased by 43.4 times.

THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN IRAN

Iranian President, Rafsanjani's prognosis on the effects of Iran's policy on economy and vice-versa has been indeed very logical. He believes that economic reconstruction require political stability and security, which in turn, necessiate political liberalization. Iran in favour of a mixed economy managed by technocrats being conscious that progress in this direction requires normalisation of relations with foreign countries. Iran has been persuing this objective with fragmentation and caution¹

1. Farhang, Mansoor, 'Foreword : Iran and the Prisms of Political Culture'. In Farsoun and Mashayakhi, (eds.), *Iran : Political Culture in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, London, 1992, p.XIII.

With regard to economy, various strategies ranging between Western Capitalism, socialist centralism and Islamic socialism have been floated. In a broader perspective, the approach has been bold, flexible and market oriented. However a virtual fiscal paralysis, domestic recession and continued uncertainty have cast a shadow on much of the economy of Iran.

More than 80 percent of Iran's foreign^{yh} exchange earnings continue to come from oil sales. As prices dipped to their lowest levels since 1988, the impact has been devastating. On an average crude oil prices were down in 1993 \$ 6 or 25 percent when compared to 1992 levels.² This meant that each dollar loss on the price was leading to the loss of the billion dollars with regard to the annual revenue. Although oil export earnings target were set at \$16.8 billion for the Iranian year 1372AM (March 1993-94), experts projected actual earnings to be around \$ 14.5 billion only. Fall in oil prices, foreign trade, foreign exchange have reduced Iran's ability to import more goods. Other important factors like the short term foreign financial commitments and the devaluation of the rial have also contributed^{to} Iran's economic problems. It is in this context that Iran has intensified its efforts to forge economic linkages with the Central Asian Republics. For over a century, Russia had dictated the terms and the nature of contacts between Central Asia and Iran and had encouraged only those links which furthered its own political and economic ambitions. Under the Soviets, Iran was painted something as the 'devil', the 'Satan' in the Central Asian States. Iran's record after the Islamic revolution affirmed

2. Kasai, Vahit, 'A Review of Iran's Economy in 1993, in Iran Business Monitor, January 1993.

this belief. However, after the demise of USSR in 1991, Iran cherished its dreams of bringing Central Asia back into the Islamic fold, but was unable to do much beyond beaming of radio transmissions of Quranic recitations³ and traditional music and poetry towards the Central Asian Republics. Of course, Turkmenistan proved to be a fertile ground for all this due to the weak transmission networks of Soviet broadcasts, but this was more on aesthetic and cultural grounds rather than a consequence of incipient religious fervour.

However, by the beginning of 1992, both Iran and the Central Asian states evinced their eagerness to explore the economic and logistical advantages that a close relationship with each other could offer. The concept of recreating the 'silk route' has acquired a potency far beyond its economic significance: in a way it has become a symbol of rebirth for the entire region.⁴ Numerous delegations have exchanged visits between the Central Asian states and Iran over the past four years. The relationship between these republics and Iran has been further strengthened by high-profile visits from the Presidents of Central Asian Republics to Iran. President Rajsanjani's visit to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in October 1993 further consolidated these visits. Areas of mutual interest have been explored on these occasions regarding transport, trade, technology and culture leading to signing of a number of bi-lateral protocols.

3. For further details see, D. Banerjee, 'Recent Developments in Central Asia and their Security Implications', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XV, No. 6, September 1992, pp. 489-502.

4. For more details see, K. Warikoo, *op. cit.*

DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION LINKS

The area of cooperation that has been given priority by both Central Asian Republics and Iran is that of transport and communications. For the Central Asian Republics which have long been entirely dependent on Russia for channels of communications with the outer world, diversifying their outlets has been of a high priority. At the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, a small portion of the Mashhad-Sarakhs rail link still remained to be completed. An agreement was concluded with China whereby China agreed to exchange its technical experts provide railway parts and transfer technology to assist the Iranian railway in constructing the Mashhad - Sarakhs rail line and established new rail lines too.⁵ There were other agreement with regard to the Mashhad - Karman - Zahedan line (approximately 1,500 kms)⁶ and the Bafgh - Bandar. A memorandum of cooperation of understanding on joint cooperation in the field of transportation was signed between Iran and Kazakhstan on 29 February, 1992.⁷ Earlier an agreement was reached on the continuous transportations between the ports of Anjali and Nowshahr in Iran and Ekta'o in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh side proposed even close cooperation with the Arabian companies in order to increase the capacity of and promote the Ekta'o port project. The two countries agreed to initiate work to increase the road transportation between the two countries in terms of goods and passengers. They also agreed to establish flights between Tehran and Alina-Aley.

5. SWB ME/WO 263, 5 January, 1993, p.A-1/3.

6. P.Stobdan, *op.cit.*, p.502.

7. SWB ME/WO 221, 10 March 1992, p.A-1/6

At the same time, Iran has evinced close interests in Turkmenistan. Borders between Iran and Turkmenia were opened at three points - Ashkhabad, Gasankuli and Locfabad. Construction work on the Mashhad-Srakhs railway began on 15th May, 1992 and in this ceremony Iran's President, Rafsanjani and Ata Charyyev, Turkmenistan's first Vice President, were present.⁸ The project was to be implemented using the sum of 140 billion rials and 150 million dollars in foreign currency in seven sections covering a distance of 165 kms. The Islamic Revolution guards corps constructed the first section which was 27 km. long. This rail line links Mashhad to Sarakhs and to Tedzhen in Turkmenistan, a total of 266 km. in length. This railway is a one way electric line equipped with a central control system. This railway is desinged to be capable of transporting 3mt of goods and 500,000 passengers during its first year of operation. Its transport capability was to be enhanced in future years to transport 10 mt of goods and 2m passengers. Regular flights have started between Iran and Turkmenistan. Simultaneously Iran Air signed an accord with Tajikistan also for starting regular flights between Tehran and Dushanbe which was subsequently to make a stop in Mashhad on its way from Tehran to Dushanbe.

