

Responses to Non-Traditional Threats & Challenges

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A distinct trend in international security in the post-Cold War era is the phenomenal rise of non-traditional threats. The most pervasive challenge to international stability is the one posed by extremist non-state armed groups and by terrorism. With the trend towards globalization and an increasingly interconnected world, these threats and challenges go beyond state systems. The devastating events of September 11, 2001, in the United States, followed by equally shocking attacks in London, Madrid and Delhi, and then the more recent carnage in Mumbai, have starkly underscored terrorism's global reach and its capability to infringe upon a state's sovereignty and integrity. These events have also reminded us of the sheer brutality of terrorism and its ability, as a kind of hydra-headed monster, to inflict large-scale suffering on innocent people.

Extremism is not a new phenomenon. However, the objectives of extremists heretofore tended to be limited to drawing attention to specific issues and grievances. Moreover, the means at their disposal were limited. The level and scale of violence was, therefore, comparatively low. A radical shift in the nature of extremism occurred during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979-1989. The extremism and terrorism that arose in the wake of this intervention were of a new magnitude, mainly because it was based on religion. The fight against 'godless Communists' generated religious fervor and, in the process, a strong Afghan resistance. The religious overtone of the struggle was sufficient to generate the Mujahideen movements and incite both Afghans and more faraway Muslims to take up arms against the Soviet forces. The religious fervor of the struggle turned extremism into a dangerous phenomenon with broad reach. The refugee crisis in countries neighboring Afghanistan provided the opportunity for the creation of a madrassah culture that functioned as an incubator of extremism and terrorism. In fact, many believe that the present day 'gun culture' in the region is a product of

this trend. But it remains unclear to this day whether the aims of the extremists are political or religious, or a combination of the two.

Samuel Huntington's thesis of a 'Clash of Civilizations', and more specifically of the inevitable clash between the world's two major religions – Christianity and Islam – may have deeply influenced a substantial number of religious extremists. This thesis, much discussed in the Muslim world, may have predisposed radicals to anticipate an attack that they perceived to be directed at their religion, and hence took it upon themselves to defend their faith by any means. As M. K. Narayanan, India's National Security Adviser since 2005, has observed, "an important driving force in regard to the Al Qaeda is the power of ideas and the rapid spread of images... the Al Qaeda mindset, even more than the Al Qaeda network, provides the most pervasive threat to Asian and international stability."¹

In the post Cold War environment, religious extremists were able to attract recruits from different backgrounds, professions and countries. Global mobility and communication has greatly facilitated their transnational reach and made terrorism a widespread phenomenon. Aside from its Arab core, Al Qaeda has recruited individuals of Pakistani, Sudanese, Afghan, and Central Asian extraction, and has managed to unite them to fight for a goal that nevertheless remains ill-defined and unclear. Foreign recruits may also have been lured into extremism by the offer of money. Certain states have extended support to religious extremists and terrorists, using militants as an instrument for furthering their own agendas. Such support has taken the form of covert financial assistance, the provision of safe sanctuaries, and training and equipment for the terrorists.

Jihadi groups have acquired the capability to absorb high technology and have proven able to make use of the latest communications media. As a consequence, terrorist groups and organizations are no longer constrained by geographical locations. The increasing availability of modern technology and communications has provided these groups with a global reach. One of the terrorists involved in the Mumbai attacks, for example, was a school dropout, yet he was proficient in the use of advanced means of communication.

¹ M.K. Narayanan, "Asia: Building International Stability," Munich Security Conference, February 10, 2008, available at <http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen>

Given the increase technological savvy of these movements and their ties to state institutions, observers have voiced growing concern that weapons of mass destruction could fall into their hands.

Central Asia, and in particular the Caspian region, is richly endowed with energy resources, and the past two decades has seen growing competition over the control of these vital assets. With the rise of extremism and terrorism has come a widespread fear that terrorists could target energy resources, at a time when energy security has become a serious consideration for both developed and developing countries. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, for example, has suggested the formation of a Caspian Anti-Terrorist Center to tackle this threat of terrorism.

To repeat, the rise of extremism and terrorism in India's neighborhood and in Central Asia began with the Soviet military intervention of Afghanistan. Although Central Asia was then part of the Soviet Union, interaction between Central Asians working in Afghanistan and the Afghan resistance had a profound impact on the region. In fact, many of these Soviet citizens left Afghanistan convinced of the righteousness of the Mujahideen cause. The withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1989 signaled the victory of the Mujahideen, but left a legacy of warlordism, a massive refugee population, growing Islamic militancy, and a booming drug economy.²

With the Soviet withdrawal, the security environment of the region underwent a fundamental change, which was to profoundly affect both India and the newly constituted Central Asian states. Pakistan had emerged as a front-line state during the conflict and played a vital role as the primary conduit for massive arms supplies and assistance to the resistance. There was a formidable proliferation of weapons in the region, and the U.S.'s sudden disengagement from Afghanistan left these problems unattended. The overthrow and assassination of the Afghan President Najibullah in 1996 ushered in a new phase for religious extremism, which reached its *nadir* under the Taliban. During Taliban rule Afghanistan became the epicenter of terrorism. The world witnessed a series of terrorist attacks, particularly the attacks on the

² Svante Cornell and Regine Spector, "Central Asia more than Islamic Extremists", *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2002.

U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the bombing of the USS Cole, which all traced back to Afghanistan.

Pakistan was among only three countries that recognized the Taliban regime. Bordering Afghanistan, its policies followed a strategy initiated by the late Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq, who in one keen observer's terms "passionately worked toward creating a pro-Pakistan Islamic government in Kabul to be followed by the Islamization of Central Asia. In military parlance this was Pakistan's strategy to secure 'strategic depth' in relation to India."³ India witnessed a sharp rise in the number of insurgencies and cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, the newly independent state of Tajikistan found itself in the throes of civil war and the opposition received support from different mujahideen groups and later from the Taliban. In 2002, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden observed that, "during the previous period, with the grace of Allah, we were successful in cooperating with our brothers in Tajikistan in various fields, including training. We were able to train a good number of [Tajiks], arm them and then deliver them back to Tajikistan."⁴ Importantly, the Fergana Valley – the bastion of Islam in Central Asia – also saw a rapid rise in religious fervor.

The defeat of the Taliban and the ongoing war on terror has not succeeded in destroying the terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan or in stabilizing the country. In fact, some analysts argue that terrorism has received a new lease on life by quickly adapting to the post-9/11 situation. The hub of terrorist activities gradually shifted to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) of Pakistan. It is primarily from bases in FATA that terrorists are carrying out their attacks and spreading the insurgency in Afghanistan. In the past few years, the view that Afghanistan is gradually tilting in favor of the religious extremists has gained adherents. This is an ominous portent for the future. The focus of this chapter is to assess the challenges posed by unconventional threats to the stability and security of the region and the significance of those threats for India as it expands its link with Central Asia..

³ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos* (London, Allen Lane, 2008), p. 268.

⁴ Quoted by Michael Scheuer, "Central Asia in Al Qaeda's Vision of the Anti-American Jihad, 1979-2006", *China and Eurasia Forum*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2006, p. 8.

From this perspective, Afghanistan is the critical link, its stability being vital both for India and the Central Asian states.

