CHAPTER- 2
The U.S. and Afghan Civil War

I. The U.S. and Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal

The conflict in South Asia in the last two decades of the 20th century witnessed the emergence of holy war - jihad against the Russian invaders of 1979. As a result the invaders were defeated and sent back home in 1989. At home Russia faced a collapsing Soviet society and breakdown of empire. And in the United States President Reagan’s Vice President George Bush, won the Presidential elections held in November 1988, and his administration was installed on January 1989. But new actor did not bring about any radical changes in U.S. policies towards Afghanistan.

According to one analyst “in its contemporary version, the Reagan Doctrine, the West should be encouraged by the success of the Mujahideen and the change in the Soviet stance towards the third world more generally, to press more vigorously its support for anti-communist or anti-Soviet forces in other third world troubled spots, in the name of self-determination and democratic values.” The Reagan administration adopted the doctrine of “horizontal escalation” which was intended to roll back post-1975 Soviet gains throughout the world. The strategy was based on the concept of U.S.-Soviet nuclear parity along with U.S. venturing in delivery capabilities (but not necessarily in explosive “throw-weight”) would be able to match Soviet threats across the board – without escalating to nuclear war. The Reagan administration largely utilized surrogate fighters to beat back Soviet-backed regimes or Soviet-supported movements. The U.S. support for anti-Soviet movements would not so inadvertently set off a number of seemingly permanent brush fires throughout many regions (as in Angola) that would be difficult to put out, even after the cold war was over.

A totally different course was pursued by the then ruling circles of the imperialist states, above all the U.S. who were trying to use the developments occurring in the Moslem world to their advantage. Holding forth the common values of the Christianity and Islam against the atheistic Communism and flirting with the political and religious leaders of the Moslem world. Western strategists were meant to
create a wave of controversy between Moslems and the Soviet Union to half circle the USSR with 'crescent of instability'. International reactionary circles spearheaded Moslem movements against the progressive forces within the Islamic world, and also against the socialist states, particularly the Soviet Union.  

The outcome in Afghanistan reflected certain of those wider influences which resulted out of universal application of the Reagan Doctrine. It prompted support for hard line anti-Soviet factions in the Afghan resistance. This line was favoured by President Zia of Pakistan. A policy which on the one hand sought to ease the way for Soviet acceptance of self-determination in Afghanistan, and on the other hand it was likely to go along with a global policy which looked towards a reciprocal reduction in pressures for competitive interventions. It was only this way that one could envisage an early breakthrough to a political settlement in Afghanistan. The alternate Western (and Mujahideen) strategy pointed towards protracted violence and political stalemate.

With the collapse of bi-polar world and the contours of a multi polar world order yet to attain definite shape the role of the U.S. as the sole superpower in any area of the world gained added importance. In most states, especially developing ones, American entry and continued presence has been guided by its long term national interest. And that overriding interest appears to be continuation of a uni-polar world order, where United States is the sole and ultimate power influencing not only the course of international politics but also having a crucial say in the international developments among countries across the world. This grand strategy of U.S. foreign policy to dominate the world may not be blatantly apparent in all its foreign policy moves because foreign policy of any states is shaped at a given moment by multiplicity of factors but that does not negate its existence. By backing the Afghan Mujahideen it achieved its prime cold war objective of rolling back communism and containing the Soviet Union till its final disintegration in December 1989.

Although, after an accord (Geneva Accord of April 1988) signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan, guaranteeing non-interference and non-intervention in each other's affairs; a similar agreement was signed between the United States and the Soviet Union in which both promised about non-intervention in Afghanistan and to act as guarantors of the Accord. This Accord paved the way for Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which was completed in February 1989. But a friendly pro-
Soviet Government had remained in power in Kabul after Soviet troops had left. Najibullah was Gorbachev’s chosen leader who announced his programme of ‘National Reconciliation’ comprising three key elements; a six-months unilateral ceasefire, the formation of a government of ‘national unity’ and the return of over 5 million refugees from Pakistan and Iran.

