CHAPTER - 3

Emerging Trends- Resurgence Of National Culture And Assertion Of Islam And Its Role In Cultural Identity

Like all religions, Islam lays emphasis on the observance of certain well defined rituals and practices. These rituals and practices have added significance in the eyes of the believers because the essentials of these are laid down in the holy Quran. As it is well known, Islam thus gives importance to five essential practices namely 'Salat'- the private prayer, pronounced five times a day, Zakat- obligatory alms designed to aid poor, Hajj-the pilgrimage to Mecca once in the lifetime, Sawm-fasting during the moth of Ramadan. And Shahada-profession of belief in one god and in Mohammad and his prophet. Besides there are some important principals and practice of moralities and duties in almost all spheres of life.

It is precisely the observance of these rituals and practices that Islam appears to have distinguished itself.
And therefore, it is precisely these observance that were discouraged during the Soviet period. On the other hand the very reassertion of Islamic identity in contemporary Uzbekistan is linked with the observation of these religious rites and practices. Thus, in many ways their observance may be regarded as an integral element of the process of re-assertion of Islamic identity in Uzbekistan, as well as with various socio-political problems connected with it. We shall now take up these points in the following pages.

During the Soviet period the observance of religious rituals and practices were restricted, but the people secretly performed them, and were able to preserve their Islamic identity to some extent. But due to inadequate knowledge of Islam, they practiced and professed a crude version of Islam, basically an amalgam of clan heritage and Quranic teachings. In the post-Soviet Uzbekistan the main emphasis of the people is on re-discovering the true form of Islamic rituals and practices. In this new situation, the local mullahs seem to play a major role in the revival of true Islam.
Cultural assertion in Uzbekistan

In the post Soviet Uzbekistan the Uzbeks are strongly inclined to adopt Islam as their way of life. The rising influence of Islam in Uzbek society can be seen from the substantial increase in the performance of religious rituals and practices by the people. The namaz [Salat] or daily prayer which is the most important practice of Islam is being performed by majority of Uzbek muslims. The Friday prayers draw large congregation despite the difficulties in their accomodation, due to a relatively small number of mosques. To accommodate the ever increasing number of performers, hundreds of mosques have been built throughout the country since 1991. It is clear from the fact, that the province of Namangan accounted for 130 mosques with another 470 the rest of Uzbekistan, more than the total in all Central Asia before 'Prestroika'.

Zakat, obligatory alms designed to aid the poor has also been practiced by majority of people in accordance with the strict Islamic rules. The Hajj pilgrimage to holy

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1 Hiro, Dilip, op.cit., p.179
city of Mecca, which was the dream of every believer during the Soviet period, is no longer a dream. The number of Hajj pilgrims has also been increasing since the Independence of Uzbekistan. It is clear from the fact that until 1989 only four muslims from the namangan province were allowed to undertake the Hajj, which increased to 1500 in 1992, accounting for nearly two fifths of the Uzbekistan's total of 4000 pilgrims. Sawm or fasting during the holy month of Ramadan has been widely practiced by people. During the Soviet period the government allowed only three days of fasting. That is, the first, fifteenth and the last days of Ramadan. Now the people follow the true Islamic rules and fast for the whole month. The fifth pillar of the Islam the 'Shahada'-profession of belief in one god and in Muhammad his prophet is made by the believer in his heart and strong belief in it makes the believer a strong Muslim. Other than these five practices the Uzbek people have also been practicing several Islamic customs and rituals. The people follow the strict Islamic rules in burial. The circumcision of every male child is done in the Islamic

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2. Ibid., p. 17
traditional way by the mullah, after which a feast is arranged by the boy's parents.

Marriages are being performed in the Islamic way as the mullah solemnize it by a formal nikaah. The people have also adopted the Islamic form of greetings 'Assalamwalaikum'. The importance of religious places and festivals have increased considerably since independence. The Islamic festivals like 'kurban bairam' and Uruza bairam are widely celebrated by the people. All these changes clearly show that the growing influence of Islam on the Uzbek society. The revival of the religious rituals and practices are nothing but the Uzbeks eagerness to re-assert their Islamic identity.