Rise of Non-Traditional Threats and Challenges

Both India and the Central Asian states have faced substantial problems with insurgencies and cross-border terrorist activities for over a decade. Presently, the problem is most pronounced in India, while the Central Asian states are affected to a lesser but still notable extent. After the end of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1989, military supplies to the Mujahideen ended in 1991, and USAID's humanitarian assistance program came to an end in early 1993. But the forces of religious extremism flourished. The Mujahideen overthrew President Mohammed Najibullah and assumed power in Afghanistan in 1992. Several factors provided sustenance to these forces, the most important among them being the proliferation and availability of arms, especially small arms.

The Proliferation of Arms

During the Soviet military intervention, Pakistan was the primary conduit for arms to the Mujahideen. It is estimated that the resistance fighters received arms worth US\$2 billion between 1979 and 1989. This aid was channeled via the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence Agency (ISI), which coordinated the supply of weapons to the Mujahideen. However, it is known that the ISI appropriated a large portion of the military supplies for its own purposes.⁵ In the process, the region was awash in arms, readily available for the extremists and terrorists who remained in the border areas even after the Soviet forces had withdrawn. An additional source of arms supplies was the huge stockpiles of weapons left behind by the retreating Soviet forces, which fell into the hands of the Mujahideen. A major central locale for the production, sale and proliferation of weaponry is Darra Adam Khel in the North West Frontier Province, commonly known as the 'Main Open Arms Bazaar.' Arms production in Darra was regarded as a cottage industry, but has gradually become a large

⁵ Salma Malik and Mallika Joseph, *Small Arms and the Security Debate in South Asia* (Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, Colombo, 2005), p. 34.

industry, free of government control and taxation.⁶ The arms bazaar of the NWFP is also renowned for the wide range of weaponry that it has on sale.

Moscow also contributed to the proliferation of arms in the region. Apart from the stockpiles left behind in Afghanistan, Russia supplied arms to the pro-government forces in Tajikistan in the civil war that began almost immediately following independence. Tajikistan was flooded with small arms during the early part of the civil war. In May 1992 alone, thousands of small arms including AK-47s and Makarov pistols were distributed, while the opposition received support from the Afghan-based mujahideen groups. Subsequently, the Northern Alliance opposing the Taliban in Afghanistan received additional weaponry from Russia and Uzbekistan.⁷

The beginning of the War on Terror in October, 2001, led to yet another influx of arms in the region. Pakistan became a frontline state once again in this war on terror, with a primary role to ensure the security of the supply route through the NWFP to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and to provide other logistical support. While the war on terror is in its eighth year, the forces of religious extremism and terrorism have not been weakened, and the surge in their activity makes the situation in Afghanistan unstable and insecure. Clearly, the availability of arms is a factor that underpins the insurgency; nevertheless, there has not been a strong effort to reduce the supply of small arms. As two scholars conclude, “advocacy on small arms has not been as intense as that on landmines primarily because the small arms campaign aims not at banning the use of weapons, but only in regulating their use, trade and transfer.”⁸

Drug Production and Trafficking

Intertwined with the issue of the proliferation of small arms is the production and trafficking of illicit narcotics, which is a major destabilizing factor and security concern, not only for Afghanistan but for all five Central Asian states. The last decade has seen a tremendous increase in the production and trafficking of drugs in and from Afghanistan. In 2007 Afghanistan produced

⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

⁷ S. Neil MacFarlane and Stina Torjesen, “Awash with Weapons? The Case of Small Arms in Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 24, no. 1, March 2005, p. 10.

⁸ Malik and Joseph, *Small Arms*, (n. 5), pp. 61-62.

a record 8,200 metric tons of opium, double the total amount of 2005, and accounting for 93 per cent of the world's entire production of opiates.⁹ Drug profits are a key source of financing that sustains extremism and terrorism. Linked with drug trafficking is the emergence of criminal groups and networks that oversee the safe passage of drugs through Afghanistan and Central Asia to markets in Europe. The link between criminal groups and terrorism is illustrated by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU, both a criminal and terrorist organization, appears primarily concerned with financial gain and successfully used terrorism in the early 2000s to maintain and secure routes for transporting narcotics.¹⁰ The Taliban initially considered drug trafficking un-Islamic, but later encouraged its production for financial reasons, particularly after 9/11.

Unfortunately, the number of troops available to NATO's ISAF mission and the fear of antagonizing local warlords that may themselves be involved in drug trafficking led to the mission being prohibited from involvement in the interdiction of drugs.¹¹

Unlike in the past, the processing of opium into heroin is now being carried out in laboratories located inside Afghanistan, but the chemical precursors required for the process are not available in the country. These precursors, primarily acetic anhydride, are provided from Russia via Central Asia. While the production of such substances in the region is known, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports that "no seizures of acetic anhydride have been reported in Central Asia in recent years".¹²

Several trafficking routes take the drugs from Afghanistan to markets. Among the preferred routes are those through Iran, through the Pakistani port of Karachi, and across Central Asia. The Tajik-Afghan border is porous and poorly guarded but Tajik law enforcement agencies still manage to intercept several tons of opiates each year. Turkmenistan has also emerged as a

⁹ Cyrus Hodes and Mark Sedra, *The Search for Security in Post Taliban Afghanistan*, Adelphi Paper 391, 2007, p. 35.

¹⁰ Tamara Makarenko, "Crime and Terrorism in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, vol. 12, no. 7, July 2000, p. 16.

¹¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, (n. 3), p. 325.

¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan*, September 2007.

major export route Afghan opiates. From these southern Central Asian states, smuggling routes converge on Kazakhstan, which has no less than four main routes through which the drugs reach Russia and Europe.

Threats and Challenges to India

The security scenario in India's neighborhood gradually deteriorated during the last decade of the twentieth century. Besides the victory of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia had undergone profound changes. It is now clear that the new situation will be a permanent feature of the region, posing new threats and challenges that affect both India and the Central Asian states.

India's geopolitical horizons widened with the independence of the Central Asian states. Although India does not share a direct boundary with any of them, it considered them as part of its extended neighborhood, with which it faced common threats emanating from a common source. Afghanistan's provinces had long enjoyed a high level of autonomy but the Soviet intervention changed this dramatically, with extremist and terrorist groups thereafter a constant presence. This did not augur well for the unfolding security environment in the region.

The defeat of the Soviet superpower provided a tremendous stimulus to extremism. Many religiously-based terrorist groups had sprung up in the course of the war, and these groups were well-trained, armed and equipped and benefited from a safe haven in the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as in the Pakistan-administered part of Kashmir. Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces these groups lost their primary target. Some began instead to focus on, or were encouraged to focus on, the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, leading to heightened militancy there.

New Delhi's considers Kashmir an integral part of the Indian Union. The Indian government has always maintained that Kashmir is a bilateral issue to be negotiated in a peaceful manner by India and Pakistan. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Defense for 2006-07, for example, stated that "on the Jammu and Kashmir issue, India is ready to look at options, short of redrawing the boundaries....India has declared its readiness to find a pragmatic solu-

tion to resolve the J&K issue.”¹³ Successive Indian governments have upheld this position. During the tenure of the National Democratic Alliance between 1999 and 2004, Minister of External Affairs Jaswant Singh stated that “let it also be clearly understood that Jammu & Kashmir is not a global foreign policy issue. It is an issue that has been made contentious by repeated and persistent interference in India’s internal affairs by Pakistan. That is why it is and can only be a bilateral matter.”¹⁴ While the Pakistani government has sought to internationalize the issue and has sought third-party mediation, the Indian government has preferred bilateral mechanisms. Suffice it to say that Kashmir is the main issue that has prevented the establishment of normal and good neighborly relations between India and Pakistan since the inception of the two countries.