But Najibullah’s proposals were turned down with disbelief and contempt by members of the seven-party alliance in Peshawar. As the Soviet Union tried to adopt a two-fold strategy, one dimension was to deliver things possible to unify the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) under Najibullah. And the other was to engage in an accelerated scheme to strengthen the PDPA’s military capability. The Soviet Union helped not only in setting up an elite presidential guard under Najibullah’s direct command and tightening the efficiency of the regime’s brutal secret police and the special militia of Sarandoy, but also supplying the regime with three to four times more weapons than its standing army required. Some of the arms supplied were among the most sophisticated ones in the Soviet inventory. Thus the Soviet Union laid the groundwork for the war to continue after their withdrawal.

Moscow’s efforts, nonetheless, exacerbated two pre-exist schisms within the Afghan resistance. They not only intensified divisions in the resistance along leadership on traditional ethno-tribal and linguistic lines, but also aggravated the sectarian Sunni-Shiaite split, which could easily be manipulated by the element from inside and outside Afghanistan for self-serving purposes. Furthermore, they brought to the fore the rival and conflicting interests of the Mujahideen’s regional supporters. Whereas, the Islamic parties forged together into an ‘alliance’ by the ISI at the behest of General Zia to fight jihad, the parties also owed their ‘influence’ to the fact that they served as somewhat porous conduits for the US and Saudi funds and weapons channeled to the resisting fighters inside Afghanistan by Pakistan’s ISI. Saudi Arabia augmented her support for their favorite Mujahideen leaders. From amongst the seven Pakistan-based Sunni resistance groups, Iran sought to single out the Shiite Mujahideen group of wahdat (unity) as its preferred platform for exerting greater influence than the total demographic strength of the Shiites would warrant in the politics of post-Soviet Afghanistan.

Factionalism had resurfaced again and became one of the important challenges faced by Najibullah government. Coup attempt made by General Shahnawa Tanai the
then Defence Minister with the support and use of air force, in March 1990, was the most important threat faced by Najibullah. This threat came from within the government from Khalq faction because of the Khalq - Parcham rivalry which caused the fall of Najibullah regime in April 1992. This also became inevitable with the Soviet Union consigned to history in early 1992 and no further aid flowing from Russia to support pro- Soviet regime in Afghanistan. There were many reasons for the Soviet Union to withdraw the force out. The worsened situation in the Soviet Union and the anti communist revolution taking place in East Europe threatened the disintegration of the Soviet socialist system. This compelled the Soviet Union to pull out the forces from Afghanistan at any cost. The fall of Najibullah regime in April 1992, put an end to the communist era in Afghanistan. However, the power vacuum resulting from the quick Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan resulted into not only human tragedy but fierce regional struggles between tribal lords for influence. The Americans first used the Afghan people as a cannon fodder against their arch rival and then left them.

In 1979, when the Afghans had declared jihad against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan it was transformed overnight to a cold war battle ground. The Afghan anti-Soviet fighters became the American heroes and America started giving economic and military aid to Afghanistan and actively encouraged the influx of foreign volunteers to join forces with the Mujahideen. A trend set which it found detrimental to its national interest in fundamental way.

In September 1988, Geneva Accords were signed between Bush and Gorbachev, whereby they pledged to terminate assistance to Mujahideen and government forces respectively. United States became increasingly preoccupied with the post- Soviet scenario that presented unlimited opportunities for it to explore and influence in the European part of the world. As winds of change swept through Eastern Europe and violent conflicts erupted in the Caucasus and Balkans, Afghanistan was pushed into oblivion. However, according to John J. Marshier, “the basic structure of the international system did not change with the end of the cold war, and that there is little reason to think that change is in offing”. He attempts to show the considerable evidence from the decade 1991-2000, that security competition among the great powers is not obsolete, either in Europe or in Northeast Asia. And he
also argues that a rising China is the most dangerous potential threat to the United States in the early twenty-first century.  