But, there are various Socio-political problems associated with the Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan. Since its independence in 1991, various external and internal forces have emerged on the scene and have actively been contributing in the revival of true Islam in the country. Many of them are prepared to take full benefit out of this new situation and are busy in creating
their area of influence by depicting them as real protectors of Islam in Uzbekistan.

In the present day Uzbekistan the local clergy [mullahs] are poised to play a major role in the revival of Islamic rituals and practices in Uzbekistan. Their position and prestige have substantially enhanced in the society. To further strengthen their position, they have been sponsoring the rapid revival of Islam. The Sermons delivered by them in the mosques with the return to religious practices, to the Arabic alphabet, but equally to good conduct while deploring the deleterious influence of Russian customs, especially of women. They have been demanding religious teachings in Schools, hallal meat, the official observance of Muslim holidays and a shift from Sunday to Friday for weekly holiday. They inveigh against traditions deemed as non-Islamic, e.g., extravagant spending on celebrating the rites of passage, mixing among men and women, the consumption of alcohol etc.

The increasing number of madrashas and the rise in the level of Islamic education also indicate the growing
influence of the mullahs. Hundreds of boys and girls have started their studies in Islamic law and Quran, since 1991. The children are given free Islamic literature to distribute to their families. On weekends they join mullahs to propagate their message in local village mosques.

The mullahs consider that the government of Islam Karimov is still communist and anti-Islamic and must be overthrown by an Islamic revolution. The significant growing influence of Islamic forces on the Uzbek society has alerted the Uzbek government. The government has now taken a soft stand towards religion and has been sponsoring the revival of a mild variety of Islam. The Uzbek president Karimov and his party members argue that Islam is concerned only with the person's moral and spiritual well being. They are determined to keep religion and politics apart, a principal enshrined in the Uzbek constitution. But the government has been stressing the impact of Islam on domestic and external affairs. It is also paying serious attention towards the building of new mosques and other Islamic institutions for the deep
study of Islamic teachings and philosophy. A very special attention has been given towards the religious education. Primary schools have begun to teach Arabic, the Quran, and other Islamic customs. Realizing the importance of Islam in the Uzbek culture the Government has paid careful attention to the symbol of Islam. The Karimov government has been very active in sponsoring and administrating religious celebrations. Soon after his election Karimov incorporated, id-ul-fitr and and id-al-qurban in the article 77 of the Uzbek labour code as national holidays.³

For the first time in the modern Uzbek history a member of the Islamic clergy has been introduced into the government. Mullah Gandhzhan Abullaev was appointed head of the committee for religious affairs attached to the cabinet ministers in April 1992⁴. President Karimov has been tactfully dealing with the revival of Islam in the country and has managed to retain a degree of mutual respect with the Islamic clergy.

² Ibid.p.28
The process of Islamization of Uzbek politics has also caused serious problems for the government. Various political parties and groups based on religion have emerged in the country since independence. The Islamic Renaissance party has a simple goal of creating an Islamic state, which has placed the party on an inevitable collision course with the government. The IRP has also been criticizing the official version of Islam propagated by the government.

Adalat [justice], which is a socio-religious organisation has started to impinge on the everyday life of the Muslims in the Fergana valley. They are forcing the people to follow strict Islamic rules. The vigilance groups formed by 'adalat' have been imposing veils on women and putting a ban on the sale of Alcohol.

There are also many negative aspects associated with the Islamic revivalism in Uzbekistan. The rise of the militant brans of Islam, Wahabism is evident, especially in the Fergahna valley. They may pose a danger for
secular fabric of the country, if their influence continues to grow in the Uzbek society.