Iran also entered into similar agreement with Kyrgyzstan on air and road transport. By virtue of an agreement signed on 24 August, 1992, the Kyrgyz transport minister proposed the establishment of an air link⁹ between the two country's capitals. Iran agreed to provide Kyrgyzstan with expertise in road transport and the management of

8. SWB ME/VO 232, 26 May 1992, p.A-1/1

9. SWB ME/VO 246, 1 September 1992, p.A-1/2

airports and airline companies. The two sides also agreed to the establishment of the Tajan Srakhs railway by the five Central Asian Countries and its onward connection to the Iranian railway network. With regard to Uzbekistan, Iran concluded an accord on expanding cooperation in rail, air and road transport. Both Iran and Uzbekistan have agreed to cooperate on the construction of the Mashhad Sarakhs railway and on the formation of a joint railway company. Iran has even agreed to construct a concrete-producing plant in Uzbekistan.¹⁰ Iran's experts would assess Uzbekistan's road transport capabilities and draw up plans for increased cooperation in this area.

The plans of cooperation in transport and communication sectors between Central Asian states and Iran virtually coincided with similar plans to connect the Central Asian Republics with China.¹¹ Kazakhstan's Supreme Soviet adopted a law on the establishment of free economic zones in some oblasts along the routes of railway that shortened the distance between Moscow and Peking and linked them via Kazakhstan and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region when it became operational in 1992.¹²

On 12th June 1993, the Iranian cargo vessel Iran Bashir, with a capacity of 3,000 tonnes, docked at the port of Anjali, in northern Iran to unload cargo from the Republic of Kazakhstan.¹³ Thus the shipping link between Iran and Kazakhstan, even stands established shipping on goods between Anjali and Turkmenistan had been launched with the docking of an Iranian ship in the port of Krashovodsk.¹⁴ The

10. SWB ME/WO 289, 6 July 1993, p.A-1/1

11. SWB SU/WO 161, 11 January 1991, p.A-1/2

12. SWB SU/WO 1845/G/2, 13 November 1993

13. SWB ME/WO 287, 22 June 1993 p.A-1/2

14. SWB ME/WO 252, 13 October 1992, p.A-1/1

Caspian sea shipping company has been operating three cargoships between Awyali, Krashovodssk and Baku. ¹⁵ An agreement between Iran and Turkmenistan for the joint development of south-eastern waters of the Caspian Sea and its Golden Beach has also been signed. To more ports are also being developed on the Iranian shore in Amirabad and Kereydoon Kerar region and feasibility studies have been carried out on a third port - Bandar - e - Jorkinan. Thus, Iran has been providing outer contacts to the Central Asian Republic through rail, road and air ways. It must be made clear that through these developments in ^{communication} links Iran has been furthering her own interests in the economic field.

DEVELOPING TRADE RELATIONS

The trade links between Central Asian region and Iran were initiated as soon as the travel restrictions were relaxed. In the private sector, the main thrust area has been the establishment of joint ventures - mostly concerned with import - export operations. ✓

In Turkmenistan, the 'Pars' group has been attempting to set up a tri-lateral venture involving their German trading partners 'FBS'. A highly successful exhibition of the goods was held at Ashkhabad by 'Pars' in October 1992. The products offered were mostly clothes, shoes, textiles, sanitary ware, building materials, automobiles and food products. ¹⁶ The 'Pars' group has also been very much active in Kazakhstan. ¹⁷ However, in Uzbekistan, it is the 'Separd' group of Iran that is leading the way. A joint

15. Ibid.

16. Turkmenskaya Iskara, 28 September 1992; 3 October 1992; 1 December 1992

17. Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 12 September 1992.

venture with the Uzbek government corporation 'SHARK'(Orient) was launched in November 1992 under the name of 'Uzsepard'. The initial capital for the joint venture was acquired through the sale of 'Separd' goods in Uzbekistan which included washing machines, clothes and shoes. They also plan to develop carpet weaving, ceramic and wood carvings¹⁸ industries in Uzbekistan. However there has been considerable growth in trade between Iran and Turkmenistan, which is largely due to their common borders. Both Iran and Turkmenistan signed on joint investment and an economic agreement. The exchange of goods between Khorashan Provines and the Republic of Turkmenistan on 9th Janaury, 1992 in Mashhad.¹⁹ Based on this agreement, which was signed between a number of managers of the factories under the supervision of the ministry of industry in Khorashan Province and the managers of the factories of the Republic of Turkmenistan, the factories of Khorasan Province were to export serge, blankets and leather goods in return for 1,000 tones of cotton, 50,000 sq. meters of machine made carpets and 200,000 petts. Even a group of agricultural experts from Khorasan visited Ashkhabad to help carry out an experimental cultivation of 1.5 tonnes of beets on an area of 1,000 hectares in Turkmenistan.²⁰ On their part Turkmen agricultural experts supervised the cotton farming in Khorasan Province on an area of 1,000 ha.

Iran provideed special export credit of 80 million dollars²¹ for trade with Turkmenistan. Under this agreement covering three months period, Iran was to import goods and raw

18. Narodnoze Slovo, 17 November 1992

19. SWB ME/WO 214, 25 January 1992, p.A-1/2

20. SWB ME/WO 217, 11 February 1992, p.A-1/2; Ibid. ME/WO 272, 9 March 1993, p.A-1/1.

21. SWB ME/WO 222, 17 March 1992, p.A-1/1

materials for industry from Turkmenistan, in exchange for sending 260,000 tonnes of foodstuffs there. The Deputy Head of the Turkmenistan Foreign Committee during his visit to Khorasan Province in early March 1992, concluded 7 agreements and 2 memoranda for understanding in the fields of industry and transport with the official of that province.²² In yet another agreement, Member of Turkmen President's council, Ata Charyyev, during his visit to Iran, clinched a deal with regard to the exchange of cotton and good worth 37 million dollars.²³ In November 1992, about 17 economic and commercial protocols worth a total of 6.76 billion dollars were again signed between Iran and Turkmenistan.²⁴

Iran has been active in Tajikistan with regard to developing trade linkages. Both the countries signed an agreement whereby a joint company named Tajiran based in the Dushanbe was opened.²⁵ This Tajiran coordinates the cooperation between the two countries. The basic objectives of the company is to expand the bilateral economic cooperation and transportation network, transfer of technology, industrial and development projects and setting up of chain stores in Tajikistan. About 400,000 tonnes of aluminium ingots, 100,000 tonnes of timber of various kind and 1 million tonne of cotton were imported by Iran from Tajikistan in 1992.²⁶ Again synthetic fibre producing complex in Dushanbe of a capacity of 2,000 tonnes a year.²⁷ Iran even allowed Tajikistan to use her routes to import and export goods on 7th July 1992. By the same

22. SWB ME/WO 222, 17 March 1992, p.A-1/1

23. SWB ME/WO 230, 12 May 1992, p.A-1/2

24. SWB ME/WO 259, 1 December 1992, p.A-1/2

25. SWB ME/WO 254, 27 October 1992, p.A-1/3

26. Ibid.

27. SWB ME/WO 237, 30 June 1992, p.A-1/2

agreement, the Iranian and Tajik Road Ministers agreed that passenger and cargo vehicles should use the Tajikistan - Uzbekistan - Turkmenistan routes or the Tajikistan - Afghanistan routes.