The process of reassurance was essentially completed in 1989. However, after George H.W. Bush took office in January, his administration initiated a “pause” while it reviewed its policy towards the Soviet Union. The new National security Adviser, Brent Scowcroft was especially skeptical of the recent arms control treaties, however, the new Secretary of State, James Baker, favoured a more active policy. A new policy document, NSD-23 drafted in March 1989, coined the phrase ‘beyond containment’ to summarize the new U.S. policy. The document suggested that it might be possible to shift to a strategy which “actively promotes the integration of the Soviet Union into the international system.” According to Dominic Lieven, “the grand alliance of Western states which far out-weighed and finally defeated the Soviet Union in the cold war remains basically united and would stand together against any Russian attempt to regain its former empire.”

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan left with divergent results flowing from the geopolitical end-game in Afghanistan. The U.S. could get an unsurpassed opportunity to redress U.S. overextension in parallel fashion or alternatively, it could construed as an unprecedented opening to push ahead spread of Western values, as well as to deliver a knockout blow to godless communism, enabling the United States to fulfill Henry Luce’s vision of an American century. While the unfinished business of the war remained, there were a number of elements that constituted unfinished task. It was possible that other form of Soviet intervention could remain or even increase as troops were withdrawn. One should not forget that the horrifying legacy of superpower intervention which consist of a disrupted political, economic, cultural and social order continue even after the end of the intervention.

The U.S. foreign policy had been shaped during half a century of cold war. A generation of diplomats had been raised in the shadow of ‘soviet containment’. The disintegration of the Soviet Union left them in a political vacuum, without specific guidelines to fill it. American diplomacy turned to business. The political elite became ambassadors and diplomats of the strong Washington lobbies. Almost overnight, it became apparent that U.S. foreign policy had turned into powerful vehicle for American cooperation, seeking opportunities everywhere instead of promoting
international stability. Sadly, this imperialist approach is still the engine powering the foreign policy of George W. Bush.

In the early 1990s, impelled by the oil lobby, George Bush had underestimated the consequences of the disintegration of the equilibrium in Central Asia, a balance of power forged in 1945 at Yalta. The dismantling of Soviet power was perceived as the beginning of a lucrative period of exploitation, with U.S. oil companies controlling the vast energy fields of the region. So confident was the White House in this context that Washington even did not bother to create a political framework for the region, or even could issue guidelines for the post Soviet era. America's interest in the Afghanistan crisis had been by and large driven by hard economic interests in the Soviet days. It was bitter super power rivalry that brought the Americans to Afghanistan. With the Soviet break up the immediate compulsion for intimate involvement in Afghanistan had been removed and America had indeed moved away. But soon the possibility of the power vacuum being filled by actors totally beyond US control would push Afghanistan back into the forefront of US foreign policy.

Following the collapse of the USSR, the oil reserves of the Caspian region were initially estimated at around 150 billion barrels, half of Saudi Arabia. The new states in the region after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan felt uncertain where to anchor their security. The commonwealth of independent states (CIS) was important to maintain the links with the Russian economy. The US government was slow to pick up the importance of the region. The private western entrants into the 'new great game' included well placed individual's maverick companies and large oil companies in that order. It was not until Clinton's globalization offensive of 1994 that the US developed its own geopolitical offensive to wrest control of the region from Russia.

The independence of Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union added a new factor to the vortex of regional power rivalries in which Afghanistan found itself. Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan share not only borders but also ethnic, cultural, and religious affinities with Afghanistan and its people. The role of the Central Asian states may acquire greater significance if the ethnic split between Afghanistan's Uzbek and Tajik groups, on the one hand, and the Pushtun on the other hands, became unmanageable. Ethnic bonds, with family and blood ties, may push the Uzbek and Tajik minorities of Afghanistan toward their co-nationals across the border in the event current power struggle in Kabul results in resurgence of the
Pushtun element. Thus there may be considerable opportunities for trade and the Central Asian states may pay increased attention to political events in Afghanistan. With the barriers previously erected by Moscow now fallen, one might see the transformation of the entire region of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan into a zone of economic and political cooperation. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan had already joined the Economic cooperation organization formed by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The consensus on economic and political forms and on states identity was yet to emerge in all of those states, but the need for economic reconstruction in Afghanistan and Central Asia in line with regional and global trend toward marketization and liberalization may bring these countries closer to one another.  

