

Conclusion

After seven decades of Communist system under Soviet Union, five new republics in Central Asia that became independent are faced with the difficult and potentially destabilising tasks of political and economic restructuring, which are most urgently needed to cope with the post-Communist domestic and international environments. This process unleashed new social and political forces with wide ranging objectives, potentially capable of having a definite qualitative impact on the structural nature and functional scope of the post-Communist governments. In the present research, an attempt has been made to study militancy and terrorism in Central Asia largely inspired by religious factors.

In the post-World War II period, the world security scenario underwent a massive change wherein not only the state actors but also non-state actors have played a determining role. Terrorism, especially during the Cold War period, received a tacit legitimacy as an instrument of foreign policy in international relations, due to ideological rivalry and divisions. In that situation, international support for terrorism was never difficult to come by. Above all, the lack of any commonly accepted definition of 'terrorism' provided it the much needed fillip to grow with the ineffectiveness of the international organisations to intervene when required. As a result, the world witnessed increasing number of countries spread across the globe coming under the fold of this menace.

Central Asia, the cradle of many civilisations in the past, has always been, due to its geographical location, host to many religions. It not only embraced them but in many cases contributed to their growth and intellectual and cultural enrichment. One such religion is 'Islam', which was the latest entrant to the region, coming as late as the eighth century AD and stayed there, patronised by the local rulers and people. Central Asia also became a fertile ground for Islamic culture and thought to grow as this region faced no serious foreign aggression after the establishment of Islam, till the Tsarist conquest. People being nomadic in nature,

without any settled agrarian base, found this monotheistic religion easy to practise. However, with the state patronage and the increased settled life style, Islam got great intellectual boost and produced eminent Islamic scholars through the ages. 'Sufism' found its patronage and enrichment in this region. The Islamic culture, literature, intellect and practice had its inputs from Central Asia that took it to great heights.

Tsarist occupation, of the region brought these activities to a grinding halt as the region once again relapsed to chaos and confusion with its polity and economy largely controlled from outside rather than locally. But great qualitative changes took place when Socialism was established in Soviet Russia followed by Stalin's dealing with the religious and nationality questions. For the first time in its history Central Asia was confronted with a kind of state atheism that made religion and religious practices a taboo. Mosques were closed down, religious schools, madrassahs outlawed, Islamic *shariah* and *sunnat* declared illegal, religious practices like *Nikkah* (marriage) and circumcision banned. The central crackdown on such activities was ferocious and severe. This policy continued through Khrushchev, Brezhnev and his successors though with minor changes from time to time as per the understandings of the leaders.

With the advent of Gorbachev, the scenario changed drastically. He inherited a state that was infested with the lacunae of the old system and which had alienated the religious population of Central Asia, who in spite of the restrictions imposed by the Soviet government maintained their religious traditions. There were secret and clandestine observances of religious rites and practices. Religious teachings were going on, though at a very small scale, secretly.

Stalin, later realising the impossibility of the total separation of the people from religion, had created a system of state-sponsored and controlled, religious activities in order to ventilate people's urges for religion in Central Asia. These

government-sponsored institutions were inadequate to satisfy the people and mainly propagated the programmes and policies of the government through their *muftis*.

In the seventies, the world witnessed several radical developments in the Islamic world, Arab-Israel war, Iranian Revolution, Pakistan's religious and military dictatorship and Moscow's intervention in Afghanistan. All these developments somehow or the other, played into the hands of the two rival superpowers. USSR's repressive attitude towards Islam had already alienated it from the hardcore Islamic world and the US had put them as top priorities. The various determinants of world politics including that of Islam were encouraged by one or the other. As a matter of policy, America, through Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, extended its generous support to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan fighting against Moscow. Arms, ammunitions, finances and all other requirements were generously supplied to them.

While this ideological rivalry and mutual antagonism was going on between the then two superpowers, another major development was occurring as an offshoot of this phenomenon. Inspired by the developments and triumphant of the successes in Iran, Pakistan, Egypt; with resources from abroad and allured by the booming drugs money, and moreover, backed up by countries from the gulf region. Islamic radical forces were out to take over the whole world in their venture to establish the Islamic *umma*. In their effort, they not only enjoyed men and material support but also the spiritual and ethical justification from the religious interpretations of Islam. Thus, 'jihad' became the mission for these radicals.