Iran and Tajikistan reached an agreement on the conditions of 50 million dollar loan to Tajikistan for the purchase of industrial facilities from Iran.²⁸ On 30th June, 1992, Iran and Tajikistan signed a five year memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the economic, educational and industrial fields. Iran, by this agreement has agreed to transfer technology in telecommunication, dam building, oil research and exploitation and the quarrying of mines.

In this way, there exists viable trade relations between Iran and the Central Asian region. It is evidenced by the fact that during the year March 1992 - March 1993, about 7,704 tones of non-oil goods to the value of 1.207 billion rials were exported from the Khorasan Province to the Central Asian Republics.²⁹ The exports included food stuffs, clothes, seed, potatoes, fruits, biscuits, toiletries and hygenic equipments. The goods were exported to the republics of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. During the same period, 47,251 tones of goods, to the value of 1.771 billion rials were exported from Turkmenistan to the Khorasan province. The imports included motor cycles, cement, asbestos, steel, electrical appliances, power station equipments, clothing, pressed wood, lorries, paper, cardboard, chemicals and machine made carpets.

28. SWB ME/VO 238, 7 July 1992, p.A-1/2

29. SWB ME/VO 280, 4 May 1993, p.A-1/2

OIL AND GAS LINKS

Iran is one of the world's major oil states although it has smaller reserves than Iraq and far smaller reserves than Saudi Arabia. However, the petroleum sector account for about 90% of Iran's exports. Iran had produced about 39 billion barrels of oil by the end of the 1990, that is when Soviet Russia was on the brink of disintegration, and had a relatively high reserve - to - production ratio of 55%.³⁰ In this situation, it was quite normal to develop the oil and gas links with the Central Asian Republics. Iran has been too keen to develop agreements with the Caspian littoral countries. An agreement signed with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and the Russian federation,³¹ provides for joint oil and gas exploration, fisheries and fishing in the Caspian Sea Zone.

Iran has even entered into some agreements with Kazakhstan which has surplus oil. Major oil sources are found in the vast Tenghiz fields in Kazakhstan which alone have a recoverable reserve of at least 6 to 9 billion barrels and also at the north-eastern segment of the Caspian Sea. Huge natural gas reserves are found at Karachaganak. During the summit meetig of economic cooperation organisation in February 1992 in Tehran the Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Baykenov called on Iranian Oil Minister Gholamreza Aqazadeh and sought Iran's help in building an oil refinery and conducting oil exploration projects. Even the Vice-President of Turkmenistan, Atta Chariyev, during the same summit of Economic Cooperation Organization requested the Iranian oil

30. Oil and Gas Journal, September 1991, p.62

31. SWB ME/WO 213, 14 January 1992, p.A-1/5. ; Ibid ME/WO 280, 4 May 1993, p.A-1/2.

Minister to help in building a motor oil plant and refinery in that republic. Aqazadeh agreed to send a group of Iranian consultants to Ashkhabad for feasibility study of cooperation in the gas industry and the building of a motor oil refinery plant in that republic.³²

At the conclusion of the visit of the President of Turkmenistan to Iran, a joint communique was released in which Iran declared its readiness to offer its resources and expertise to overcome Turkmenistan difficulties. The two countries agreed to use each others territory for the transit of goods. Iran even agreed in principle to a request from Turkmenistan that it should provide the necessary facilities for the export of upto 40 billion cu m of gas from Turkmenistan over an unspecified period.³³ Again, yet another multi-billion dollar agreement was signed between Iran and Turkmenistan on oil and gas when a member of the Turkmen President's council, Ata Charyyev visited Tehran in May 1992.³⁴ Talking about this deal he claimed that Turkmenistan had not concluded agreements of "such vast scope with any other country until now".³⁵

In a meeting on 1st August 1992, between the Iranian oil Minister and the Turkmen Ambassador³⁶ in Tehran it was agreed that a group of experts from Turkmenistan would visit Iran in order to examine the technical aspects of the proposal for a pipe line to export Iranian natural gas to Turkmenistan. During the same month, the Iranian oil Minister announced after his return from the Republic of Kazakhstan that discussions had

32. SWB ME/VO 219, 25 February 1992, p.A-1/1

33. Ibid., SWB ME/VO 280, 4 May 1993, p.A-1/2

34. SWB ME/VO 230, 12 May 1992, p.A-1/2

35. SWB ME/VO 243, 11 August 1993, p.A-1/2

36. SWB ME/VO 230, 12 May 1992, p.A-1/2

been held on the building^h and reconstruction of Kazakhstan's refineries.³⁷ It was also agreed to design the building of a motor oil factory with annual capacity of 1,80,000 tonnes with Iranian expertise. Discussions were also held on linking the Kazakhstan - Azerbaijan oil pipe line to Tabrij via Baku in order to make oil exports possible. A statement of understanding was signed for expanding the cooperation between the two countries in the field of energy a fuel resources - specially oil and gas in November 1992.³⁸

In this way Iran and Central^{Asi} states specially Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have evolved an institutional frame work to facilitate mutual cooperation in oil and gas sectors in order to achieve optimum benefits from their rich energy resources. In this area Iran's 'Petro-dollar diplomacy' are easily discernable behind which Iranian crippling economies interest and the ideological thrust are the main factors.