The most important effect of the revival of Islamic ideals seems to be on the social life of the country. The women who have been enjoying almost equal status with men during the Soviet period are now being forced to conform to the fundamentalists' social mores. Those who follow Wahabis have abandoned their colourful Uzbek costumes for white veils that cover the body from head to toe. Some girls have voluntarily taken to wearing 'hajab' (headscarf). The fundamentalists have also demanded the withdrawal of young girls from schools. This will considerably affect the status of women in Uzbek society, if the Government fails to protect their interests.

The Islamic revival may also lead to increase in the child marriage ratio and polygamy as they are prevalent in the Pre-Soviet Uzbek society. The negative attitude of the Muslims towards family planning will definitely lead to rapid population growth creating lots of problems in the society.
But undoubtedly, the revival of Islamic rituals and practices in Uzbekistan can be seen as the people's willingness to re-assert their Islamic identity. Islam has also provided them a spiritual and moral guidance, which in turn is substantially affecting the way of life of the people. The growing influence of Islam may also play a major role in controlling the rising corruption in the society, which has arisen as a result of deteriorating economic condition.

Reinforcing legends

The Uzbek regime identifies legendary personalities of Mavarounnr as the forebearers of Uzbek identity. According to the regime, Uzbek national pride is rooted in the great military, scientific and the cultural exploits of such men as Amir Timur, his grandson Ulubek and Alishir Navoi. In his first International address, President Karimov recalled the contribution that our people [Uzbeks] have made to world civilization. In December 1994 Karimov decreed, well in advance, the
grand celebration of 660th anniversary of Amir Timur's birth. Films were announced on his name.

Similar such events went on to glorify the identity of the two regions. But only future will decide on how far such identities are retained.

Assertion Of Islam And It's Role In Cultural Identity In Tajikistan

Throughout the years of its Soviet history Tajikistan was known as a forlorn outpost having the highest birth rate and infant mortality in the USSR, the last hearth of anti-Soviet resistance and the Basmachi movement which went on into the late 1930s. In fact, Soviet history is the only history Tajikistan, as a nation, has ever had. It appeared on the map of the world in the mid-1920s, with the other countries of Central Asia, when the Soviets nationally and territorially delimited Turkestan, which they inherited from the tsars and the Emirates of Bukhara and Khiva. Tajikistan first appeared as an autonomous republic within Uzbekistan in 1924 and was elevated to the status of Union Republic in 1929.
Independence, which followed the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, was accompanied by a fierce power struggle leading to the outbreak of the civil war in December 1992. In violation of the civic truce proclaimed at the November 1992 session of the Tajik Republican Parliament, a coalition of Soviet-era political elites and criminal elements known as the Popular Front of Tajikistan, attempted to annihilate the Tajik opposition, a coalition of Islamic and secular pro-democracy groups.

Although they had the backing of the Russian military and Uzbekistan's government, the attempt failed. Opposition forces were pushed across the Panj river into Afghanistan and soon resumed the armed struggle along the Tajik-Afghan border and inside Tajikistan. Tens of thousands of refugees were pushed into Afghanistan, and hundreds of thousands fled the country for Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union. The civil war claimed a heavy toll: about 100,000 dead; a devastated economy; and a society deeply fragmented both regionally and politically. Internal peace and stability have never
been restored. Moreover, the Tajik civil war destabilized the Central Asian region and has acquired an international dimension: As a result of short-sighted Russian and Uzbek policy, Afghanistan, with its own civil war, has been drawn into the conflict in Tajikistan.