To add to it, there was an upsurge in 'Wahhabism' and 'Deoband' school of thought in the Islamic world, promoted by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan respectively. Both believed in puritanical and conservative restoration of Islamic society as per the *sharia* and *hadith* of Islam. For them, every aspect of human life was addressed

to by these two religious commandments. Therefore, anybody who disbelieved it, or who opposed it including all non-Muslims were branded as 'Kafirs'- worthy of religious prosecution.

This agenda could not have found more suitable conditions than that in Afghanistan that started with the Russian intervention in 1979. As mentioned earlier, supported and aided by US, the Mujahideen forces set out to liberate Afghanistan and establish the Islamic *umma*.

Realising the impossibility to carry on the Cold War and the various internal compulsions like sagging economy, the social discontent, rise of ethnic nationalism and strong resentment in some parts of the USSR, Gorbachev initiated the processes of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*. In the initial years of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, there was no major impact on the socio-religious dimension. Gorbachev pushed it through with indomitable zeal and fervour. The first major global political impact was visible when USSR decided to withdraw from Afghanistan. It not only brought the 'Cold War' to an end but also was accompanied with a whole lot of repercussions all over the world.

Soviets left the entire nation of Afghanistan in quandary. It withdrew so fast that there was no time for installing a proper representative government there. As a result, Afghanistan which was already divided vertically and horizontally along ethnic and clan lines relapsed into a civil war. This development not only was disastrous for Afghanistan but jeopardised the security of the region. As the fighting between the warlords continued year after year, America who had no more stakes in the region did not show much interest to ensure stability in the region. In 1995, finally, there emerged a new force later known as 'Taliban', entirely created, equipped and trained by Pakistan which took over Kabul and began a phase of radical Islamism based on the Deoband school of thought. Mullah Omar not only

became the undisputed leader but also turned the clock of Afghanistan back into the medieval ages with the imposition of *sharia* and *hadith*.

Only a few countries like Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recognised the Taliban which remained completely isolated from the rest of the world. No press, no freedom, no communication, no liberty of any kind was granted. This success of Taliban in Afghanistan further skyrocketed the fervour of the Islamic radical forces who now turned their attention further north which they had thought was a greener pasture.

Lack of any real political rival, total international isolation and availability of resources made Taliban spread its tentacles towards its northern borders - the Central Asian countries. Two other developments promoted its urge further. The first was the outbreak of Tajik civil war and the second was the arrival of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi born terrorist, who, inspired by Wahhabism of Saudi model, turned his guns towards America. Flushed with funds from large-scale narcotics trafficking and small arms trade, Taliban started supporting the opposition group led by IRP, one of the radical fundamentalist Islamist parties in Central Asia. Later, it also supported all other like-minded parties like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. This brought radical religious fundamentalism to the Central Asian region which was otherwise a region with tolerant and liberal Sufi traditions. The advent of this ideological variant with the aim and objective to install Islamic government in these states turned more and more into a political phenomenon.

Soon after independence, the Islamist forces in the region strongly endeavoured to revive the old Islamic traditions in a radical mould. As a result, thousands of mosques were built, and *madrasahs* proliferated in large numbers. People were encouraged to take *haj* in large numbers, religious teachings were encouraged, and students migrated to other countries like Egypt and Pakistan to get

religious teachings. In Pakistan, madrassahs were opened to accommodate students from Central Asia. Countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan sent thousands of copies of 'Holy Koran' and a number of Islamic clerics to impart Islamic teaching in the region. People celebrated Islamic rituals in open and in grandiose manner. Islamic *shariah* was venerated with utmost commitment. All these activities took place outside the state sponsored religious establishments which were opened for the public to carry on their religious activities.

Tajikistan faced the full impact of these developments when civil war broke out and in five years around 50,000 people were killed and nearly 2, 00,000 people became homeless refugees. Incidentally, one of the parties in the whole episode was the government itself, opposed by radical Islamic forces organised on ethnic and regional lines. Tajik events were followed by Tashkent bombing in Uzbekistan and the Batken incursion in Kyrgyzstan. The governments largely have chosen to meet this challenge by recourse to repressive measures and cracked down heavily on the suspected radical forces. Press freedom is curtailed, human rights are squeezed, freedom of any kind is negated and all kinds of religious activities are either banned or looked down with suspicion. As the government crackdowns increased, the terrorist incidents also increased with greater ferocity and magnitude. Bomb blasts, shootings, hostage takings and all other methods of terrorism were employed by the Islamist forces.

Differences have arisen among the observers regarding the causes of the growth of religious extremism and ensuing terrorism in the region. While some are of the view that this was because of the government's repressive policies, others say that it is inherent in the nature of Islamic radicalism.