In the early years of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, the activities of extremist and terrorist groups went unnoticed. Numerous religious-based groups and organizations sprang up in India as well as in Pakistan. Among those deserving mention are Lashkar-e-Taiba (founded in 1990 in the Kunar province of Afghanistan but based in Pakistan); Jaishe-e-Mohammad (founded 2002 in Karachi); Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (founded in 1989); while the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) is a separatist organization with the aim of independence for Kashmir. It has differed with other militant organizations on the question of violence.¹⁵ The declared objective of these groups was jihad against the Indian government and the ‘liberation’ Kashmir. Qari Abdul Wahid, who now claims to lead Lashkar-e-Taiba’s operations in Jammu and Kashmir, wrote in the December, 1999, issue of *Voice of Islam* that the organization would uphold the flag of freedom and Islam through jihad not only in Kashmir but in the whole world.¹⁶

With the capture of power by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Indian security concerns worsened. As the Indian Ministry of Defense put it, “any fundamentalist regime in Afghanistan such as the Taliban could be an insidious

¹³ *Annual Report, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 2006-2007*, p. 4.

¹⁴ *Official Statements of the Government of India* (September 11 – January 13, 2002), Ministry of External Affairs.

¹⁵ Praveen Swami, “Terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir in Theory and Practice”, in Sumit Ganguly (ed.), *The Kashmir Question Retrospect and Prospect* (London, Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 2003), p. 58.

¹⁶ *The Hindu*, January 19, 2009.

threat to our secularism, as well as a potentially destabilizing factor in Kashmir.”¹⁷ Adding to India’s strategic apprehensions was the possibility that Pakistan’s search for strategic depth vis-à-vis India could succeed, especially after the Central Asian states unexpectedly gained independence in 1991 and a religious-oriented regime came to power in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, India experienced unabated militancy and cross-border terrorism leading to immense loss of innocent lives, destruction of property, and disruption of normal life.

A large number of foreign militants from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sudan and several Arab countries have been involved in the militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. However, there is so far no evidence to suggest that Uzbeks belonging to the IMU have been involved in militant activity there. Over the years, the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands have become the center not only of Pakistani and Afghan extremists, but of Pakistani pan-Islamic groups that are involved in the Kashmir militancy. A dangerous dimension is that terrorist groups operating in Kashmir are trying to link up with radical Islamist groups in other parts of India, with the objective of destabilizing the whole of the country.

After the fundamental changes that occurred in Afghanistan in 1992, Pakistan hoped that the numerous militant groups that it considered ‘strategic assets’ could be utilized either covertly or overtly for fighting in Kashmir. It referred to these as ‘freedom fighters.’ At stake was the fundamental conflict between a notion of statehood based on religious exclusiveness and one based on secular democratic values.

The extremist and terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan shifted their base to the FATA region after the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in 2001. Media reports suggest that these groups have become strong and resilient. They operate freely, crossing the border with impunity and imposing their writ on the people living in the border areas. Developments in the Swat Valley in 2009 are a case in point, though the extremists’ hold on the region did not last. The confidence, audacity and capability of the ex-

¹⁷ *Annual Report, Ministry of Defense, Government of India, 2000-2001*, p. 11.

tremist groups has come to pose a serious challenge to Pakistani society as a whole and to Pakistan's sovereignty.

Threats and Challenges to the Central Asian States

While India viewed developments in Afghanistan and Central Asia with concern, Pakistan perceived them as an opportunity. Since the people of Central Asia are predominantly Muslims, Pakistan hoped to spread its religious agenda there, and to use this opportunity to strengthen its quest for strategic depth *vis-à-vis* India. In this approach, Pakistan had the support of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan also hoped to emerge as a bridge between the landlocked states of Central Asia and the rest of the world, in the process creating a strategically integrated region. To operationalize this goal, the Muslim-based Economic Cooperation Organization in 1993 devised a Quetta Plan focusing on transportation.

The leadership in the newly independent Central Asian states were highly circumspect about Pakistan's activities in the region. Being suspicious of political Islam and of Islamabad's religious agenda, they responded negatively to Pakistan's overtures and looked instead to India for enhanced engagement.

When the Central Asian states gained independence, an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty prevailed. The fratricidal civil war in Afghanistan that began following the Soviet withdrawal had an ominous impact on the newly emerging states. Historically and culturally, Central Asia had centuries-old ties with Afghanistan, the Indus valley and India. These ties were based on transport, trade, religion, ethnic links and historical conquests. In the changed context of 1991, it seemed that the religious factor might become the force to reconnect Central Asia with Afghanistan. Although there was an upsurge of religious revivalism in Central Asia, it did not become the binding factor that was expected in some quarters. The Constitutions of all the five new states proclaimed that the state-building process would be based on secular, democratic ideals, and the five states have proceeded along these lines, seeing political Islam as a leading threat to their statehood.

Islam has flourished in Central Asia for centuries, and the authority of the unofficial clergy there remained powerful even during the Soviet period. In Tajikistan, clandestine Islamic groups had an important underground exist-

tence. After 1991, existing groups began to surface, while many new ones were formed. Following the collapse of Communism, mosques were constructed in every town of the Uzbek part of the Fergana Valley, while in the Kyrgyz sector their number rose to 1,500. While religious schools sprang up across the region. In the ideological vacuum that emerged, people began to observe religious practices and customs with renewed fervor. The search for a new identity led many to look for values that were rooted in religion. Yet in the main, the form of Islam that began to reappear was benevolent and tolerant. This was due to the influence of Sufism, and also to the spread of modern education and the emancipation of women. Typical organizations in this vein were the *Jamaats* in Uzbekistan, self-help organizations that focus on social welfare, oppose militancy, and see a greater role for Islamic values in society.¹⁸ The international Tablighi Jamaat organization is also active in Central Asia, aiming at strengthening Islamic values.

Extremism was not an integral part of the religious ethos of Central Asia, but it nevertheless emerged thanks mainly to external support, largely due to external support. As Tajik scholar Muzaffar Alimov states,

there was a clear activation in the nineties of foreign religious organizations in the countries of Central Asian region. The period saw a rise in the number of foreign emissaries from Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan and the Gulf countries. They were engaged in propagating different Islamic tenets and Pan-Islamic ideas, which were irrelevant for the people of the region.¹⁹

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE made inroads into Central Asia with their religious agendas. Significant financial flows from Saudi Arabia were available to propagate the ultra-conservative Saudi doctrine of Wahhabism. The result of these activities was a government backlash that soon led even some legitimate cultural groups to be banned. In the succeeding sweep many innocent people, particularly in Uzbekistan, were jailed. In order to avoid

¹⁸ Havilah Hoffman, "Islamic Radicals in Central Asia 'Not All that Significant' - Expert", *Eurasianet*, April 25, 2006. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/recaps/articles/eavo42506.shtml>

¹⁹ Muzaffar Alimov, "Central Asia after Collapse of USSR and Islamic Radicalism", in J.N. Roy and B.B. Kumar (ed.), *India and Central Asia: Classical to Contemporary Periods* New Delhi: Astha Bharati, 2007, p. 217.

persecution, many religious leaders fled to Afghanistan, where they were warmly welcomed and provided with sanctuary. Importantly, once in Afghanistan, these exiles gained vast experience in political and military struggle and established contacts with other Islamic organizations and movements.