However, regional powers including the Russian Federation were more active. Afghanistan became an arena in which regional rivals were competing for influence, with some regional powers favoring certain groups involved in the struggle to influence favorite group as stage to preserve its geopolitics and its interest in Afghanistan. For the United States probably Pakistan would play important role again as it used to play in the cold war year. It could quietly fit into American political and strategic objective in Central Asian region which would provide vantage ground for preventing Russian hegemony in the region, containing Iran and playing a balancing role against emerging powers like China. The control over the Pakistan Afghanistan corridor and creating an opening from the south would be vital for the West in gaining access to the oil and natural gas resources of the region, probably in this context with large support to Pakistan it could be frontline state again. There is no doubt that in 1995 the Afghan civil war became a mini-great game for regional powers. Their policies were influenced not only by developments in Afghanistan but also by one another’s actions as competition among them had increased. For some, the war became in part a proxy fight. Pakistan was the most important outside player in Afghanistan but Iran- whose relative importance grew during the year Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, Russia and India were other important players.  

To complicate the situation further, the USA had its own regional and international interests. Since Washington’s counter-interventionist policy had all along been guided more by how it could benefit the USA against the Soviet Union rather than by what might be conducive to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. In
the process Washington neglected to give sufficient thought as to what could become of Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal. This was evident in its policy priorities and distribution of weapons to the Mujahideen. It channeled arms through Pakistan more specifically through Pakistan’s military intelligence (ISI) to those Afghans who received ISI endorsement.

Immediately after the Soviet withdrawal, little attempt was made to focus US energy and aid either on creating the conditions and mechanisms for ensuring a relatively bloodless transfer of power to the Mujahideen or on catering the Afghan’s humanitarian needs during a transitional phase. There is no doubt why a successful guerilla movement could not turn into a cohesive political force. The designs and agendas of external powers coupled with the ambitions of self-serving Mujahideen warlords and leaders effectively blocked any attempt at national consolidation. In short Soviet invasion not only strengthened the old tribal and ethnic loyalties, but helped ethnic solidarity to be used for inter-ethnic wars. This would have significant bearing on the period following the soviet withdrawal.

II. Afghan Civil War –The Key Factors

During the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and later the guerrilla war against the pro-communist regime in Kabul, the frontline divided almost all ethnic groups and the larger tribes. In all those groups there were collaborators of the socialist regimes and some fierce enemies of these regimes; and people who decide to wait and see who would prevail. Some family fever to communist some fever to Mujahideen of favorites. Some hoped for the achievements of socialism and for the brotherly help of the USSR to transform Afghanistan into a supra-ethnic class society and eventually into a harmonious socialist union; the others expected that grand jihad against the formidable common enemy to do the job of creating one Afghan nation. As the war dragged on, it became obvious that the Kabul regimes and the Mujahideen were divided into numerous hostile factions. It also became obvious that ethnicity and tribalism were contributory factors to this process, but not the most important ones.

A. Internal factors

The present civil war in Afghanistan has frequently been analyzed as an ethnic war: the Pushtuns against the Tajiks, Hazara and Uzbek or others. Each of these
groups fighting separately under its own commanders and military structure, the predominantly Pushtun Taliban are believed to aim at printing their ethnic stamp on all other ethnic groups of the country, and non-Pushtun are supposed to fight against Pushtun dominance and against their ethnic marginalization. Pushtun ethnic groups are estimated to account for between 40 per cent of Afghanistan nationals and the Pushtun themselves subdivided into thousand of tribes. There is no doubt that the Taliban polarized the country between a predominantly Pushtun south and east on the one side, and the other one.

Hazara, is an ethnic group whose members play a major role in the civil war. Groups live in various part of northern Afghanistan, and in the major cities, particularly in Kabul as well as in Quetta (Pakistan) and mashad (Iran). An unifying factor is the popular dislike of Pushtun. In the post 1992 civil war pressure from Iran drove them together politically. Only of the pro-Iranian Hezb-e-wahadat (party of unity). The Hazara may become the first major ethnic group and strong unit against Pushtun (Taliban). Iran and Hazara ethnic relations not motivated by ethnic solidarity but rather by religious connection.