There were a number of antecedents that led to the onset of the Tajik civil war, now in its third year: some rooted in history; some generated by perestroika; some influenced by outside interference in domestic political developments. More specifically, the elements were localism, ideological antagonism and power struggles between Soviet-era political elites and incipient proto-democratic, nationalistic and Islamic parties and movements, as well as Uzbekistan and Russia's meddling into Tajik politics.
Soviet's nationalities and cultural policy and its impact on Tajik's national identity

The 1920s division was not fair to Tajiks. Out of a total population of 1,100,000 only 300,000 found themselves in the confines of the newly established state, the others being isolated within the confines of other national borders. Worse still, ninety-three percent of the country's territory was mountainous. What turned out to be gerrymandering was explained by the desire of the Uzbeks to have the historically important cities of Bukhara and Samarqand as part of Uzbekistan, despite the fact that for centuries the majority of the cities' population was Tajik. This was a matter of prestige rather than a political necessity, for when the Russians conquered Central Asia in the second half of the nineteenth century, they made Tashkent the political, administrative and cultural center of Russian Turkestan, replacing cities of Bukhara and Samarqand, which had been regional centers for centuries.

As a result, Tajiks were left without two centers around which the process of nation-building was
unfolding. Consequently, without these cities' intellectual elite and professionals, Tajiks were denied critical resources for state-building. Despite the fact that both processes were soon completely suppressed by the Soviet regime, this loss contributed to the preservation of mahalgaroi (localism), when self-identification with a particular region was more important than awareness of being an ethnic Tajik. Tajiks were virtually thrown back to the state of "natural" isolation caused by geographic factors, because there was no other city in newly established Tajikistan that could play a central role for them.

The settlement of Tajiks has been such that mountains have secluded them into four regions loosely connected with each other. Over centuries, this seclusion contributed to the formation and preservation of strong local identities that were gradually melded at the court, madrassahs (Islamic religious schools) and bazaars of Bukhara and Samarqand. The integration process was accelerated in the 19th century with the emergence of the Tajik Enlightenment and the Jadid movement, the
Russian conquest of the greater part of Central Asia and the transition of Emirates of Bukhara and Khiva under the Russian protectorship.

With the establishment of Soviet Tajikistan, neither Dushanbe, a village-turned-capital, nor Khujand and Uroteppa (Istarawshon), other ancient cities of Central Asia now located in Leninabad province, could replace Bukhara and Samarqand as the Tajiks' cultural center. On the contrary, when the Khujandis ascended to top party and government positions in Tajikistan in 1940s they endorsed localism as the corner stone of their policy, and kept regional rivalries boiling, while reserving for themselves the role of arbiter.

Under the Khujandis, localism assumed such proportions that it began to somewhat resemble the Indian caste pyramid with its division of labour. Perestroika and then independence, produced an opportunity to step up nation-building process and put forward another difficult task that of state-building. It changed nothing for the Khujandi political elite: It was preoccupied exclusively with preservation of its
supremacy against the backdrop of popular strife and demands for putting an end to localism espoused by forces across the country. In 1991, these forces, which included the Islamic Renaissance Party, the "Rastokhez" Popular Movement, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan, the "La'li Badahshon" and "Nosiri Khusraw" societies, as well as forces loyal to Qadi Akbar Turajonzoda (chief Islamic cleric of the republic), formed what became known as the Islamic-democratic opposition, or "the opposition" for short. In May 1992, as a result of the opposition's limited success in curtailing Khujandis' authority manifested by the formation of the Government of National Reconciliation (GNR), the latter resorted to playing the card of localism to stymie further encroachment on their power. Precipitating a flare up of regional rivalries, the Khujandis succeeded in breaking the emerging unity of the country's other regions and lured political and criminal leaders of Kulob province into fighting the opposition forces, some of whom were natives of Karategin and Pamir. In December 1992, this fighting turned into the civil war.
It was outside interference that turned civic strife in Tajikistan into civil war. Uzbekistan and Russia came to the rescue of the Soviet-era Tajik nomenklatura, each for reasons of its own. The threat of Khujandis losing power in Tajikistan was also felt by ethnic Uzbeks, both those living in Tajikistan, where they constituted a powerful community of 23 percent of the population, and those in the Uzbek government. After the Bolshevik revolution, Moscow continued its policy of favoritism toward Uzbekistan, and Tashkent remained the center of Soviet Central Asia. It was after the emergence of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic in 1929 that the Khujandis' alliance which the Uzbeks paid off. With Tashkent's backing, the Khujandis rose to a leading role in Tajikistan during the 1940s. It has been no secret that since that time, all nominees for top party and government jobs in Tajikistan were first approved by Tashkent and only then by Moscow. In return, the Khujandis recognized Uzbekistan's leading role in the region, and made Tajikistan faithfully follow Uzbekistan's policies. The Khujandis followed the lead of the Uzbek's policies for a long time, and their defeat in
Tajikistan would have impeded the implementation of President Islam Karimov's plan for an Uzbek-dominated Turkestan, which he had been advocating since independence.

