

Introduction

The problem of militancy and terrorism and its impact on the socio-political structure of a state has assumed prominence in the writings of many social scientists especially in the post-World War II period. These problems are noticed in acute form in the newly independent Central Asian states, chiefly because of their fragile social systems, economic chaos and underdeveloped political structures, all of which have failed to fulfil the needs and aspirations of the people. Due to the transitional nature of these societies, various ethnic and religious groups compete with each other to dominate the political system of the country that leads to a clash of interests and conflicts which sometimes takes violent forms leading to institutional decay and results in intense social, political and economic upheavals. Decidedly unprepared to cope with the vacuum created by the collapse of Communist Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics became lively forums for a multiplicity of ideological trends. During the entire Soviet rule, an anti-religious policy was followed ferociously by the Soviet leaders. The region which was dominated by Islam and was considered another epicentre of Islamic religious thought faced the worst from the Soviet leaders. At the same time, the pace of economic and social development in the region was abysmal with the agriculture mainly dependent on cotton cultivation. Industrial development considered as the basis of economic development, was lagging behind in this region, which was used as a raw material base for the industries in Russia.

The post-Soviet period witnessed a greater influence and strengthened the role of the non-state actors in determining the policy and trends in the region which became the vehicles of socio-economic progress of different societies. The emergence and the increasing role of the several terrorist movements, radical religious groups, drug trafficking and gun running have forced the nations in the region to formulate necessary security and social policies. NGOs and other

international organisations have played a vital role in the socio-economic development of various Central Asian nations.

After the Soviet disintegration, the governments which took over the reigns of power were headed by ex-Communists with a strong propensity towards single party rule. In the absence of democratic progress and plethora of problems facing the society, centrifugal forces emerged mostly aided and abetted by internal and external actors. Several developments in different parts of the globe gave the much needed inspirations and motivations to these forces to carry out their agenda. Among them were the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Afghan crisis, the military and religious coup in Pakistan and the Middle East crisis. Saturated with religious indoctrination and inspired by these events, the Islamist forces extended their grand designs of an Islamic *umma* to the Central Asian region.

A clash of interests emerged with the incumbent governments desiring to preserve the secular, atheistic traditions of the region and the radical Islamists seeking to establish Islamic governments on the basis of *sharia* and *hadith*, the ultimate canons of Islamic faith.

This clash of interests created a vicious circle. Governments reacting to fundamentalism adopted repressive measures that in some cases resulted in greater legitimacy to these forces and making them martyrs before the people and increasing their support base and capability to strike again, inviting greater repression by the state.

Terrorism in Central Asia has many points which are shrouded with controversy. Its operation is extremely complicated and it does not have any recognised leadership. Their popularity is doubtful and objectives not very clear. In that respect, the present study attempts to put into comparative perspective the dynamics working behind the phenomenon of terrorism. It should be pointed out

that while there has been a general consensus on a set of conceptual parameters believed to be capable of having a definite qualitative impact on Central Asian terrorism, very few observers seem to agree on the relative weight and significance of these parameters vis-à-vis one another and in relation to the subject under study. Some scholars have, however, emphasised internal economic factors as the primary force behind the growth of terrorism in the region. Interestingly enough, the continuing economic decline in the region has strengthened the diehard Communists and ultra-nationalists rather than Islamic forces. Others, focussing on the role of Iran and Afghanistan in Tajik affairs in recent years, assign considerable importance to external pressures exerted from the Middle East. The present study will focus both external and internal factors which are considered more critical in shaping militancy and terrorism in the region.

Another very significant aspect of terrorism in Central Asia is its area of operation. In the present study, it has been generally referred to as terrorism and militancy. But looking at their area of operation, one thing that becomes clear is that all the terrorist groups who operate in the region are basically regional groups with cross-border linkages. Secondly, they have also been operating across the border mainly aided and abetted by Afghanistan. Therefore, terrorism in Central Asia has been aptly called as cross-border terrorism.

The third important aspect associated with terrorism in Central Asia is that it is intricately intertwined with the growth of Islamic radicalism in the region. In fact, it is the immediate cause of the growth of militancy and terrorism. Therefore, it is basically religious in nature and has been aggravated with the revival of Islamism in Central Asia.