The eruption of the Tajik Civil War provided an opportunity for foreign groups to further cement their contacts in Tajikistan. The opposition, consisting of both religious and non-religious components, fled to Afghanistan, where they received training, arms, safe havens and financial assistance. Special study camps were set up to impart religious knowledge. It is estimated that nearly 100,000 Tajik opposition members relocated to Afghanistan between 1992 and 1997. Whether or not the Tajik civil war was at bottom a religious affair, the resulting struggle resulted in the loss of 40,000 lives.²⁰

The rise of the Taliban and their ability to hold on to power had a profound impact on Central Asia. The Taliban's rapid advance into northern Afghanistan fuelled apprehensions about a possible 'Greater Afghanistan' that could destabilize, if not break up the newly formed states. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sought the help of Russia in meeting this challenge, but both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan tried to ensure their security by means of a bilateral dialogue with Pakistan.. On a visit to Tashkent in October 1996 President Farooq Leghari of Pakistan assured the Uzbek president that the Taliban had no territorial ambitions beyond Afghanistan's borders, a message which he repeated in Almaty on 28 October, 1996. Nonetheless, Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev issued a warning that the Afghan conflict must not be allowed to spread beyond its borders.²¹ The Indian government was also deeply concerned at these developments and welcomed the meeting in October, 1996, at which Russia and the Central Asian states planned their strategy for meeting meet this danger.

The Taliban's impact on Central Asia was visible in the rising profile of the IMU, with its declared objective of jihad against the Karimov government in

²⁰ Ibid., p. 218.

²¹ Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London, 1998), pp. 131-32.

Uzbekistan.²² The IMU received full support from the Taliban in this objective. The Taliban in turn wanted the IMU to create diversionary activity to draw attention from its own struggle with the Northern Alliance. Martha Brill Olcott, a U.S. specialist on Central Asia, said that "... allegations that the IMU was tied to the Al Qaeda network were well documented by materials seized in their camps in northern Afghanistan in late 2001 and early 2002."²³ The IMU carried out several incursions into Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and even attempted to assassinate President Karimov in 1999. During the War on Terror, the it fought alongside the Taliban, with an IMU faction still based in FATA of Pakistan. Well-known analyst Ahmed Rashid, who visited a madrassah in that region, reported that "... the teachers showed off the special classrooms where hundreds of students from Central Asia were studying Islam with the help of interpreters."²⁴

The Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), long active in the Middle East, has worked across Central Asia to realize its dream of a new Muslim Caliphate that would destroy existing states and abolish other faiths. There also splinter groups such as Al Bayat (large presence in Tajikistan); Islom Lashkarlari; the Islamic Movement of Central Asia (a successor to the IMU); Akromiya; and Hizb-an-Nusra.

Religious extremism and terrorism are not the products of economic hardship but they gain legitimacy in environments facing poverty and unemployment. In the opinion of President Karimov,

... the harsh realities encountered during the transition period, such as the objective differences among members of the population and natural distinctions in level of property ownership, have induced parts of the population to adopt a Soviet like mentality and call for a return to an illusory utopian equality, or to launch a pseudo-struggle against luxury and excessiveness – a return in essence to the artificially leveled stan-

²² "The Call to Jihad by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan", in Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Delhi, 2002), pp. 247-249.

²³ Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia: Terrorism, Religious Extremism, Regional Security", Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, 29 October 2003, available at <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=1387>

²⁴ Rashid, *Jihad*, (n. 22), p. 140.

dards that make society flat, gray and backwardIn these circumstances, ideas such as Islamic Wahhabism have become deceptively popular.²⁵

It cannot be denied that foreign religious extremists have successfully used economic incentives to lure people into their work. In a lecture in April 2005, former Uzbek Ambassador to Iran, Khaydarov, spoke of "... a sense of futility that causes people to turn to religious ideology.' Teachers in Uzbekistan, he said, make US \$12 a month, while religious groups pay new members as much as US \$200, mainly with funding from Saudi Arabia'²⁶ The only solution to this problem is to generate more economic development, which has been underway across Central Asia during the last six years. This same challenge faces all those who would like to see Afghanistan develop along moderate and productive lines.

Once the War on Terror was launched, the scale of terrorist activities in Central Asia dropped, notable exceptions being the series of blasts in Tashkent in 2004 and the assault on Andijan by Akromiya in 2005. Religious extremism will continue to flourish across the region as long as Afghanistan-Pakistan based terrorist groups are not destroyed. Improvement in economic conditions and the spread of open, participatory politics would to an extent mitigate people's hardships, and thereby reduce further the likelihood of extremism and terrorism. This in turn will depend on the emergence of new elites and new leaders across the region. It is likely that the future leadership and new elite would be more focused on economic development and growth than their predecessors. Their agenda should be foster the integration of their national economies with the world economy. Aware of their landlocked status, current leaders are already paying greater attention to the expansion and diversification of transport corridors. Participatory politics in Central Asia is at a nascent stage, but with the passage of time and new leaders at the helm, democratic cultures and institutions could once more begin to evolve. An evolutionary approach would make the process of democratization irreversi-

²⁵ Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty First Century* (Cambridge Mass. , 1998), p. 24.

²⁶ Amb. Abdusamat Khaydarov, "Rise of Islamic Extremism in Central Asia", 28 April 2005.

ble. A noticeable development that is already contributing to a cultural shift in the region is the growing popularity of the English language. This is already greatly facilitating people-to-people interactions. In the long run, participatory politics, open societies and economic development are likely to do more than anything else to marginalize extremism and terrorism.

A great deal will depend on Central Asia's external environment, especially developments in Afghanistan and in the border lands between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Obama Administration is focusing on Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly the border areas, and considers this to be the central point for its struggle against terrorism. However, progress in this region could lead to an exodus of extremists and terrorists to Central Asia., a possibility that President Karimov has recently cautioned against. And as was noted earlier, it is Tajikistan that is most vulnerable to this destabilizing possibility.

Indian and Central Asian States' Response to the Challenge of Non-Traditional Threats

The Indian government has dealt with this challenge of this mounting threat at various levels. At the domestic level, Indian security forces have been guarding the frontiers with Pakistan. Cross-border terrorism has been contained and the destabilization of J&K has been prevented. At the political level, India has attempted to solve the issue within a democratic and secular framework. Regular elections to the State Assembly take place.

The government engages in dialogue with radical Islamist groups operating in J&K, provided that they accept the Indian Constitution. And a composite dialogue with Pakistan has been initiated. Focusing on bilateral mechanism, India has expressed its readiness to find pragmatic solutions to all outstanding issues, "short of redrawing the boundaries."

Every time India-Pakistan relations harden, these bilateral mechanisms come under strain and their value is questioned. In the wake of the Mumbai attacks, all bilateral initiatives have been stalled. However, reports suggest that the composite dialogue between India and Pakistan has in fact made substantive progress. Inevitably, a central point in India's diplomacy is to highlight the threat emanating from religious extremism and cross-border terrorism in

Kashmir. Combating nontraditional threats and challenges, especially those supported by external forces, is India's uppermost security concern. India has therefore been supportive of initiatives in this area launched by the United Nations. It has supported Security Council Resolution 1373, a milestone resolution aimed at combating terrorism, and it has introduced the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, which is currently before the UN's General Assembly. During Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's June, 2009, visit to Yekaterinburg he elicited support for this initiative.