ILLEGAL CROSS-BORDER TRADE

Apart from the development of communication and trade linkages in both the public and private sectors, there has also begun illegal cross border trade between the Central Asian Republics and Iran after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan are on the verge of turning into a 'Golden Triangle'³⁹ of Hashish and opium production like the one that exists already in South-East Asia. The

37. SWB ME/WO 245, 25 August 1992, p.A-1/2

38. SWB ME/WO 256, 10 November 1992, p.A-1/2

39. FBIS-USR-93-005, 13 January 1993, pp.100-101

Mafia that operates within the boundaries of the Central Asian Republics is with enviable efficiency actively striving to establish contacts with its Western partners in general and the Italians in particulars. It helps the latter 'launder' drug dollars and invest them in privatisation through the new banking network. Alain Labrousse, Director of the Geopolitical Observatory for Narcotics Tracking, claims that the 'ranks of mafia structures are being reinforced by former KGB personnel'.⁴⁰

The basic cause behind this unprecedented drug boom where opium is used as a sort of 'local currency' has been, as claimed by Labrousse, is the worsening economic crisis in those areas. "It is becoming more and more profitable for collective farmers in those areas (Central Asia) to cultivate and sell poppies, cannabis and other crops from which narcotic substances can easily be manufactured".⁴¹ It is estimated that there are 1,38,000 hectares of Cannabis in the Chu river valley of Kazakhstan. And no out of the ruins of the former Soviet Empire there is emerging a mighty drug power, which will simply add another 'Golden Triangle' on the global plain but with serious repurcussion. However, the only positive aspect is that the Iranian government is cooperating with the Central Asian authorities to try to stamp out this draconian menace.⁴²

40. FBIS-USR-93-005, 13 January 1993, p.101

41. Ibid.

42. FBIS-USR-93-009, 27 January 1993, pp.113-114

ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION ORGANISATION & CASPIAN SEA COOPERATION ZONE

As discussed earlier, Iran has been active in encouraging bilateral relation with all the Central Asian Republics. At the same time, Iran has also been the driving force behind the creation of two multilateral regional groupings. The first of these - the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) was not, in fact, a new coalition, but only an enlarged, revitalized version of a previous series of alliances. In February 1955, Turkey and Iraq formed a Western - sponsored mutual defence treaty which was expanded later in the same year to include Pakistan and Iran. However Iraq withdrew from the Pact in 1958 and it was later renamed as Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). After a long span of time, in 1984 Iran tried to give a new lease of life to this alliance which was given the name of Economic Cooperation Organisation. But the new life was infused into the Economic Cooperation Organisation only in February 1992 when Iran hosted the first summit meeting of the Heads of state of Economic Cooperation Organisation members in Tehran.

In order to influence the Central Asian Republics, the President of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan were specially invited. Quite naturally, this event was viewed with surprise and even disquiet by some sections of the international community, who feared something of 'Pan-Islamic' axis. However President Rafsanjani stressed the importance of economic rather than politics in the new situation. In his message to the International conference on oil and gas, held in Isfahan on 12 May 1991 Rafsanjani this

policy of 'new outlook'. Iran's Foreign Minister Vilayati also underscored the fact that "a new order is emerging in the world in which economic consideration overshadow the political priorities."

Economic Cooperation Organization has drawn plans to develop satellite communications and transport links between member States, to lower tariff barriers and to create a postal union. The creation of a regional bank to aid investment is also under discussion.⁴³ However, these high flying objectives have failed to get a vigorous start considering the magnitude of the problems on the domestic economic front of all the concerned countries on one hand and by the latest and at times overt⁴⁴ rivalry between the original members - Iran, Turkey and Pakistan to establish their own 'special relationships' with the Central Asian Republics.⁴⁵

The second regional grouping, the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone (CSCZ) launched in February 1992, coincided with the First Summit Meeting of Economic Cooperation Organization in Tehran. This Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone brings the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan together made like one platform. Economic Cooperation Organization, the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone also has its headquarter in Tehran. There are a number of common concerns, including specific issues regarding the protection and exploitation of the

43. Shirin Akiner, *op.cit.*, p.252.

44. For more details see, P.Stobdan, 'Islamic Reawakening in Central Asia : Towards Stability or Conflicts?', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.XV, No.6, September 1993, pp.503-518.

45. Shirin Akiner, *op.cit.*, p.252.

Caspian Sea's resources. The increasing industrialisation of the coastal region means that urgent attention must be given to this problem if large scale economic damage is to be avoided. Pollution is another problem to the ecological balance of the Sea. Though Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan claim to be the 'cleanest' of the littoral states, the fact remains that the problem is common to all and effective group mechanisms are required to monitor pollution levels and to enforce compliance with agreed norms.

Economic linkages have developed to a greater extent in between Iran and the Central Asian Republics from the period 1990-94. The deepening economic crisis, which had permeated the Central Asian Republics after the Soviet Union's collapse was simply the strongest factor which pushed the Central Asian Republics, towards the 'outer space'. At the other hand, Iran too after its major engagements during the 1980s had lost much space on the international plane. Its economy which had suffered to a much larger extent due to the Iran-Iraq war, was in need for some economic collaborators, which after the breakdown of USSR was provided by the adjoining Central Asian Republics. Apart from this, Iran perceiving itself as the "protector of Islam", saw such a fulfilling mission in this Central Asian Region. Hence, a period of economic cooperation has ensued and the two organisations - Economic Cooperation Organisation and the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone are the best possible institutional mechanisms to facilitate the same. But to claim that these two organisations have been evolved by Iran just for the sake of economic linkages will be too simplistic. These organisations have come into being for something more than only economic cooperation as is believed by most of the analysts. This point is strengthened by the very comment of

President Rajsanjani at the very first summit of Economic Cooperation Organisation held on February 1992 in Tehran, "Economic Cooperation Organisation would first step towards regional alliance that could develop into a world power. It was natural for the predominantly Muslim ex-Soviet Republics to turn to Economic Cooperation Organisation. The Economic Cooperation Organisation members and other Muslim States of South West Asia can form a powerful 'political cum economic body' in the region and present themselves as a world power."⁴⁶ The fact is that Iran is simultaneously using culture and religion for expanding its influence in Central Asian Republics and is not merely relying on ideology⁴⁷ be it on the political or economic front. Though, it is too early to expect miracles from the Economic Cooperation Organisation for conflict resolution and confidence buildings. As such the Economic Cooperation Organisation will have to formulate a collective strategy to address some of the challenges faced by the members including those pertaining to conflict resolution and Confidence Building Mechanisms (CBMs) among the Central Asian states. If the case is not so, the Central Asian Republics will only be the losers. Thus, it can be will argued that Iran have a determind bid to cultivate the relations with the Central Asian Republics. During the last three and odd years some significant high level visit and exchange of political and economic delegations took place between Iran and its northern neighbours. During the deliberations, there was marked emphasis on improving the communications and transport network, promoting trade and cooperation in the energy, gas and oil

46. Three Central Asian Republics join ECO : The Pakistan Times, Lahore, February 18, 1992.

47. Moonis Ahmar, 'Conflict Resolution and Confidence Building in Central Asia', Strategic Studies, Vol.XVI, No.3, Spring 1994 p.89.

sectors initiating functional cooperation in building infrastructure in the field of banking, small scale industries, education, health, tourism, sports and information media. The five northern provinces of Iran are geared to expand border trade and passenger traffic with the Central Asian Republics of course for their own benefits.