Uzbek speak their own Turkish language, adhere to Sunni Islam, their number equal roughly those of the Hazara living in North Afghanistan for centuries. During the Soviet-Afghan war, some of the Uzbeks sided with pro-Soviet government or rather with pro-minority policy of the new government and were militarily organized under Rashid Dostum’s Jawani militias: others sided with the Mujahideen mainly under the Harakate-e-Enqelab of malawi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi whose leaders, but not commanders, were almost exclusively Pushtun.

None of these groupings had ever developed a decision making institution which could express the will of the whole ethnic group or at least larger part of it, and which could lead such people to any concerted political or military action. The Pushtun are said to have ruled the country for 250 year. In fact it was not the Pushtun, but Pushtun rulers, who governed a wide range of different people, but never the Pushtun, not even a majority of them. Such a simplification is of little help in evaluating the prevailing situation in Afghanistan. The civil war in Afghanistan will rather depend on whether the protagonists continue using ethnicity as a psychological weapon which invariably backfires against those who use it. It will also depend on Afghanistan’s neighbors and on the regional powers who not only continue to fuel the
Afghan civil war but also make things worse by applying ethnic criteria while choosing their friends.\(^{35}\)

**B. Regional Powers and their Rivalries**

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan the neighboring powers - Iran, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan became more important. Each of these three countries is linked to one of the parties in Afghanistan: Pakistan with the Hezb-i-Islami, Iran with the Hezb-e-wahdat and Uzbekistan with the Jumbesh. Their relations are a matter of reciprocal manipulation: each tries to command the other to further its own interest. The three neighboring powers all opposed the rebuilding of the Afghan state by the coalition, led by the Jamait-i-Islami, but they could not agree on a common course, the division among the three states correspond to those between their client parties; one can see the assumption that eliminating certain actors in the new-regionalized conflict in Afghanistan will automatically ensure stabilization.

The basic objective of Pakistan’s policy toward Afghanistan is to weaken the Afghan state, which since 1947 has favored an alliance with India.\(^{36}\) As India’s approach overlooked the probability that the future politics of Afghanistan would be more complex than the simple alternatives between secularism and fundamentalist Islam. The fall of Marxist regime and formation of the Mujahideen government in Kabul may influence the political and psychological dynamics of on going conflict in Kashmir, where India and Pakistan have fought three costly wars. Long before capturing power in Kabul, the Mujahideen leaders supported the liberation of Kashmir.\(^{37}\) In addition, India’s policy was based on the principle of opposition to all religious fundamentalisms which was espoused by most of the Indian nationalist leaders. Some American analyst feel that India was watching and waiting in order to be sure that Soviet intervention in Afghanistan would be successful. Had it happened, it could lead the formation of an independent Pakhtoonistan or could put pressure on Pakistan to change its policy toward India.\(^{38}\) While, Pakistan’s military and political support for the Hezb-i-Islami is thus partially attributable to the Hezb’s lack of nationalist rhetoric (the party even went far as to advocate confederation between Pakistan and Afghanistan). This consistent backing of one party has in practice contributed to destabilization which, incidentally, undermined Pakistan’s pretensions to play an important role in post-communist Central Asia, since Afghanistan is a
crucial passageway to that region. Further more, the permanent strategic goals of Pakistan in Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal are:

- to have a friendly government in Kabul to prevent the reconstruction of a Kabul – New Delhi axis
- To establish strategic depth against India, by using Afghanistan territory a corridor towards Central Asia this could be used to import gas and oil.
- To enact a Sunni Islamic policy which is the very basis of Pakistan’s legitimacy, secular Pakistani government to enlist the support of the increasingly effective and numerous militant religious networks inside Pakistan and divert them from domestic politics to regional militancy.