At the regional level, India and the Central Asian states have a common stake in peace and stability in the region. In the early years, the Indian concern was that developments in Afghanistan could cast their shadow on the new countries of Central Asia, which it perceived as fragile entities engaged in the monumental task of systemic transition for which they lacked experience and expertise. At this nascent stage of their consolidation process the potential for Afghan turmoil to spill over into Central Asia appeared strong, not least because the borders were porous and undefined and because of the vast Central Asian diaspora living in northern Afghanistan. From the Indian perspective, the possibility of a destabilized Central Asia seemed very real.

The Indian government was equally concerned over Pakistan's approach to Central Asia. At the core of India's concerns was the apprehension that Pakistan would seek to acquire 'strategic depth' vis-à-vis India by bringing these states within the fold of Islam. The strategy of seeking strategic depth in Afghanistan was initiated by President Zia-ul Haq of Pakistan even before the Soviet Union collapsed. The break-up of the Soviet Union and the overthrow of Afghanistan's President Najibullah by the mujahedeen gave a powerful impetus to pursue this strategic project with added vigor. Indeed, Pakistani leaders found the prospect of a vast region coming under the sway of their own Islamic values very appealing. However, they seem to have underestimated the degree to which the values of the Central Asian milieu were liberal and moderate, a balance between modernity and tradition. Yet at the time, the potential that the Pakistani push for "strategic depth" in Afghanistan could strengthen the forces of instability religious extremism in the broader region could certainly could not be discounted .

To repeat, Indian apprehensions were not unfounded. Official thinking in New Delhi perceived the beginning of the Tajik civil war and the Taliban's capture of power in Afghanistan as part of Pakistan's larger plan to extend its influence in Central Asia, and to do so under a flag of Islamization. Also lending credence to this conclusion was the widespread talk of a "Greater Afghanistan," much of it emanating from Islamabad. All this, and the obvious fact that the fragile new states of Central Asia were in no position to defend themselves, led India to welcome the Russian military presence in Central Asia as a guarantor of peace and stability. This fully accorded with India's interests. Later, when the Taliban came to power, India supported the anti-Taliban Afghani forces (mainly Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras from the North) that came together under the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance received backing from Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were also apprehensive of the Taliban but opted for a policy of engagement and negotiations with the Taliban. It was therefore both logical and consistent for India and the Central Asian states to welcome the US-led War on Terror and NATO's military presence in the region.

India's lingering concerns over the future of the new Central Asian states were put to rest in 1991-2 when all the five presidents visited India in quick succession.²⁷ The Central Asians were all keen to develop friendly ties with India and now sought its experience and assistance in their gigantic task of post-Soviet transformation. Such hopes came to them naturally, given their extensive past contacts with the Indian government and institutions and their sense of long-term cultural affinity with India itself. Thus, the congruence of interests on the issue of religious extremism and terrorism and shared perceptions of the threat they posed to pluralistic and secular societies became a cementing factor in India's relations with the new states of Central Asia.

During his visit to India in 1992, President Askar Akayev declared in his banquet speech that "Kyrgyzstan is looking to India as an example as it sets

²⁷ President Saparmurat Niyazov of Turkmenistan – April 1992, President Askar Akayev – March 1992, President Islam Karimov – 1992, President Nursultan Nazarbaev – February 1992, President Karimov – August 1991.

about restructuring its economy and socio-political system.” Further, he announced that “We categorically reject extremism of any kind. Let there be neither extremism of the Communist type nor that of religious fanatics.”²⁸ Echoing this sentiment, Kazakhstan’s president Nursultan Nazarbayev said during his 1992 visit to India that, “It was vital for our country to ensure that there would be no overdose of religious indoctrination and that its policies remain secular.” India, he declared, could play an important role in this context and he went on to underline the importance of economic cooperation and cultural interaction with India.²⁹

Undoubtedly, these statements eased India’s concerns and allowed the commonality of interests thus affirmed to become a valuable component of India’s new ties with the Central Asian states.

On gaining its independence, Turkmenistan opted for a foreign policy based on the principle of “neutrality.” However, there existed between India and Turkmenistan an ancient and rich legacy of contacts and affinities. Acknowledging this, the Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov visited India twice. However, the fact that non-traditional threats and challenges figured less prominently in Turkmenistan’s threat perceptions than in the thinking of the other new governments of Central Asia limited India’s interaction with Turkmenistan in this sphere. However, in all other areas the two countries have built and maintained friendly ties.

India built its relations with the Central Asian states on the basis of their aspiration to become more open and progressive societies, as well as their commitment to secularism and to democracy. Beyond this, India and the Central Asian states share common views on the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking. Yet in spite of the many positive factors in its favor, India’s engagement with Central Asia was not as vigorous as it ought to have been.

Several factors hampered a more vibrant engagement with Central Asia in the early years. Obviously, the Indian government had not anticipated the break-up of the Soviet Union, with which it had built up cordial and enduring ties over the years. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet collapse the

²⁸ Foreign Affairs Record, No. 2, February 1992 (A Government of India Publication), p.114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

Indian government had two major concerns. First, it wanted to restore its ties with Russia and put them on a new basis. This was essential in view of India's substantial cooperation and interdependence with Russia in the area of defense. Second, India wanted to bring its policy towards the new states of Central Asia into a coherent relation with its all-important policy towards South Asia. Stated differently, India endeavored to embrace ties with these new states in such a way as to reinforce its abiding concerns in South Asia. It was for this reason that India's main focus was on countering Pakistan's attempts to acquire strategic depth in Afghanistan and to do so in such a way as to constrain Pakistan's ongoing militancy in Jammu and Kashmir. In pursuing these goals, India continued to treat diplomatic exchanges as an important policy tool. Also relevant was the fact that India had just launched its own economic reforms, which placed great demands on resources and the government's attention.

All these factors impinged on Indian policy makers as they moved to open and expand their contacts with the new states of Central Asia. As a consequence, it was simply not possible for India to devote to the task the attention it required and which it amply deserved in light of India's deep contacts and affinities there. In sum, while other major powers had already established a strong presence in the region and were deeply involved there, particularly in the areas of extractive industries and transport, India's presence in Central Asia remained minimal and its policy largely reactive,

It was noted above that both India and the Central Asian states welcomed the US and Western military presence in Afghanistan as a means of defeating the Taliban., the existence of which posed a serious threat to the integrity and sovereignty of India and the new states of Central Asia. The Central Asian states believed that the threat of religious extremism and terrorism had grown to unmanageable proportions, necessitating an intervention that only the West, particularly the US, could deliver. An insightful local observer pointed out that:

“The majority of the public regards the American military presence as a gift from Allah. The reasoning behind this attitude is simple – ‘Russia has no money to protect us and people here aren’t used protecting themselves.’”³⁰

Impelled by such reasoning, The Central Asian states offered access to bases on their territories and military facilities. By the turn of the century, the impact of India’s economic reforms were becoming visible and its international profile was rising. The Indian expansion of private entrepreneurship and particularly the growth of information technology, generated the perception that India was a rising power in Asia. This change also led India to broaden the parameters of its foreign policy. For the first time India was willing to look beyond South Asia, and to pay more attention to its entire extended neighborhood; including Central Asia and Afghanistan, as well as South East Asia. There was also a broadening of Indian strategies on security matters and a new desire to play a more proactive role throughout the region.

In this context, New Delhi came to assign a significant role to what it called “strategic defense dialogues” between India and a number of partnership countries in the area. The intent of these dialogues was to generate a stronger spirit of partnership that would lead to the preparation of a globally-coordinated initiative to fight the menace of “terrorism, arms proliferation, drug trafficking, piracy and other nefarious activities by non-state actors.”³¹ This shift in India’s strategic thinking significantly broadened its areas of concern. As the Ministry of Defense put it in its annual report for 2005-2006.