The Islamic revival in Central Asia has been characterised by two sets of factors. One, the regional proclivity towards Islam depends on the type of the

society prevalent in the particular region - sedentary or tribal. The nature of the dominant Islamic proclivity is influenced, in turn, by the organisational reach and the mobilisation capacities of the Islamic forces operating in the region. The general factors that are equally significant are the weaknesses of the nascent democratic forces and their ability to institute genuine political reforms and also the ethnic make up and orientation of each republic.

Islam, which has been basically peaceful and moderate in Central Asia unlike in Arab and Pakistan, was due to historical factors like the method of spread of Islam there, the geographical and occupational life style and the nature of the population settlements. Islam developed culturally in Central Asia and was enriched intellectually and spiritually by the Central Asian traditions.

But, during the Tsarist rule Islam did not find the patronage it needed to develop further both culturally and spatially. Again, with the advent of the Communist rule, the scenario turned upside down. Islam was banned only to revive with the coming of *Glasnost* and *Perestroika* and more vigorously after independence in 1991.

The Islamic revivalist forces since independence have to a great extent been successful in influencing the orientation of Islam through their organisational reach and the mobilisation capacity. Through the rapidly increasing numbers of mosques and madrassahs, they have been well organised and capable of reaching to the public.

The Central Asian governments' general political orientations as well as their attitude towards Islam constitute another parameter of the Islamic revival in Central Asia. The reluctance shown by the incumbent governments in carrying out political reforms with the objective of including the newly emerging democratic

and Islamic forces in the political discourse made the Islamic forces to become rebels, and hence, role models for others.

Another important parameter which has decided the Islamic revival in Central Asia is the ethnic composition of the Central Asian republics. The large-scale presence of the non-Muslim Slavs, in some cases like Kazakhstan same in number as the original Kazakhs, made the latter a minority in their own republic. Even in Uzbekistan, there was substantial number of non-Muslims. Such ethnic contrast offered a powerful explanatory parameter to revival of Islam in Central Asia.

The problems of cross-border terrorism, militancy and radical Islamic revivalism aggravated in the post-Soviet period due to their close nexus with drug trafficking and arms trade. The Central Asian republics in tandem with other neighbouring states have formed several forums and have entered into bilateral and multi-lateral treaties, to counter these threats.

In the study undertaken, the following hypotheses would be examined:

- Problems of cross-border terrorism and militancy are posing potential threats to the unity and stability of the nascent Central Asian states.
- The Central Asian states are facing various types of terrorism like drug-trafficking, emergence of radical Islamic fundamentalism especially Wahhabism and Deobandism, and proliferation of small weapons etc.
- The diverse ethnic composition of Central Asia states and the presence of a large number of Slavic populations have influenced the factors and patterns of the growth of terrorism.
- Improper economic distribution and the resultant rise in unemployment have greatly influenced the above mentioned process.

- Due to weak development of political structure and institutions in Central Asia, threats of cross-border terrorism have increased and the republics are trying to combat the problem in different ways both bilaterally and multilaterally.
- Historical and geopolitical necessity makes it imperative for the Central Asian states to combat the problem of terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism through mutual cooperation with neighbouring secular states.

The *First Chapter* provides an in-depth study of the definition, types, tactics and philosophy of terrorism as well as the difference between various similar concepts which are very often used interchangeably. For example, terrorism, militancy and insurgency find their use interchangeably in similar contexts in spite of their latent and theoretical differences. To avoid such overlappings, these have been discussed taking the help of the opinions of various experts and authorities in this field. Several organisational and official definitions have also been examined to draw a clear picture. Among the definitional efforts, those of UN and CIS have been prominently dealt with and finally all these definitions have been compiled in a diagram forwarded by David Easton's Systems Theory. Besides the complex definitional discrepancy, the philosophy, the methods and tactics, the objectives and types and their strategies have been discussed. In the final portion of the chapter, other related phenomenon in the light of which the Central Asian terrorism can be classified, have been discussed.