In addition, Pakistan now lacked a viable Afghanistan policy to enable it to secure a receptive government in Kabul to settle once and for all the long Standing Afghan – Pakistan border dispute in line with Pakistan’s interests. After the Soviet withdrawal, Islamabad essentially would have liked to see an enmeshing of the identity of Pakistan’s and Afghanistan into a Pakistan influenced Pashtun ruled enclave to assist it with wider objectives. And Pakistan also fitted in American’s new political and strategic agenda in the region – that of preventing Russian hegemony, containing Iran and playing a balancing role against ambitions powers as China. Stability in Afghanistan was the main variable in this strategy. Domination in Afghanistan was important to exercise powerful control over the Southern corridor to Central Asia. This was the only way to enhance Pakistan geopolitical standing with the West in shaping the future evolution of Central Asia. This by itself would get Pakistan economic and political rewards ‘by creating a regional dependence on Islamabad to ensure safety for traffic - in other words, the international acceptance of Islamabad’s hegemony over the Southern approaches to Central Asia and the Western gateway to China’. The control over Pakistan-Afghanistan corridor and creating an opening from the South would be vital natural gas resources of the region, probably in this context one may see the Brown Amendments largesse, as US’s subtle renewal of support to Pakistan as a frontline state again.

Iran chose to support Hez-Be-Wehdat. Since the Soviet withdrawal, Iran’s policy toward Afghanistan has been to avoid establishment of a Saudi-backed Islamic regime in Kabul which would mean the isolation of Afghanistan’s Shiites, who
constituted the only card Iran now holds in the country. The Saudi funding for the Afghan faction of Mujahideen came primarily due to its desire to have a dominant influence in the Islamic world, undermining Iran and to establish a Sunni fundamentalist movement in Afghanistan. Saudi’s political and religious motives went beyond Afghanistan and it was making of efforts to expand influence in Central Asia as well. Saudi money and Afghan Mujahideen were believed to be behind Tajik civil war also. Furthermore, the Islamic revolution in Iran had challenged Saudi Arabia’s pre-eminence. Indeed Tehran argued that monarchy was incompatible with Islam and that Saudi Arabia’s close relations with the United States were against the interests of the Moslems. Saudi believed that Iran will pose a great threat to them. Saudi Arabia also promoted the Sunni Islamic fundamentalists within Afghan resistance and deliberately emphasized the Sunni and Shiite division in Islam. During 1988-1992, Saudi Arabia wanted to consolidate the influence by insisting on the establishment of a pro-Saudi Arabia and pro-Pakistan Islamic government in Kabul after withdrawal of Soviet. In the rise of Taliban it was believed that Saudi’s supported financially to the Taliban. When Taliban entered Mazari’s Hezb-e-wahdat forces both allies of Iran in the Southern and Western outskirts of Kabul, murdered Mazari and threatened to capture Kabul fi-rom Rabbani and Massoud. It was at this juncture that the Taliban movement emerged as a serious contender for national power. Iran started seeing Taliban as an anti-Shia and anti-Iran force. Iran strong suspicion for the Taliban tied not only to Pakistan but to Saudi Arabia and the United States. It feared that the US might be planning to turn Afghanistan into an anti-Iranian state. Tehran attached greater importance to the interests of the state and nationalism in its foreign policy. Iran also emphasized on the rights of the Afghan Shiites. During period 1988-1992, Iran encouraged the Iran-based Shiites organizations in Afghanistan to demand 25 per cent of the representation in the institutions and in any future government in Kabul. The Shiites demand was forcefully rejected by the pro-Saudi and pro-Pakistan Sunni resistance organizations in Peshawar. Whereas, the formation of the Hez-Be-Wehdat in 1990. was largely Iranian initiative, aimed at bringing together all Shiites in Afghanistan, or at least the Hazaras. But the Hez-Be-wehdat’s departure from the government alliance had indirectly weakened Iran’s grip on the party.
The Uzbek government key external objective was to guarantee all international frontiers to prevent the destabilization of Central Asia. The border with Afghanistan is particularly important; President Islam Karimov’s secular regime feared an Islamic contagion emanating from Afghanistan (or, indirectly, from Tajikistan, where an Islamic insurgency rages). Uzbekistan backed the Jumbesh in Afghanistan in the quest for a reliable ally to guard its Southern border—not because of ethnic solidarity with Uzbeks in Afghanistan. So long as the Jumbesh controlled an important piece of the border, Uzbekistan’s border was assured. The risk for the Jumbesh was that it would remain confined to a small part of Afghanistan. For Uzbekistan the danger was being shut out of future political developments in Kabul. 49