“India’s size, strategic location, trade interests and a security environment that extends from the Persian Gulf in the West to the Straits of Malacca in the East and from Central Asian Republics in the north to near the equator in the south, underpin India’s security response. In view of this strategic spread it is essential for the country to maintain credible land, air, and maritime forces to safeguard its security interests.”³²

³⁰ *Current Digest of Post Soviet Press*, vol. 53, no. 42 (2001), p. 17.

³¹ *Annual Report 2005-2006*, Ministry of Defense, Government of India, p. 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 2002-2003, p. 2.

Together, these shifts substantially energized Indian policy in Central Asia, leaving it pro-active rather than reactive. At the same time, India's involvement in Afghanistan also deepened, and is now very substantial. In the Indian perspective, the security and stability of Afghanistan is linked with that of Central Asia. Indian engagement with Central Asia ranges from security and strategic diplomatic to the economic and cultural spheres. The Central Asian states have welcomed India's enhanced interaction with them. Having consolidated their independence, they are now focusing on efforts to build new polities, a project that has progressed everywhere, albeit at very different paces. In the economic sphere Kazakhstan has made considerable progress, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan proceeding at a slower pace and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan having recently adopted policies that are intensifying the pace of their development.

Together, the Central Asian states are all now ready to look southwards. The Declaration of Strategic Partnership between India and Kazakhstan encapsulates a qualitative enhancement of their relations, with India now playing a significant role in the execution of Astana's multi-vectored foreign policy. India is increasingly perceived as a 'balancer,' which implies that it can and should play a positive and constructive role in the region, whether it chooses to act independently or in cooperation with the US or Russia, or perhaps with both. More recently, India's strategic partnership with the US has opened up new opportunities that need to be thoroughly explored in the coming period.

By the time India was ready to launch its proactive policy in Central Asia, other major powers had already established their presence there. As a result, the space in the region for India appeared limited. However, it is important to stress that the interests of the major powers in Central Asia are increasingly balanced, and not necessarily inimical to one another. This significant change is due as much to the adroit balancing policies of the Central Asian countries themselves as to the actions of the external powers. This further enhances India's ability to play an active and positive role in the region.

The main challenge facing both India and the Central Asian states has been religious extremism and terrorism, and in all cases this emanates from the same source. In recognition of this reality, India established Joint Working

Groups (JWG) on counter-terrorism with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in 2003 and with Kazakhstan in 2004. The aim of each JWG was to review and analyze the regional security scenario, coordinate information, and share experience. The JWG frameworks also envision the training of paramilitary personnel. Thus, it is appropriate that Russian border guards sought India's help in combating extremism and terrorism on the strategic southern border of the Commonwealth of Independent States. India had also extended help in training the forces of the Northern Alliance.

A valuable input into Indian policy is the developing defense cooperation between India and Afghanistan's northern neighbors. Military-Technical Cooperation Agreements have been signed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These agreements provide for the construction of training facilities, the purchase of defense equipment and the regular exchange of high-level military delegations. The possibility of Indian involvement in upgrading and modernizing defense-related industries in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is also to be explored.

While announcing 'infrastructure requirements' of the Military Training College in Dushanbe during a visit to Tajikistan in November, 2003, Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, stated that "We are cooperating well in the field of defense training. We have agreed to institutionalize contact between our armed forces in specialized areas."³³ Media reports at the time claimed that India had acquired base facilities at Ayni near Dushanbe, but in the fact the Ayni project was modest in scale. Dispelling reports that India had acquired a strategic toehold in Central Asia, India's Defense Minister A.K. Antony declared that the air base would not be put to any military or strategic use and emphasized that India would only provide training there to Tajik pilots.³⁴ Whether the Ayni base is a minor project for training or an actual military base is a moot point. The challenge of extremism and terrorism was growing in Tajikistan at the time, and Russia was apparently not in a position to provide further security. According to Stephen Blank, a well-known American specialist on Eurasian affairs,

³³ *The Hindu* (Chennai), November 14, 2003.

³⁴ *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), July 20, 2007.

“Russian weakness in Central Asia compounds India’s immediate and long-term problems there. In the short term, the chaos in Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia over which Russia might once have exerted a strong restraining influence is now free to spread southwards.”³⁵

For this reason India and the Central Asian states have been rendering support to the war on terror, including the initiative at Ayni.

On issues of regional security, a successful scenario will depend largely on a balance of interests among the US, Russia and China. Through the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program, the US, European Union, and NATO have established a wide-ranging presence in Central Asia. Russia’s great leverage there stems from its strong military presence and dominance of the energy sector there, as well as the large presence of migrant workers from Central Asia in Russia itself. Within careful limits the Central Asian states perceive all these external presences as essential. As one official put it, “We need external powers to maintain stability of the region, but do not want one dominant power, whether it is the US, China, or Russia.”³⁶

The Central Asian states have joined a number of multilateral regional groupings. Earlier, it was the Collective Security Treaty of 1992 that provided them with a security umbrella. In 2001 the Shanghai Five evolved into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the agenda of which includes both security and economic issues. Among its structures, the SCO has established the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) primarily to deal with unconventional challenges. At present RATS is merely a coordinating center for the exchange of information. Cooperation among its members is weak and the SCO lacks forces of its own with which to deal with threats and challenges. India is today an observer in the SCO but all the Central Asian states have strongly backed India’s application for full membership. Another regional security arrangement is the Collective Security Treaty Organization

³⁵ Quoted by Stephen Blank, “India’s Rising Presence in Central Asia”, in Ariel Cohen (ed.), *Eurasia in Balance: The US and Regional Power Shift* (Burlington, USA, 2005), p. 186

³⁶ Foreign Affairs Record, No. 2, February 1992 (A Government of India Publication), p.114.

(CSTO), a Russian initiative aimed primarily at integrating its members' defense sectors. At a Moscow summit in February, 2009, the CSTO formed its own Collective Fast Reaction Force to deal with threats and challenges.

It remains to be seen how effective and efficient these various groupings will be. India is also a member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a Kazakh initiative. Though CICA is a forum for discussion, in the long term it aims at broadening the parameters of security by involving states outside the Central Asian region.

The existing regional groupings in Central Asia act as a limiting factor on India's efforts to intensify its engagement. While the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has not emerged as an effective grouping with respect to security matters, it has nevertheless initiated some people-oriented programs in such areas as the alleviation of poverty, transport connectivity, education, and health care. Now that Afghanistan has become a full member of SAARC, the possibility of redefining the grouping as a series of contiguous states has arisen. This could be an advantageous development. Besides broadening its interests in Central Asia, India has taken a major stake in the development of an independent, democratic and secular Afghanistan. Indian policy in Afghanistan emphasizes institutional and infrastructure development but also includes a strong element of counter-terrorism. It is fair to say that by now Indian policy in both Central Asia and Afghanistan consists of an integrated effort to counter terrorist forces and develop viable economies that can provide people with livelihoods and thereby undercut popular support for extremism.

At the political level, India's secular and democratic credentials have endeared it to the Central Asian states, which feel they have much to gain from India's experience and expertise in building democratic institutions and managing diversity. Visits by heads of state have become a regular feature of this interaction. In January, 2009, India honored President Nazarbayev by naming him guest of honor at its annual Republic Day Parade.