At the same time, it is a fact that there are considerable variations at both inter and intra-republican levels as far as propensity towards Islam is concerned. Classified on the lines of sedentary/tribal dichotomy, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan go

to the top of the list followed by Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. At the intra-republican level, the propensity towards Islam seems to have its centre in the Fergana Valley, which has been divided between the three republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. There are of course other regions with a somewhat similar Islamic orientation to Fergana, such as Kara Kalpak part of eastern Turkmenistan bordering Uzbekistan and several regions in Tajikistan. The most significant pattern in all these is that the Uzbeks are found in large numbers in most but not all places with a stronger Islamic propensity. As anticipated, the organisational strength and the mobilisation capacity of Islamic forces have been more advanced in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as compared to the other republics.

The Islamic proclivity has been only one of the four parameters influencing the nature, scope and intensity and speed of Islamic revival in Central Asia. The others being, the strengths and weaknesses of the democratic drive, the governments' policies towards Islam, their willingness to institute socially inclusive political reforms, and the ethnic orientation and make up of each republic. Of these, the political context has the potential to move Islam in a sharply radical direction.

The repressive policy of the state has been carried out to the extreme in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Whereas Uzbekistan has banned all the Islamic parties and organisations, Tajikistan till the end of the civil war, followed the same and as a result of the civil war settlement has recognised them who now constitute a part of the government. In Uzbekistan and prior to civil war settlement in Tajikistan, the Islamic leaders were jailed, given death sentences or forced into exile for advocating a particular set of ideas. Gradually, especially after 1999, even the other regimes in Central Asia have been responding with increased repression, viewing not just Islamic militancy but all Islamic practice as a threat to their grip on power. Such steps, according to some, have only fuelled the support for the radical Islamic



groups. The experts underline that any further repression is bound to strengthen the resolve of the Islamic forces and further radicalise their agenda. To substantiate their opinion, they cite the example of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan where due to the absence of sharp governmental repression, less radicalisation of Islam has not taken place in comparison to like Uzbekistan or Tajikistan. Secondly, experience from world over shows that authoritarian policies like that of banning of Islamic parties and movements, almost invariably, strengthen the legitimacy of such organisations while at the same time adversely affecting the legitimacy of the government, with devastating long term consequences.

Another set of opinion sees the answer to Islamic radicalism in the democratic drive in Central Asia. They say that if democracy is given a chance to flourish, it would weaken the radical tendencies of religion, for it offers an ideological paradigm with popular political objectives. Much like the Islamic drive, the democratic drive has also not been a monolithic phenomenon with uniform inter-republican patterns. On the contrary, the propensity towards democracy varies considerably from republic to republic with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan having the strongest and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. the weakest tendencies.

The entire make up and the orientation of the Central Asian republics influence the process under study. Given its mild Islamic proclivity and unique ethnic composition, Islam has played a secondary role in Kazakhstan and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. This is in part due to the presence of a large non-Muslim population, which almost equals its Muslim population. The ethnic composition has changed in the recent years because of the departure of the Russians and higher birth rates of the Kazakh population. But the rate of change is not enough to fundamentally alter the present ethnic picture. This is to some extent true in Kyrgyzstan where the Slavic population is sizeable, making the success of

the radical Islamic forces a less likely possibility. On the other hand, the picture is substantially different in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, where the ratio of non-Muslim population to that of the Muslim population is substantially smaller.

Ethnic make up, as a factor, however, is counterpoised by the ongoing ethnic current that has been labelled in this study as ethnic separatism. Reinforced by tribal, regional, sub-regional and local exclusivist tendencies, ethnic separatism has been on the rise in the region, offering a centrifugal force with considerable power.

Another important factor which plays a crucial role in the entire scenario is the economy of the republics and the living standard of the people. As has been discussed in chapter 2 and chapter 3, the withdrawal of Soviet state's economic support after the disintegration has created a financial havoc in the Central Asian republics. The economic policies which were followed during the USSR had made these republics totally dependent on Moscow. In the post-independence period, the issue of deteriorating economic standards, grinding poverty and unemployment is raked up by the Islamists.