CHAPTER - IV

STRENGTHENING CULTURAL LINKS

The paradigm of socio-cultural evolution and development, both liberal and socialist, regards advances in science and technology and the consequent industrialisation of societies as the factors leading to a weakening if not elimination, of the two main social characteristics of the pre-industrial era - The eclipse of religion and the break down of traditional communal and ascriptive relations. As is known, the Central Asian Republics are passing through a phase of transition after the breakdown of the Soviet Union on all accounts- political, economic, social and cultural. However the basic problem in Central Asian states is to establish their independent identities. They are at a cross road and have to 'decide' per se, as to which path each of these legatees of the Soviet system should follow - whether to Islam, the ethnos, nationalism, authoritarianism or towards a space where all these paths converge. In this transitional phase as so often in history, the transition itself can be of epochal length, like the European transition from feudalism to capitalism from the 14th to 18th centuries.

Over the past century and a half the Central Asian Republics shared a common fate as the colonial territories of the Russian Empire and later as constituent Republic. It is a matter of fact for almost four centuries, the Central Asian region shared a common fate as hotland of nomadic and oases cultures hemmed in by these sedentary agricultural civilisations of China, Iran and Russia, and as victims of their creeping and irrevocable military superiority over nomadism. Of course, their identity as a civilisation is as real and

their cohesion as a policy has been as ephemeral and chimerical as the European. Their cultural oneness is the experienced.

Indeed, the different claimants to the five nations created or bequeathed by the Soviet Union's disintegration can be easily classified as the religious, the liberal and democratic in current post - Soviet parlance. However, the religion is Islamic and subdivides in to the supra-national pan - Islamic and the more purely nationalised. The democratic consists of the ethnic nationalist type along side an international one. And the interesting point is that while the hold of religion in the pre- industrial form has some what declined in the first and second worlds and secularism is well established there, the CARs are still facing the trauma of getting bracketed in the cock pit of religion. While the revivalist movements of the Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism do not seemed to be necessarily anti-secular, the Islamic rivalism avowedly aims to religious in junctions ¹. And the point to keep in mind is that Islam has seldom unified nations. In today's world, it has become perhaps more fractions than ever. The basic cause behind this notion is that there are numerous sects in Islam and the Shia- Sunni divide is real and deep. There are Arabic and Persia influences. Though the Central Asian Muslims , after the seventy years of communist rule, have lost their Islamic moorings, the fundamentalist forces have a peculiar appeal. This becomes disastrous in times of political instability and economic distress when their sense of wrong is heightened and patriotic fervour is aroused by which ever ideologue has the

1. C.Inayatullah, 'Democracy, Ethnonationalism and the Emerging World Order', In Sushil Kumar, (ed), Gorbachev's reform and International Change, Lancer's Books, New Delhi, 1993, p.199.

pulpit at the moment. The security related view of Islam attains importance keeping in view the Iranian efforts towards this cultural imperialism with regard to the Central Asian Republics. A brief sketch of the ethnic composition of the Central Asian Republics sheds light on the cultural similarities and dissimilarities between Central Asian region and Iran.

Table - 1

ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLIC

by per cent

Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzia	Turkmenia	Tajikistan
Kazakhs - 40	Uzbeks - 91	Kyrgyzs - 52	Turkmen - 72	Tajiks - 62
Russians - 38	Russians - 08	Russians - 22	Russians - 10	Uzbeks - 24
Germans - 06	Tajiks - 05	Uzbeks - 13	Uzbeks - 09	Russians - 08
Ukrainians - 05	Kazakhs - 04	Ukrainians - 03	Kazakhs - 03	Kirghizs - 01
Others - 11	Others - 12	Germans - 02	Ukrainians - 01	Ukrainians - 01
		Others - 08	Others - 05	Others - 04

Central Asian region is a mosaic of various ethnic group. The Kazakhs are a minority in their own homeland and there are a sizable Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan. However, the most assertive ethnic group parallel to the Russian is Uzbek. There are about 16 million Uzbeks in Uzbekistan alone and several million in other Central Asian States. And the interesting point is that the Tajiks and Uzbeks claim cultural supremacy *vis-a-vis* the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and the Turkmen. The Tajiks consider themselves to be the most advanced culturally, by virtue of belonging to the ancient and rich Persian Civilization and

also do to the point of being biggest non-Turkic community in the Central Asia. Besides, there are certain Central Asian Ethnic group settled with in the Iranian territory detailed below:

	1978	1983
Turkmans	550,000	650,000
Azerbaijanis	5,800,000	6120,000
Tajiks	40,000	44,000

Language Link :

Except for the Tajiks, all other ethnic group in Central Asia speak a language close to Turkish. Perhaps, that has led to provoking Pan-Islamic aspirations by resorting to the use of both religious and cultural links. At the same time the affinities of Persian languages, literature and historical experience provide a close bond~~age~~ between Iran and the Persian speaking peoples in Tajikistan, Bukharest and Samarkand regions of Uzbekistan and Afganistan. In order to consolidate and develop these links Iran initiated in February 1992 the move for establishing the Association of Persian Speaking Peoples, embracing Iran, Tajikistan and Afganistan. Justifying Iran's quest to play a leadership role in Central Asia not only on religious but on cultural grounds also, the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said that , "We have decided to create this cultural organization to revitalize Persian, the language which had contributed the most to Islamic civilization in Central Asia and in all the former Soviet Republics."⁸

The case with Tajikistan is quite suitable for Iran. Here the Islamic fundamentalist aspects are quite high. Even while celebrating their first anniversary of independence from September 9 to 16, 1992, Tajikistan organized the first International Forum of Tajik speaking peoples and friends of Tajikistan at the Dushanbe. Earlier in May, 1992, the Tajik Government floated an organization of culture called 'Payward' (the link) which has evolved as the single biggest cultural organization of that country. It was the same Forum which decided to hold the first International Forum of Tajiks whose Organizing committee was headed by Habibullah Saidmuradov, the then Deputy Prime Minister.