This highlighted the raising of the India-Kazakhstan relationship to a qualitatively higher level through the Declaration on Strategic Partnership between the two governments. Above and beyond such formal relationships, India's influence in the cultural sphere is vast. Its films and music are ex-

tremely popular, which undergirds an attitude of warmth and friendliness towards India among ordinary Central Asians. This prepares the ground for India to further expand its engagement with the countries of Central Asia.

The main economic driver of India's engagement in Central Asia lies in the agrarian sector; including rural development, agro-based industries, and the upgrading of existing infrastructure in these areas. India can take up such projects either independently or in partnership with third countries. In the long run it is certain to be a leading force for developing prosperity in the region as a whole. In order to be effective in this, however, India must have safe and a reliable access to Central Asia. Such connectedness in the field of transport will give the landlocked Central Asian states access to India itself and to all the ports and economic centers of the South Asia region as a whole.

What Are the Best Options By Which India Can Connect With Central Asia?

The best option for India to reach out to Central Asia would be to follow the ancient land transport routes and their modern equivalents directly across Afghanistan. As this happens, one can expect the same volume and range of cross-cultural interaction that occurred in the past to take place once again. The best option lies through Pakistan and Afghanistan and thence via Uzbekistan or Tajikistan to the West and North. The main transport artery of Afghanistan is the "Garland Highway" or "Ring Road" that connects Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, the Ring Road has been considerably rehabilitated with assistance from the US, Japan, and Saudi Arabia. India's Border Road Organization is also involved in the construction of a road linking the Iranian port of Chabahar and the Ring Road. Uzbekistan's existing transport and communication links are extensive, though they need repair and upgrading. A study conducted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) identifies Uzbekistan as the only country in the region to have even a small proportion of roads that can be classified as 'primary' or class-I highways.³⁷ This positions Uzbekistan well as a future

³⁷ Asian Development Bank, *Central Asia: Increasing Gains from Trade Through Regional Cooperation in Trade Policy, Transport, and Customs Transit*, Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2006, <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/ca-trade-policy/> (accessed on April 8, 2010)

transport hub for the region, including Afghanistan, even though major projects underway in all its neighboring countries will doubtless bring them solidly into the picture as well.

The ADB is also of the opinion that the main southern transport corridor should follow the routes from Pakistan to Afghanistan via the Khyber and Bolan passes through Peshawar and from Gwadar and Quetta to Kandahar. These much-preferred India-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan transport corridors have so far failed to emerge as a workable project, but could do so if the U.S. worked more actively with relevant countries and funders to bring them about.

Several significant imponderables vex this transport corridor, the main one being the continuing troubled relationship between India and Pakistan on the one hand, and acrimonious relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the other hand. Terrorist groups based in Pakistan continue to operate with impunity, posing grave challenges to both India and Afghanistan and preventing progress on these all-important transport corridors. The outrage that took place in Mumbai in November, 2008, and the continuing instability in Afghanistan are only the most recent in a series of fresh impediments that have arisen. Indeed, it is by now evident that extremist and terrorist elements also pose a threat to Pakistan itself.

For the time being, Pakistan's approach to this important transport corridor is exclusivist. In promoting its Gwadar port as the center for trade and as an outlet to the sea for the states of Central Asia, Pakistan still seeks to exclude India. Meanwhile, the economic price that Pakistan pays for its failure to operationalize the Gwadar route as a major international corridor mounts daily. In the end, it is Pakistan itself that stands to gain most in terms of transit revenues from this route. And whenever the Gwadar port becomes fully functional, the Central Asian states will gain a critically important alternative as they develop their important new southward orientations.

An equally significant step towards opening Central Asia and Afghanistan to Pakistan, India, and South Asia will be the TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Since it will bring significant benefits to all parties involved, and since it is directed against no one, its realization may in the end prove to be less problematic than many think to-

day. But until the projects for roads and pipelines that bring together Pakistan and India are actually realized, India will have no alternative but to pursue the second option, namely, a sea-cum-surface transport route connecting India with Uzbekistan through Iran and Afghanistan. India has rendered partial assistance in building the Chabahar port on the Makran coast. The Zaranj-Delaram highway from the Iran-Afghanistan border to Afghanistan's Ring Road is now fully operational, thanks to Indian assistance. This corridor needs to be further developed to create smooth and easy access to Afghanistan and Central Asia via Uzbekistan. The following observation by Frederick Starr, a renowned scholar of Eurasian affairs, is not only apt but places the transport corridor issue in the right perspective:

“... the best way forward is to pursue whatever options make the best sense under the circumstances; if one channel is blocked let trade flow through others. This process will encourage, even force those countries creating the main political blockages to calculate the opportunity cost to themselves of their own perspective.”³⁸

Afghanistan is central to the development of all the main options for improving connectivity between Central and South Asia. If Afghanistan is to play its essential role in this grand development, stability and security must be established there. The progress of peace and stability in Afghanistan will inevitably pave the way for Afghanistan to reemerge as a transport hub. This brings us to the vital question: what are the prospects for stability in Afghanistan?

The Afghan Connection: Peace and Stability

Afghanistan's future stability will hinge on its external environment. One of the greatest destabilizing factors is the continuing insurgency led by the Taliban and Al Qaeda. These forces have certainly been weakened, but they have not been destroyed. Inevitably, the question arises as to whether such a conflict can be resolved through military means? It is clear that non-traditional threats and challenges involving well-armed insurgents call for conventional military methods, such as those being employed by the NATO-

³⁸ S. Frederick Starr, *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia* (Washington, D.C., 2007), p. 31.

led ISAF. However, it is by now equally clear that measures that foster economic development must also be taken. This point is now generally accepted by the US and ISAF. What is not understood, and what has not been accepted, is that economic development must be pursued *simultaneously* with conventional warfare and not held off until the conventional campaign of arms has achieved its main goals. This is an extremely challenging task, of course. but any attempt to do the military and economic programs *seriatem*, holding off the latter until what is judged to be sufficient progress has been made in the former area, is doomed to fail.

The fate of the Kejaki dam on the Helmand River provides a laboratory example of how this process can succeed or fail. The Kejaki dam came to symbolize NATO's resistance to the insurgents. The Kejaki dam was designed to provide power to Helmand and neighboring Kandahar and, significantly, water for the pursuit of normal agriculture. It thus posed a frontal choice between legal agriculture and illicit poppy cultivation. The dam has not been completed, the rationale for the delay in its completion being that the security situation must first be taken in hand. This logic is 180 degrees off the mark. The completion of the Kejaki dam, however difficult the process, will provide an impetus to agriculture and create normal livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people. A strong military presence during the process of construction will go far towards dispelling fear of the insurgents among the local populace, and will encourage the people, particularly the unemployed and youths, to throw in their lot with the reconstruction effort.

The Obama administration has favored for Afghanistan a policy that combines a heightened military presence, an intensified reconstruction effort, and serious pressure on Pakistan to cease its support for the well-entrenched insurgents based in its tribal areas. The US has also named Richard Holbrook as a Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. These steps differ more by degree than by kind from those of the previous administration in Washington. The success of this approach will depend on Pakistan's ability to control effectively its volatile border regions and to rid the area of extremist elements. Collaborative efforts between the international community and local elements on the ground will need to be expanded. The scenario that must be avoided at all cost is to place the insurgents under sufficient pressure

to drive them into neighboring Tajikistan or the Fergana Valley but not enough pressure to destroy them. The mountainous Badakhshan province of Tajikistan could provide a perfect hide-out for the extremists and terrorists and enable them to continue their war to far into the future..