In addition, developments in Tajikistan were fraught with two other threats of a domestic nature. First, perestroika brought a revival of historical rivalries between Tajiks and Uzbeks. Since the introduction of glasnost Tajiks, both inside Tajikistan and in Bukhara and Samarqand, demanded that minority rights of the Tajik population in Uzbekistan be restored. Some even called for the "return" of Bukhara and Samarqand to Tajikistan.

Second, Islam Karimov feared that the success of the Islamic-democratic opposition in Tajikistan would strengthen anti-Karimov opposition in Uzbekistan, thereby jeopardizing his rule. In May 1992 these threats motivated him to intervene actively in Tajik politics on the side of the Khujandi elite and to procure their alliance with the Kulobis. Also, skillfully playing the card of "the threat of Islamic fundamentalism," he convinced
Russian President Boris Yeltsin that the Islamic tide was a threat to Russia as well, and obtained Russian military assistance for intervention in Tajikistan.

Russians and Russian-speakers living in Tajikistan, as well as Russian military units stationed in the republic, contributed to Moscow's decision to throw its support behind the Khujandi-Kulob alliance. They felt threatened by the advent of Tajikistan's independence and by the political developments that followed because they were not psychologically ready to give up their privileged status of "big brother" and submit to the rule of those whom they considered to be beneath them. This propelled emigration of Russians, Germans, Jews and others to Russia, the western NIS, Germany and Israel. Emigration had already assumed a mass character in Tajikistan after the adoption of a "Law on Language." The law, which made Tajik the state language, has always been considered by Russians a critical turning point and the main source of all their misfortune in Tajikistan since 1989, because it put their jobs and future at risk by necessitating the use of Tajik in the
state apparatus and in sectors of national economy where the Russians primarily worked. Emigration did not appeal to many because, upon their arrival to Russia, Tajikistani and Central Asian Russians and Russian-speakers discovered that they were not that welcome there, and that it was very difficult to adjust behaviorally to a new life among their co-ethnics. Furthermore, many simply could not afford to move out of Tajikistan. These factors persuaded many Europeans in Tajikistan to stay where they were and fight for their survival.

Evolution of the Political Situation in Tajikistan

Since December 1992

Since the outbreak of the civil war three processes have been defining life and politics in Tajikistan: A continuing surge of localism and the criminalization of political and everyday life, and a gradual loss of the republic's sovereignty and independence, which threatens the state's very existence.
Criminalization of Life

After the Popular Front of Tajikistan (PFT) came to power, Tajikistan became politically and economically controlled by the Front's leaders, many of whom had criminal pasts. These leaders were appointed to central and local governments, a move that led to a sharp increase in crime rates. What began with the criminalization of politics could not fail to affect all other aspects of life. The first move in that direction was indisputably the selection of Sangak Safarov as a leader of the Popular Front of Tajikistan. Safarov spent 23 of his 65 years in prison for violent crimes.