The Forum laid stress mainly on the reestablishment of the Tajiks in enriching human civilisation and particularly the civilization of Farsi, Tajik and Dari speaking peoples and those whose dialects are the offshoot of these languages. This roughly covers Iran, Tajikistan, Tajiki speaking regions of Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Badakhshan and Pamir mountain ranges. More than 200 delegates from different countries attended the conference. However, the most prominent was the Iranian delegation comprising nearly half of the total delegates and was headed by Abbas Maliki, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran. Iranian Ambassador in Dushanbe, Shabistari and his cultural counsellor took very active part in the deliberations. And by the activities of Iran, it appeared as if the entire

8. Persian Speaking Countries Forum Formed. The Frontier Post, Peshawar, February 20, 1992.

programme of the conference was either prepared by the Iranian or was closely monitored by them. It is worthwhile to add that Iran did try to persuade the Central Asian Authorities to adopt Persian-Arabic script for the local Central Asian languages most of which have, however, abandoned the previous Cyrillic script in favour of the Latin script. This move by the Central Asian States is a sharp rebuff to the sustained Iranian efforts to use language as a means to influence the Central Asian societies and cultures.

It would be equally erroneous to assume that the population of Central Asia constitutes a uniform mass of Muslims or Turkic.... Although most speak Turkic languages, these are mutually not intelligible. Turkmen and Uzbek being no closer to the other than Italian is to Spanish. The Tajiks, of course, speak Persian, an Indo-European language unrelated to Turkic.... Persian was the native language of the Tajiks and the second language of many Uzbeks, the Mullahs knew Arabic and the Qadis (Judges) applied the Sharia in courts. Their religious and cultural identity was strong and largely impervious to Russian influence. They lived in compact settlements.²

As said, the Turkic and Iranian languages have dominated sedentary Central Asian Culture for a long period of time. This fact reflects the movement of the Iranian, then Turkic peoples within the region as a whole. However, the point whether local people in Central Asia developed from pure Iranian or Turkic stock is immaterial to understanding the role of language in ethnicity.³ The fact remains that Persian was the cultural language of

2. Firuz, Kazemzaden, 'US Policy towards Central Asia,' Statement prepared for the sub-committee on Europe and the Middle East, Hearing before the sub-committee on Europe and the Middle East of the committee on Foreign Affairs, April 28, 1992, p.46.

3. Maria Subtelny, 'The Symbiosis of Tajik and Uzbeks', 1991.

sedentary Central Asia into the beginning of this century. Despite the efforts of the Grand old man of letters, Mir Ali Shiri Nawazi (Fani), Turki, as the sedentary Central Asian Turkic was called until the 1920s, did not overtake Persian as the cultural language though it incorporated a prodigious number of Persian Words and phrases.⁴ Even in the early Soviet period, in Bukhara and in Samarkand, the historians and poets employed Persian.⁵ Of course, this language, in no way, reflected ethnicity - it was a reflection of the prestige and cultural wealth of Persian. Not even the Uzbek Conquests of the 16th century and the cleavage of Khorasan into Shi'a and Sunni, affected the status of Persian.

However, the question which assumes importance is that if the past pattern has been that language usage and ethnicity did not necessarily coincide, can we assume that today also, ethnicity may also exist without a coinciding language component? The answer appears to be a cautious yes, but for reasons quite different in this post Soviet era. And the fact remains that in contemporary Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as in the past, the ethnic identity and language usage are distantly related especially among the ruling urban elite.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Apart from the similarity on the plane of language, another important cultural cohabitation between Central Asian region and Iran has been the religious affiliation within the ideological fold. It may be pointed out that 'Pan-Islamism' of this region breaks the national

4. Eden Naby, 'Central Asian Literature in Transition', as quoted in, Ibid, *Ethnicity and Islam in Central Asia*, Central Asian Survey, 12(2), 1993, p.156.

5. Ibid, p.157.

barrier of the Soviet Nations in order to unite all Muslims. But it is interesting that this pan-Islamism stops at the Soviet frontiers and does not, as the 'Pan' denotes, extend to the whole world of Islam. In short, it is a pan Soviet Islam which prevails in this region.⁶

An important factor with regard to the current Islam of the Central Asian Republics is that it owes much to the organisational and academic existence of the ex Soviet species. The official Islamic establishment belonged to the 'nomenklature' and did not engage in either a critique of Marxism Leninism or protest against the anti-religious propaganda of the Communist Party. It denounced the foreign attacks on the anti religious nature of the Soviet union and represented Soviet Islam abroad on numerous cultural and diplomatic missions. But it did not make any doctrinal compromise in Islam. In that matter, it remained utterly orthodox and it attained high academic standards.

The Soviets promoted 'official Islam' during the last fifty years or so. The Tashkent Directorate even used to publish an excellent quarterly journal - Muslim of the Soviet East, in six languages - Arabic, Uzbek (in the Arabic Script), English, French, Persian and Dari. It even published several editions of the Holy Quran and two collection of the 'Hadith'. Many of its personnel were graduates of the Al-Azhar University. As a result, they were heirs to the glorious jadid tradition of modernity which sought to reconcile Islam with science and progress through pedagogic, publicist and organisational activities and not

6. Edn Naby, 'Ethnicity and Islam in Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, 12(2), 1993, pp.151-167.

through any doctrinal innovations. But these Jadids and official Islamic establishment contributed a great deal to the preservation of Islamic tradition and practices among the Central Asian Muslims, when atheism was the order of the day under the Soviets.

However subsequent to the independence of Central Asian Republics, all underground network of sufis, Islamic missionaries and madarsas sprang up spontaneously throughout Central Asia.

PAN-ISLAMISM

In the contemporary times, the pan-Islamism has acquired its formal political organisation in the Islamic Renaissance Party with dominance of the North Caucasian Muslims, although some important centres of its activity includes Tajikistan and Ferghana valley. Its ^{specific} Muslim features are its exhortion to all Muslims to be politically engaged as Muslims and for the supercession of the class, tribe and nation by the Umma of the faithful.⁷ Today, however, it is important only in pockets as a political movement through the same Islamic Renaissance Party, whereas the Sufi informal Islam remains mired in localism and keeping the faith alive. The prevailing situation in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan will hardly tolerate pan Islamism largely due to their large European population. However, Turkmenistan seems to remain the land of the Sufi orders in religious life. At the same time, Uzbekistan - the political leader of Turkistan, is so secure, indeed aggressive in ^{its} nationalism that such pan-movement are a hindrance.