Meanwhile, drug trafficking shows no sign of abating either as an economic reality or as a destabilizing force in the region. Traffickers undermine already fragile new state institutions, undermining the vitals of the governance system. Closely related is the widespread corruption, the tentacles of which have reached the highest levels of government. The resulting unofficial taxes are massive, and place money in the pockets of warlords, local authorities, and Taliban militants, but not of local farmers, who receive a pittance. Any developmental effort must therefore include a strategy to curtail the drug trafficking that meets 40 to 50 percent of the financial needs of the Taliban alone, not to mention other groups. This issue is intertwined with the urgent need for better border controls and management, especially along Afghanistan's highly porous borders with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. The US and NATO are already focusing on this issue, but success remains elusive.

Another critical issue that impinges on the peace and stability of Afghanistan is its border with Pakistan, which the Kabul government does not accept and which at many key points remains undefined. Afghanistan has contested the Durand Line since 1947 and it must now be considered defunct. President Zia-ul Haq's vision of a Pakistani-influenced region extending into Central Asia depended on an undefined border with Afghanistan, so that Pakistan's army could justify any future interference in that country and beyond. After 9/11 many Pakistanis maintained that if President Karzai would only recognize the Durand Line he would sufficiently appease Islamabad to enable it to cut off Pakistan's military support for the Taliban.³⁹ The Taliban and other terrorist elements have taken advantage of this undefined border, operating as a criminal organization to move contraband goods, drugs, and small weapons across it.

Politically, Afghanistan is not stable. The democratic institutions established after 9/11 have yet to evolve into durable structures. Many elements in Af-

³⁹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, (n. 3), pp. 267-68.

ghanistan, including the local warlords, are interested in maintaining a weak state. Added to this is the mounting insurgency that poses a direct threat to Afghanistan's sovereignty. Although presidential elections were held in 2004, President Karzai's influence does not extend far beyond Kabul and he is often dismissively referred to as the 'Mayor of Kabul'. With serious doubts being cast about Karzai's ability to govern the country in an effective manner, it is often suggested that a dialogue should be opened with moderate Taliban and other elements that are willing to work within the Constitutional framework and shun violence. Supporters of this approach hold up the "Tajik Model" as a successful application of this approach.

This inevitably gives rise to the question, "Who is a moderate Taliban?" Do there exist elements of the Taliban with which reconciliation is possible? The Tajik model has succeeded because the main opposition group, the Islamic Renaissance Party, was willing to work within the constitutional framework. Would moderate Taliban give up their dream of establishing Sharia rule? In the final analysis, democracy and open societies are the best guarantors of social harmony but these can only be instituted through social consensus, not by fiat. A step that might promote this process would be the return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran and the return to them of the plots of land they owned before the Soviet invasion. This would widen the basis of democracy as members of this large group who are not committed to jihadism would gain a stake in the new order. In a speech at the Munich Security Conference on 8 February, 2009, President Karzai announced that,

"We will invite all those Taliban who are not part of Al Qaeda, who are not part of terrorist networks, who want to return to their country, who want to live by the constitution of Afghanistan, and who want to live in peace and live a normal life, to come back to their country."⁴⁰

Afghanistan needs investments in the agrarian and industrial sectors, road networks, power transmission, and engineering. The reconstruction effort has addressed some of these issues but an accelerated pace of economic devel-

⁴⁰ *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), February 9, 2009.

opment would hasten the process of tackling such other concerns such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and healthcare.

In closing, let us return once more to a theme that has been sounded above. An important step towards improving Afghanistan's economy would be to restore its traditional position as a hub of transport and trade. Afghanistan long served as the crucial link between South and Central Asia. A revival of that status will be a daunting task but not an impossible one, provided there is the requisite political will. The idea of a "Greater Central Asia" connecting South Asia with Central Asia is worth pursuing as a means of creating vast opportunities for lucrative interactions between the two regions. India's easiest access to the region would be via Pakistani routes, but troubled relations between the two countries leave India with no choice but to pursue the Iranian option.

India has assisted Iran in building container terminals at Chabahar port on the Makran coast and has constructed the highway link between Zaranj on the Iranian border and Delaram on the Afghan Ring Road. The Central Asian states are all keen to intensify their engagement with India and the Indian Ocean region, and Southeast Asia as well. They appreciate the economic importance of the southward direction for their landlocked countries and have grown impatient with the lack of progress on the opening of common routes involving India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thwarted in that direction, they are increasingly looking to the Iranian route, which is scarcely what Pakistan expected would be the outcome of its exclusionist policy.

In this context, there is acknowledged to be an acute need for some kind of multilateral grouping that would bring the South and Central Asian states closer together. The concept of a "Greater Central Asia" that includes India could be the basis of such a grouping. Another possibility is that SAARC could be extended to Central Asia. Now that Afghanistan is a member of SAARC, such a possibility has become very real. In the long run, economic prosperity and political stability is bound to alter positively the geopolitics of the region. Enhanced political and economic interaction through transport and trade could replace extremism and terrorism as the link connecting South Asia with Central Asia. There are no easy solutions to the huge complexities that are involved, but one simple step would be to give priority to

long-term economic considerations as opposed to the politics of the short-term.

Concluding Observations

Extremism and terrorism are the prime security concerns of all countries in the region, as well as the major powers. The US and NATO forces are battling the insurgents but will require lots of time and tenacity before the adversary can be eliminated. Drug trafficking, smuggling in small weapons, and organized crime are factors that fuel extremism and terrorism. These have to be tackled simultaneously. In India's view, Afghanistan and Central Asia are interlinked and must be integral components of its approach to regional security. Traditionally, India enjoyed cordial ties with Afghanistan, and maintained multifaceted interests in Central Asia as well. After 9/11, India has focused on restoring those ties by becoming closely involved in the overall reconstruction effort. India's presence and influence in Afghanistan is substantial. Its goal, very simply, is to help Afghanistan become a sovereign and independent country. Today, India has the capacity to play a constructive role in Central Asia, but the presence there of other major powers acts as a limiting factor. A new possibility that has opened up for India is to work in cooperation with either the U.S. or Russia or both in order to secure mutual benefits in the region. The challenge of extremism and terrorism continues to loom over the horizon in Central Asia. Tajikistan in particular is highly vulnerable due to its proximity to Pakistan's FATA region, which should be factored into any future strategy to combat terrorism.

Over time, new elites and leaders will emerge in the Central Asian states. The emerging elites are likely to be more focused than their predecessors on economic development and on integrating their countries into the world economy. As a recognized power in the field of science and technology, India can play a major role in the changing economic landscape of Central Asia. With economic progress, opportunities for employment will expand. This in turn will create conditions more favorable to participatory politics and to open systems of information and governance, and less welcoming to some of the dysfunctional activities that are so common there today. The war on terror is expected to enter a decisive phase during the tenure of the Obama ad-

ministration in Washington. If this combines a determined military presence with a more active promotion of the economy on a regional basis, prospects for both Afghanistan and its Central Asian neighbors will greatly improve..

A big question mark hangs over Pakistan's ability to rein in the numerous extremist and terrorist organizations that flourish on its soil, and also its ability to control the borderlands adjoining Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the many pessimistic predictions, the reemergence of Afghanistan as a center of trade and transport is still possible, especially if Iran is involved in the evolving strategy. The southward direction for the Central Asian states is essential for strengthening their economic prosperity and for integrating them into the world economy. In the long run, such a prospect holds immense potential as a means of reorienting the geopolitics of the entire region.