Many of those who came to power in the republic in November-December 1992 and were not affiliated with the PFT, also had criminal pasts. Former Tajik ambassador to the CIS and now Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Mirzoev was twice convicted of gang rape. Ilhom Shakirov, Tajikistan's trade representative in Moscow, served time for financial machinations.
Two Prosecutor Generals of Tajikistan indicted Abdumalik Abdullojonov, while he was still Prime Minister, on charges of corruption and embezzlement. The latter's criminal background has been the talk of Tajikistan for years. Many field commanders with criminal backgrounds became governors or mayors of districts, towns and settlements in areas where they had previously operated.

Leaders of the PFT did nothing to restrain their fighters from committing various crimes and mass killings in Dushanbe and during military operations in Gharm and Qurgonteppa. With the fragmentation of the PFT, the authorities lost control of its various groups and were unable to control crime and violence in the republic. Salomiddin Sharopov, prosecutor of Dushanbe, acknowledged that in 1993 the number of felonies went up by 19 percent and robberies by 32 percent, and the number of murders increased 2.2 times over 1992 figures. Shootings can be heard in Dushanbe every night. Various gangs have adopted the tactic of killing plant and factory managers in order to place their own
appointees in the positions. For example, in the course of 1993 Dushanbe's cotton factory changed managers six times, all of them were killed by rival groups.

It is virtually impossible to occupy any significant post without the backing of PFT gangs. Such gangs reportedly maintain unofficial prisons where they hold kidnapped people for ransom. Their primary targets are businessmen, Gharmis, and Badahshonis. As a rule, judges refuse to deal with cases in which PFT members are involved. In Dushanbe, a deputy prime minister was killed in March 1994. That was followed by the murder of the executive editor of the leading newspaper. There were assassination attempts on the lives of the former prosecutor general of Tajikistan and vice-president of the republic.

Tajikistani Russians (including 201st Division officers) have also been affected by the crime wave. Interviews with Russian refugees published in the Russian press suggest that they are subject to duress, and worse, because of their nationality. There has been a sharp increase in the number of murders of Russian
officers in Dushanbe and other towns of Tajikistan. Significantly, these murders are not attributed to the opposition, which denounces such acts. On the contrary, a special brigade of the Ministry of Interior, which consists of Kulobis with criminal pasts, has committed attacks on and insults to Russian officers.

Drug-related crimes are also on the rise. The drug business has developed into a major source of income for all sides the Government, the opposition, and the Russian military. (It should be emphasized that wild cannabis and the opium poppy have been cultivated in the region and used by Central Asian peoples in various ways for centuries and were an item exported along the Silk road from the Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent to Turkey and Europe.) Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and the subsequent civil war dramatically increased the drug business in that country. Now the civil war in Tajikistan echoes the Afghan pattern. The absence of a strong central government, the criminal past of many in the current Tajik leadership (and of warlords on both sides), the breakdown of the economy,
uncontrolled borders, and the expansion of commercial ties and transportation links to other parts of the world have all contributed to the expansion of the drug business in Tajikistan. Tajik authorities claim that private opium buyers from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and elsewhere are prompting a dramatic increase in the production of Tajikistan-grown opium, destined primarily for foreign markets. Drug abuse in Tajikistan itself is on the rise, with heroin surfacing for the first time. The greatest impact is in Gorno-Badakhshon Autonomous Province, in the almost impassable Pamir Mountains. Badakhshonis, who have been supporting the Opposition, found themselves economically and otherwise blockaded by the current regime. This prompted them to produce opium as a cash crop and engage in drug trade to survive. Drug dealers, who have been in business for years, are emerging as the most powerful figures in Pamir. Last year neighboring Badahshon province in Afghanistan roughly doubled its opium poppy acreage and potential opium production.
As one might expect, crime, drugs and arms trafficking are spreading beyond Tajik borders into the CIS.

Tajikistan: money, the desire to do some shooting, or the deep-seated wish to seek retribution for the lost Afghan war. After the Russian Defense Ministry realized that many of the contractors had criminal pasts originally many of the contractors were hired without screening it had to abandon the idea of contract recruitment.