The *Second Chapter* addresses the growth of terrorism, militancy and religious fundamentalism in the region. With a brief background of the religious policies in the past, the chapter examines the situation prevailing in the Central Asian states in the present times. Terrorism in Central Asia being basically

religious in nature, Gorbachev's period being a watershed, saw radical departure from the previous eras in dealing with the question of religion. Besides the political developments, other factors which contributed to Islamic revival in the post-independence period have been discussed keeping in view the changing international scenario of the period. To substantiate the arguments that terrorism in its violent form exists in Central Asia, several incidences of terrorist attacks have been mentioned in a chronological order beginning from 1992. They further have been substantiated with the official and other organisational opinions. The perpetrators of the terrorism in Central Asia, their organisational structures, leaders and affiliations have also been examined in the chapter. The overall political orientation and their agenda also have been included in the chapter. A discussion on the quantitative dimensions of Islamic revival with respect to the number of mosques, madrassahs and the observance of the Islamic rituals has been presented.

The *Third Chapter* contains the link that exists between the terrorists, the drug traffickers and small arms dealers. Central Asian terrorism is not only a local product but also has been sponsored by outside forces like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Their financial support and material help including logistical succours have kept terrorism in Central Asia alive even on the face of ferocious crackdown by the governments. How the drugs produced in Afghanistan and Central Asia is trafficked to the outside world and the money gained out of it is utilised to procure arms and weapons for the fight against governments, have been dealt with in the chapter. Figures of the drugs seized by state authorities have been presented, giving an idea of the magnitude of the drug business in the region. Besides this, the various causes behind the proliferation of drugs have been cited. While the rise of the fundamentalist Islam in Central Asia has provided the motivation for the terrorist activities, it is the money drawn from the illegal drugs trade which has

sustained these activities and steady flow of arms and supplies continue to reach the terrorists.

The various kinds of responses of the Central Asian republics towards this menace of terrorism are the subject matter of *Chapter Four*. This chapter delineates the role the states have played in curbing not only terrorism but also the factors supporting such activities. The governments which saw the problem initially as a kind of law and order situation, adopted stringent and repressive methods to curb their expansion. Later, there have been various concerted efforts in this direction. These are bilateral agreements expressing the desires of the Central Asian governments to fight out terrorism, multi-lateral agreements within CIS and outside CIS signed for greater coordination in the efforts of the states to fight terrorism and drugs trade. The responses of the states have been discussed in this chapter which also focus some attention on the deleterious effects of the governments' repressive policies towards the Islamic forces. This chapter also specifically deals with the developments which have taken place in the post-11 September 2001 period. The extremely transformed strategic scenario and its repercussions on politics of the region have also been incorporated.

The *Fifth Chapter* exclusively contains the various organisational efforts which have been undertaken by the Central Asian states in fighting terrorism in the region. Of late, various organisations like SCO, OSCE, NATO, OIC, CICA, ECO, EEC and CIS have shown great enthusiasm in the developments in the region. Their role with regard to the anti-terrorism efforts in the region have been analysed in this chapter.

The concluding chapter gives a final assessment of the different views and theories forwarded by different quarters and discussed in the preceding chapters. Apart from that, certain suggestions have been incorporated in it which are drawn

out after thoroughly analysing the prevailing situation in the region. Besides all these, the chapter contains the tests of the various hypotheses which were taken up for research.

The objective of this study is to have a comprehensive analysis of the problems of militancy and terrorism which the Central Asian republics are facing. The impact of these problems on the social and political fabric of the region has been assessed. Secondly, the response of the Central Asian republics to the problems, the measures taken by them to combat terrorism and militancy and to consolidate their own position against this threat, are the major issues addressed in this research work.

This study is based on historico-analytical and comparative methods. Speeches of the heads of governments and state officials of Central Asian republics, Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and others published documents by these governments and daily broadcast reports from Summary of World Broadcasts, Foreign Broadcast Information Services and Press Reports from Current Digest of the post-Soviet press and other major newspapers have been consulted. Several books by distinguished experts in the field, various articles published in different journals have also been consulted to substantiate different arguments forwarded in the research.