There was a tremendous shift in the security paradigm of Central Asia in the recent past. In the pre - 11 September 2001 period, Afghanistan's civil war was the biggest threat to Central Asian security. This scenario was further exacerbated by the growth of Islamic extremism and terrorism associated with Osama bin Laden and his Arab Afghans who had considerable influence with the Taliban, the IMU and Islamic Jehadi groups in Pakistan. Osama encouraged the Taliban leaders to embrace an internationalist pan-Islamic ideology. In addition to funding IMU operations, he enlisted other Central Asian militants into his own group, Al-Qaeda. The latter's global network, which according to the US intelligence had operatives and cells in 34 countries, linked the Central Asian radicals to the politics of global radical Islam, providing financial and military support for the groups and helping them to travel in and out of their respective states clandestinely.

All these groups profited from the drug trade based in Afghanistan in which Taliban and Laden were heavily involved. In the 1980s, the drug export routes ran solely through Pakistan. Now they extend through Iran, China and the Central Asian states and the Arabian Gulf and are controlled by Pakistani, Afghan, Arab, Chechen and Central Asian crime organisations. Drugs fund political activism, and drugs pay for weapons. They also are the financial mainstay of IMU and other radical Islamic movements.

The unity and stability of the nascent Central Asian republics face the formidable threat of militancy and cross-border terrorism. Just with only a little more than a decade old independence, the countries are still not prepared enough to face this onslaught. The collapse of the Soviet Union left these republics in a state of confusion. As there was no real freedom movement which preceded their independence, social and political institutions in these republics were hardly developed to carry the stupendous task of independent existence. Secondly, the lack of such a movement also had its impact on the social cohesion (ethnic, clan and tribal) and resulted in minimum awareness of democracy. The rulers of these republics are all ex-Communists with slightly different shades. Their reluctance to generate democratic awareness and spirit has meant the continuation of the old political methods which the religious forces are vehemently opposing. This struggle for space has now become bipolar with both sides not ready to reconcile with each other. The worst casualty in this condition is democracy and the aspirations of the people, thereby widening the social gulf and threatening the stability of the nations. For example, civil war in Tajikistan from 1992-97 not only destroyed the unity and stability of the republic but also hindered the process of socio-economic development.

The kind of militancy and terrorism which these countries are facing is multi-dimensional in nature and manifested through various means like drug

trafficking, arms trading, the emergence of radical Islamic fundamentalism especially of Wahhabism and Deobandism type. In Central Asia, an unholy nexus exists between religious fundamentalism, narcotics trafficking and small arms trading. This region, being a traditionally drug cultivating one, has found new patrons in the form of the Islamic radical forces there. Afghanistan has always been the hub of drug trade in the region. It not only produced the highest amount of poppy in the region but also contributed to 16 percent of the total world consumption. This illegal drug trade has sustained militancy and terrorism in the region. The huge amount of fund which these groups require is largely met by such trade. For example, Osama bin Laden who headed Al-Qaeda financed the entire activity from the drugs trade which he carried on in consonance with Taliban. Another important factor which to a great extent influences the drug trade is the economy of the region. Being agrarian economies with over dependence on cotton cultivation, the region finds it difficult to progress economically and finance the huge social development costs. In the post-independence period, the withdrawal of central subsidy from Moscow has also aggravated the situation further. Lack of industrial development and other means of employment have pushed the region into poverty which in a vicious circle leading to the upsurge in religious fundamentalism and crime nexus.

The proliferation of the small arms in the region also worsened the situation further. The illegal money which comes from the large scale drug trade mainly routed to arms procurement by the terrorist and criminal groups. These arms are sophisticated, small and largely used by the terrorists to counter security forces.

The growth of Islamic fundamentalism in the form of Wahhabism and Deobandism has contributed tremendously to the growth of militancy and terrorism in the region. Seven decades of restrictions on religious matters were lifted suddenly in 1991. The civil society which had preserved the ethos of Islam in

the previous decades, now enthusiastically came out in open and practised religion and subsequently exercised religious rights. In the absence of any democratic mechanism to absorb this resurgence of religious spirit, the religious fundamentalist groups, largely aided and abetted by the neighbouring countries, exploited the situation and tried to change the mode of religious expressions towards radicalism. At the same time, the situation in Afghanistan - the establishment of Taliban rule that received support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, added fuel to fire. Fundamentalist groups like Islamic Renaissance Party, Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan resorted to terrorist methods to establish their authority and express their opposition to the government's repression. While these were the immediate reasons, the greater objectives of these groups lay in the establishment of Islamic states replacing the present secular ones.