In sum, the Government and the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan should be accorded primary responsibility for the republic's collapse into a state of lawlessness and crime. In May 1992 they distributed about 1,800 Kalashnikov submachine guns to Kulob criminal elements gathered in Ozodi Square. When those elements formed the PFT and later came to power, they made crime and violence the law of life. What neo-communist rule holds for Tajikistan is best expressed in a phrase attributed to President Rahmonov, to Dostiev or to former Minister of Interior Salimov: "We came with blood, and we shall leave with blood."
Gradual loss of the republic's sovereignty and independence

The inability of the republican leadership to cope with the political situation, exercise control over the whole territory, and provide the civil tranquility necessary for stable social and economic development combine to make Tajikistan politically and economically dependent on Russia.

Initially, after the ascent to power of the Khujandi-PFT alliance in 1992, Tajikistan fell into the same kind of dependency on Uzbekistan.

Those two countries provided crucial support for the restoration of the old regime. This explains the heavy Russian military presence and the initial Uzbek "advisory" role in the republic. Russia apparently admitted Tajikistan to a new ruble zone, thus taking over the devastated Tajik economy.
The Tajik Opposition: Fundamentally Moderate

The Tajik opposition has survived the crackdown and purges by the current regime. The opposition managed to reorganize itself and reemerge as a force which eventually made governments of Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan sit down at the negotiating table with it. The opposition has advanced its proposals for ending the civil war and continuously speaks about finding a political solution to the conflict. The Islamic wing of the opposition has repeatedly stated that it has no plans to build an Islamic state in Tajikistan. Notably, it has not found much support in the Muslim world.

Since December 1992, the opposition has been concentrated in three places: Afghanistan, Moscow and Gorno-Badahshon. Small groups of fighters operate in central Tajikistan (Karategin). The Islamic part of the opposition, which was shoved into Afghanistan together with more than 100,000 refugees, consisted of various groups, notably the Islamic Renaissance Party and forces loyal to Akbar Turajonzoda, who as Qadi was Chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board of Tajikistan, the country's
clerical hierarchy. These forces, plus nonaffiliated civilian refugees, organized the Movement of the Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (MIRT). The Movement is headed by Said Abdullohi Nuri, who has been spiritual guide of the IRP and close to Turajonzoda, who is now his first deputy. Another deputy is Muhammadsharif Himmatzoda, Chairman of the former IRP, now disbanded. Opposition fighters are concentrated in military camps in Tahor and Qunduz provinces of Afghanistan. The headquarters of MIRT are in the town of Taliqon in Tahor province.

The secular part of the opposition is based in Moscow. Now called the Coordinating Center of Tajik Democratic Forces in CIS, it unites members of the Democratic Party, "Rastokhez" Popular Movement, various Pamiri groups and formerly non-affiliated activists and intellectuals. The Center is headed by Otakhon Latifi, former Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan. The "Umed" (Hope) Fund deals with the Tajik refugees scattered in CIS. It is headed by Colonel Habib Sanginov, former people's deputy of the republican
parliament and former head of the republic's Traffic Inspection.

The opposition has managed to preserve the close cooperation and unity of its Islamic and secular elements, though the leader of the small Democratic Party and a number of his followers abruptly defected from the opposition to embrace Rahmonov and his Russian allies. As was the case in 1991-92, the opposition groups are working together on articulating a joint approach to ending the civil war. During the third round of intra-Tajik peace talks in Islamabad in October 1994, representatives of various groups forming the opposition drafted a joint declaration to announce formally the creation of the United Tajik Opposition and its underlying principles. After the discussion within each of the constituent groups the declaration was signed by MIRT, the DPT and the Coordinating Center on July 23, 1995. Said Abdullohi Nuri was re-elected the opposition's leader. The declaration is open for signature to other parties, groups or individuals in opposition to Rahmonov's regime.
Tajikistan and the supposed desire of the Islamic Renaissance Party and Muslim Spiritual Board of Tajikistan to build a theocratic state. The embellishment of this threat was necessary to justify Uzbek and Russian intervention and the resuscitation of the old totalitarian regime. To be sure, when the IRP was officially established in 1989, it proclaimed as one of its goals the establishment of an Islamic state in Tajikistan. It perceived that this goal would be the result of winning parliamentary elections and having the change approved by a referendum. But after coming face to face with Tajik political reality, and under pressure from Akbar Turajonzoda, the IRP dropped this goal from its charter. It became evident that a long period of "de-Sovietization" and education in the Islamic spirit was necessary to produce a constituency that would be prepared to discuss seriously the idea of introducing an Islamic state.