7. For more details on these aspects see, Kamal Karpat, 'The Old and New Central Asia', *Central Asian Survey*, 12(4), 1993, pp.415-425.

Pan-Islamism, therefore seems destined to exist as a cultural force of considerable vitality. However on the political front, it seems doomed to the status of a regional lobby or a strictly local entity. The exceptional situation in Tajikistan might well be transitional given the anxieties of the CIS over the spread of the Civil War. But its major weakness is its strength, that it disdains the national unity and hereby could compromise, building it specifically national base of power. On the other hand its supra-national yearnings, even to the extent of a Turkistani Union of the five Central Asian Republics is simply a fantasy!

But the ground reality the Central Asian population crave not for religious dogma but for western^y paths of development, which is more likely to be fulfilled via Turkic connections. Hence Turkey with its secular characteristics, European identity and free market economy is a more attractive model.⁹ Of course, this is in a bad ^{taste} for Islamic revivalism. But is also true, at the same time, that in all the five Cenral Asian Republics there are elements who have camouflaged themselves skillfully to use the grave situation once any instability creeps in.

Perhaps, the deteriorating conditions of the masses in some Muslim states have prepared a fertile ground for the phillp Islamic fundamentalist has got. Rafique Zakaria is of the view that the poor and the down-trodden, frustrated by the politics of the ruling classes, have often sought refuge in the promise of fundamenta^{list}, who assure them a better life, if not in this world, undoubtedly in the next. ¹⁰ The appologists of Islamic fundamentalism belive

9. Morton Abramowitz, a former US Ambassador to Turkey, quoted in Newsweek, 3 February, 1992, p.22.

10. Rafique Zakari, 'What exactly is Islamic Fundamentalism?', Statesman, 15 September 1985.

that 'Islam is an ideology and worship, a home and nationality, a religion and a state' all at the same time.¹¹ " It is the moral orbit around which human life ought to resolve in order to revive the contents of divine message".¹² In other words, it ending the boundaries of state, language, colonial and local tradition. In such ideological atmosphere propagated by Iran it is quite possible that the present new generation of Muslim in Central Asia gets influenced in this religious arena. Iran signed an agreement with the republic of Turkmenistan to promote tourism. The tourism organisation also planes and returning to Mecca in order to provide them facilities to visit holy sites in Tehran and in its bid to woo the central Asians, Iran has been writing its media for propaganda. Iranian broadcasts serve as a source of information for the Muslim clergy and other radical organizations. Iranian radio station of Gorgan and Bandar-e-Turkmen has been beaming their religion broadcasts to the Muslims of Turkmenia.¹³ As said earlier, Iran's ideological influence has even spread to Tajikistan which shares its language and culture with that country. It has gone to such an extent that the Tajik people started naming their newly borns Ayatollah!

Apart from echo of Iranian radio broadcast in Turkmenia, several other steps have also been taken by Iran with seriousness. However the majority Sunni Muslims of Turkmenistan do not seem to be concerned over this increasing Iranian ideological influence. Of course, Islamic activities have increased but not of the fundamentalist brand. Ashkhabad had no mosque in 1990 but now these can be found anywhere easily.¹⁴ Iran has not lost its

11. 'Fundamentalism : Spreading Tentacles', The Patriot, 2 October 1984.

12. Manzoorudin Ahmed, 'Integration of the Muslim World; Problems and Prospects', Pakistan Horizon, Vol. 34(1), 1981, p.4.

13. P. Stobdan, n. 15 p-508.

14. For further details see, Eden Naby, n. 6, p-163.

hope to spread Islam and safeguard it in Turkmenia. This has even led to some sort of rivalry in between Turkey and Iran. In the meeting of the Heads of E.C.O. countries held in Ashkhabad, Rafsanjani openly admitted that there existed rivalry between Iran and Turkey for 'Influence' in Central Asian region.¹⁵ Immediately before that the E.C.O.'s summit, no fewer than twelve Iranian business, technical, cultural and political delegation toured the newly independent Central Asian Republics. The diplomatic offensive northward is led by Hasan Ibrahim Habibi, one of Rafsanjani's principle aides. Even Saeed Raja'i who heads the Foreign Office Committee of the Islamic Majlis (Parliament) has said that the Caucasus and Central Asia represent Iran's natural political, economic and cultural habitat. It is only natural that Iran should take initiative in developing a new reality there.¹⁶

Thus, the reality remains that the drive to make ethnicity (Based on kinship) and language, the basis of national identity, initiated by the Russian Government and then expanded and intensified by the Soviet regime, is being used by the Islamic Republic Of Iran for its own purposes. Earlier, the Soviet promotion of local dialects, separate ethnicities and official Islam aimed at undermining, first, the cultural unity of the area rooted in a national, universal faith, and second, the potential conglomeration of the Turkic and Persian speaking groups into one political block. Now Iran is trying to use both these aspects for the propagation and strengthening of Islam.

15. FBIS-SOV-92-092, 15 May, 1992, p. 7.

16. Muslim, 28 February, 1992; also consult, Surendra Chopra, *Islamic Fundamentalism : Pakistan and Central Asia*, in Sushil Kumar (ed), *Gorbachev's Reforms and International Change*, Lancer's Books, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 360-377.

Today the thousand year old Central Asian history and culture have assumed a new form and content after several processes of disintegration and reintegration. Of course, the final disintegration of the old society, both on the political-military front and the economic, social and educational policies, aimed basically at consolidating the new ruler's authority, was started by the Russian regime. These policies stimulated and brought to fruition the particularist tendencies that lay dormant in the native societies and galvanised the differences of ethnicity, dialects and region, tribe gave them anew meaning and status and vitality. Even the development of the capitalist economic order, the spread of literacy, written communication and modern education culminated in the rise of local and regional elites. The same elites are the forerunners and the architects of the Central Asian Republics in today's life. And the fact that the societies of these Central Asian Republics, being highly stratified, they are basically secular in nature with the tinge of a different - locale type of Islamism. The positive aspect remains that the path followed by these ruling elites referring themselves as 'Muslims', is the same as the pre-revolutionary Muslim reformers - the Jadids who sought to open the societies to the best of western cultural and technology. In such a scenario, regardless of the cultural continuum with Iran, the Central Asian Republic at this juncture of history, are steering clear of any Pan-Islamic block or alliance. In future, what course these republics would follow remains to be the million dollar question when one keeps the point in mind "No culture can be hermetically sealed off".

CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

For more than three decades former Soviet Union was a major force in the Middle East, and super power rivalry exacerbated many of the conflicts in the region. However, the end of the cold war and collapse of the Soviet Union have fundamentally altered the rules of the Game in the Middle East politics thereby producing a new fluidity in the region, new diplomatic alignments and new opportunities for both peace and conflicts.

The five Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan came into being with the demise of the Soviet Union in late 1991. This event was, in a way, synonymous with the turning of the wheel of history. Although the Central Asian States have earnestly begun to rediscover their roots on a more stable plane, their geographical, socio cultural and ethno-religious proximity have provided a fertile ground for the Islamic Republic of Iran to manouvere the whole Great Game according to her 'whims and subtle wishes'.

Islamic state of Iran with 'desire to rewrite her historical moornigs with these Republics on the basis of its Islamic connections, have shown more than enough interest in this Central Asian region. The struggle for influence in Central Asia by Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey its cetainly not new. But the way Iran is trying with all its efforts to bring the region under its own ideological fold has created a space which has to be taken care of cautiously in this post -cold war era.

The 55 million Central Asian population of which about 45 millions are Muslims, really had a time of relief after the de^{nise} of Soviet Russia. It is a fact that historically Islam has been an important factor in this Central Asian region. It has played a key role in the dissemination of Islamic Civilization in Asia and particularly in the Indian sub-continent.

However over seven decades of communist rule did curvethe religious policies and tried to evolve the official Islam. The Muslim population of this region had no option but to adjust themselves to these policies, but the seeds were much deeper. Now, after their independence, this Central Asian Republics are witnessing ^a sudden resurgence of Islam. There has been a rise in the observance of Islamic rites, adoption ~~of~~ Islamic form of greeting, religious marriages, performance of daily prayers and greater attendance ⁱⁿ the mosques. Evidence also points towards the phenomenal increase in the construction of new mosques throughout the region. True that the Central Asian Muslims, after a long 'Russian Embrace' of 70 years have lost, to some extent their Islamic tinge. But the fundamentalists still have a peculiar appeal and here Islamic State of Iran is playing the role of pivot to a greater extent in this region.

It is claimed that what the Central Asian population crave is not religious dogma but Western technology and markets, which are more likely to be fulfilled through their Turkic connections. This is, to some extent a good deterrent to the emergence of Islamic revivalism. But the fact that Turkey and Saudi Arabia backed by the US are still not in a formidable position compared to Iran gives the whole equation a dangerous aspect. In Iran they are elements who have positioned themselves skillfully to exploit the Islamic card.

should , any weakness emerge in the ruling elite. These forces have an added advantage when one considers the economic distress of the Central Asian Republic. In this situation, the fundamental appeals of Islamic republics of Iran, which are always under some ^{sort} of politico- economic or socio-cultural face., have a peculiar appeal. Indeed ,when the sense of wrong among the Central Asian Republics is heightened and the patriotic fervour is aroused then the situation becomes more aggravated and here the name of the Tajikistan comes instantly to our mind.

The drive of Islamic Republic of Iran in various segment of the Central Asian Republics, so that a niche could be attained , has been multifaceted. This ranges from Islamisation and economic penetration to the underhand bargaining for the nuclear arsenal, which , fortunately for Iran and unfortunately for the emerging world order, have a good storage in the Central Asian Republics.

On the economic front , Islam is having the advantage of providing outlets to the land - locked Central Asian regions. Iran is trying with all its means to change the economic order in this region. Be it Tajikistan with its strong Islamic sentiments or Turkmenistan or for that matter even Kazakhstan with their tumbling economy, Iran is pumping enough money to maintain and construct new mosques and madrasas, sending Islamic literature, audio - visual materials etc. Iran is developing its communication links which includes railway, road, telephone and airlines with the Central Asian regions. It is even developing relations with the China in this ^{field} so that it could make her dreams of emerging as a regional power, come true.

Iran revived the near^{dead} ECO and Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone to further her own politico-economic ambitions. All these Central Asian Republics have been brought under these organisations. True that the basic thrust of these various organisations have been of developing the economy of its members, the political implications can not be simply shrugged off. The aim of Iran has been to evolve this region as a political and economic power within her own leadership.

Tajikistan has been accorded the most favoured nation's status and the situation in Turkmenistan is much worse. Through its "Petro-Dollars Diplomacy" Iran is propagating its Islamic propaganda through its radio-stations of Gorgan and Bandar-e-Turkmen. The Iranian T.V. stations are also not behind with their capsules in Turkmen and Azeri languages. In Kazakhstan too, Iran is playing her game safely. There was a conflict between Iran and Turkey over the oil pipe line from Kazakhstan gas pipe line from Turkmenistan, But in an astute move, Tehran launched the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone which groups Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Russia thereby sidelining the interest of Turkey as a whole.

Iran is also interested in the 'nuclear storage' of the Central Asian Republics. There have been reports about Iran's clandestine nuclear dealings with these republics. Of course, Iran rejects all such allegations but the evidences point to something smoky. There have been various agreements and numerous delegation on nuclear matters, between the Iran and the Central Asian Republics. Besides these nuclear weapons, the enriched uranium

stock pile in this region has been also accessible to the interested buyers and Iran is always there to get the real benefit. Kazakhstan and Tajikistan hold about 30 percent of the Uranium reserve of the former Soviet Union and Iran have very cordial relation with these republics.

Though the relationship between Iranian the Central Asian Republic is cordial, but of late, it appears to be less active. As yet, so pressing mutual attractions have emerged. This is quite natural-the Central Asian Republic requires above all hard currency investment to help develop balanced and sustainable national economy. But Iran, grappling with her own economic distress alongwith social problem, is not in a condition, to be of much help to the Central Asian Republic. But at the ideological moorings of Islam are the guiding principles behind all the policies of Islamic Republic of Iran, be it foreign or domestic, Iran is taking extra pains to influence the Central Asian Republic with regard to the communication links such as railway, roads and airways, the development has been of high level probably because the preparatory work was started and almost completed even before the disintegration of Soviet Union. The other plans are likely to be a far longer time to come to fruition. As far as the common security issues are concerned, neither Iran nor the Central Asian Republic have much to offer each other beyond the general co-operation. However, if the Central Asian Republic want to survive and develop as economically viable and socially stable sovereign independent states, they will have to strike a balance between their interest and those of Iran. Otherwise, there always stands the old dictum-History repeats itself!

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