Weak economies and large scale unemployment are major factors for the growth of fundamentalist terrorism. As experts suggest, a developed and self-contented population in the region would have been more tolerant than radical, as the history and tradition of the region show us. The region had been a seat of tolerant and liberal Islamic culture which manifested in the form of birth and growth of 'Sufism' which was even denounced by the other radical Muslims as *kafirs* - the non-believers. The post-independence economy of the region resulted in poverty and unemployment which was thoroughly exploited by the radical forces to consolidate their support and legitimacy among the common masses.

The local governments have also not been able to address the situation with dexterity and prudence. They relied more upon repressive methods instead of addressing the problem democratically. The growth of democratic process in the region has been negligible. On the other hand, these rulers are becoming increasingly arbitrary and despotic violating all the norms of democracy. This lack of political and democratic development has provided the radical forces a greater

legitimacy among the public and has projected them as martyrs. Human rights have been grossly violated, and all other civil and political rights have been drastically curtailed. Such reactionary policies have created a great resentment among the masses, thus providing a ground for the radical extremism. Multi-party democracy is still a far-cry in Central Asia. Instead, the present governments have resorted to illegal methods like electoral malpractices to perpetuate their rule, further weakening democratic development in these states. How some democratic development in Tajikistan has gone a long way in winning the confidence of people is an example. The government not only brought the civil war to an end, but also made the radical fundamentalist forces a part of the government, the radicals giving up their original project to establish an Islamic state and *umma*. It is a fact that more the repression by the government, greater the reaction by the radical forces and this creates a vicious circle. Secondly, the lack of stability and security leads to greater negligence by the government of the socio-economic development initiatives providing opportunity to the radical forces attack the establishment.

In the post-Cold War period, in the light of the new security scenario in world politics, there is a realisation all over the world that no state can defend itself or mitigate the problems of its security unilaterally and in isolation. Therefore, international cooperation is a veritable need in fighting not only traditional but also non-traditional forces which threaten the security and stability of a nation. This realisation has gained more relevance with the growth of militancy and terrorism in Central Asia. In spite of harsh repressive methods adopted by the governments in the region, militancy and terrorism still survive, forcing the countries to enter into bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation with other powers for a coordinated approach to fight this menace. As terrorism in Central Asia is cross-border in nature, the involvement of several states with a strong, coordinated and cooperative

approach in tandem with other world organisations, can ensure their victory against militancy and terrorism.

Since 1992, there have been a number of endeavours in this direction. Soon after independence the fragile and nascent republics in the Central Asian region were faced with the herculean task of defending their countries from external and internal forces. In their quest for security they entered into the Collective Security Treaty with Russia as the major guarantor of their security imperatives. It was followed by multilateral organisations of both security and economic orientation like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, GUUAM which has Uzbekistan in it, the Economic Cooperation Organisations, Eurasian Economic Community, Six Plus Two, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building in Asia. Besides these efforts, the Central Asian countries also joined other international Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, Economic Cooperation Organisation and North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme.

All these organisations in spite of their specific purposes and functions have unambiguously expressed their rejection of terrorism and militancy in the region through their resolutions and actions. Some have also engaged themselves directly in these efforts by cooperating militarily and economically. However, despite such united opinion against terrorism these organisations have been successful to a limited extent. The economic condition of not only the Central Asian states but also other regional powers Iran, Turkey and even Russia has hampered the efforts regional organisations. Secondly, stiff competition between the countries involved for the oil resources in the region makes their cooperation against terrorism a half-hearted effort. For example, the Shanghai Anti-Terrorist Centre in Bishkek has been suffering from shortage of funds from the very beginning. Thirdly, among the regional cooperation organisations, there are also countries which are directly or

regional organisations. Secondly, stiff competition between the countries involved for the oil resources in the region makes their cooperation against terrorism a half-hearted effort. For example, the Shanghai Anti-Terrorist Centre in Bishkek has been suffering from shortage of funds from the very beginning. Thirdly, among the regional cooperation organisations, there are also countries which are directly or indirectly have supported terrorism for their own limited geopolitical objectives. Therefore, when they come out against terrorism, they are hardly taken with ease by others. Another factor is the strong mutual suspicion, which prevails, for example, among Iran and Pakistan, Pakistan and Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran has hindered the progress of their organisations.

Nevertheless, since September 11 terrorist attack in the US, the world is increasingly aware of the dangers of global terrorism. There is greater coordination at the international level to weaken the base of terrorism and eliminate their global network. This would make the task of the Central Asian states a lot easier. The removal of the Taliban has been another outcome of this international effort that has further eroded the support system of the terrorists. At the same time, it should be underlined that ultimately internal environment has also to be created to draw people away from militancy, terrorism and religious fundamentalism.