Since 1991, the IRP has been advocating the establishment of a secular, democratic state with a market economy, in which State and Church would be separated. In addition, the Islamic part of the opposition
has pledged its support for preservation of the multinational character of Tajikistan and has committed itself to the respect of ethnic minority rights. Most recently they advanced a proposal to include in the creation of a theocratic state in Tajikistan. Contrary to widespread rumors implying that Iran has supported the IRP and the MIRT, Iran did not and could not have played any active part in supporting the Islamic-democratic alliance in Tajikistan for two reasons.

First, it was as clear to Iranians, as to the leaders of the Tajik Muslims, that there were no immediate prospects for founding an Islamic state in Tajikistan, if only because there were few Tajiks who knew what being a Muslim really meant: what line of conduct, outlook and, generally speaking, mentality they would henceforth be expected to follow. It would be necessary first to have large numbers of educated clergy who, in turn, would be able to deliver Islamic teachings to the masses.

Second, good and stable relations with Russia are more important for the pragmatic Iranian leadership than the desire to have Tajikistan or any other Central Asian
state Islamicized as soon as possible. That is why, on the official level, Teheran does not go beyond the expression of concern for the plight of Muslims in Tajikistan. In addition to having Russia as its economic partner and arms supplier, Iran is apparently trying to win Moscow's support for its confrontation with the West, specifically the United States over its deal for the purchase of nuclear reactors from Russia. The fact that Russo-American relations have soured shows that Teheran might have made progress in this direction.

The Islamic Conference Organization, an international Islamic organization, did not even respond to the Tajik opposition's appeal to act as an intermediary in peace talks nor did it pay heed to the opposition's peace proposals. All this brought public lamentations from Davlat Usmon, one of the leaders of the opposition and former Deputy Prime Minister of Tajikistan. He disclosed that financial support, arms and ammunition came from various Islamic non governmental organizations and from sympathetic Tajik Afghan mujaheddin commanders. However, it was reported that
Javid Nasir, head of the Pakistani army's Inter services Intelligence Directorate, was fired for helping Islamic forces in Tajikistan, India, Sri Lanka, and the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Turajonzoda indicated that several countries were ready to assist the opposition in waging the war, not because of their love for the opposition but in order to weaken Russia.

Indeed, the Tajik opposition is not too weak to mount still damaging military offensives. It did so quite successfully in Tavildara in August/September 1994, as a kind of "protest vote" against the presidential elections and constitutional referendum. In sum, it is still unclear whether the Russian bear has really tamed the Tajik tiger. And the solution to that riddle lies no less in the internal dynamics of Tajik society than in diplomatic maneuvers of Russia and Uzbekistan described above.

Looking ahead, a new round of more formal negotiations between the contending Tajik sides is scheduled to begin sometime in November 1995. The talks promise to provide an acid test of whether this newly apparent
interest in the Tajik opposition, on the part of both
Moscow and Tashkent, will also be reflected in a more
flexible position on the part of the current Tajik regime
itself or whether the two sides will go back to the
battlefield again. Either way, the next few months could
represent a turning point for Tajikistan, and quite
possibly for its neighbors as well.

It's now clear from the political and social
conditions in this republics that Islam has emerged as
the most important factor in the making of cultural
identity in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.