Russia - The down fall of pro-Soviet regime (Najibullah) followed by the disintegration of former Soviet Union, 50 posed new challenges to Soviet military establishment. The conditions of Afghan war worsened by the ethnic conflicts within the military, the Afghan war not only exacerbated the ethnic conflict, but it also jeopardized the assets of the Soviets structure in Central Asia. The impact to Afghan war was more prominent on Central Asians countries due to the similarities in culture, religion and ethnicity of their Afghanistan counterparts. Therefore, the Central Asians countries were not comfortable with the Soviet Afghan policy. Apart from the Central Asians countries the Afghan war created anti-Soviet and anti-Russian sentiments among other ethnic minorities. What Soviet wanted after its withdrawal from Afghanistan was first, Afghanistan would be an independent non-align country, friendly toward USSR. Secondly, it would have a government of national reconciliation in which the Marxist PDPA would share substantial power with non-Marxist groups including resistance groups 51 that might join the process of national reconciliation but to no gain as many hard line Pushtuns reduced their offensive against these states. But by and large the country remained divided, even at the height of the Mujahideen offensive against the Soviet forces. 52

The Soviet feared the spread of ‘fundamentalism’ (a word that was closely identified with Western fears) and the instability in the Ferghana valley, and the near civil war conditions in Tajikistan. The instability in Afghanistan boded ill for the Russian first circle of security the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). As far as that country was concerned, the borders of CIS were to be protected as before, a
policy that was reinforced after Tajikistan’s conflict flared after 1993.\textsuperscript{53} Since the USA was trying to use the developments occurring in the Moslem world to its advantage. Holding forth upon the common values of the Christian and Islamic civilizations as opposed to atheistic communism and flirting with the political and religious leaders of the Moslem world, Western strategists tried to drive a wave of controversy between Moslems and the Soviet Union, to half circle the USSR with crescent of instability: the American ‘aim’ could only be countered by those who were prepared to give up their principles to suit Washington’s interests.

International reactionary circles were trying to point the spearhead of Moslem movements against the progressive forces within the Islamic world, and also against socialist states, particularly the Soviet Union,\textsuperscript{54} (though the CIA had launched the jihad in the then Soviet territory as early as 1987). The border, (especially towards the mountains) proved to be ideal guerrilla territory with opposition forces given shelter mainly by the Tajik groups led by Massoud (though initially they seemed having been patronized by all groups).\textsuperscript{55} It was argued stridently and frequently in Central Asia as well as in Moscow that Tajikistan’s civil war originated and continued so long basically because of interference from Afghanistan.

For Russia, Tajikistan was its only remaining foothold in Central Asia: Moscow maintained the 20th division and border guards, where the rank and file were usually locals under Russian command, while it had neither troops nor even military advisers in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Despite so called ‘Islamic threat’ Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan refused to allow Russian troops to be in their countries and stayed away from any practical military co-operation with Moscow. Russia did not have any strategic interests inside Afghanistan, but wanted to keep Tajikistan outside Uzbek influence and pressure. Hence, the use of the ‘Islamic threats’ made sense as Russia had a pragmatic approach to the Afghan conflict: its only goal was to maintain its military presence in the area at the lowest possible cost.\textsuperscript{57} It became obvious that ethnicity and tribalism were contributory factors to this process, but not the most important ones.

The future of Afghanistan will rather depend on whether the protagonists continue using ethnicity as a psychological weapon which invariably backfires against those who use it. It will also depend on Afghanistan’s neighbors and on the regional
powers who not only continue to fuel the Afghan civil war but also make things worse by applying ethnic criteria while choosing their 'friends'.

C. The Discovery of large Sources of Energy; The Oil and Gas in the Newly Emerged Central Asian Countries

After the end of the cold war, Afghanistan had lost its strategic importance. But the break down of the Soviet Union, the emergence of Central Asian states, the discovery of large quantities of oil and gas in the Caspian area, Afghanistan possibility could be an alternative gateway to Central Asia, that revived Afghanistan’s strategic importance for Iran, India, and Russia on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the United States on the other. This did not bode well for peace and stability in Afghanistan. The conflict continued for quite a while, not only because of dispute among Afghanistan’s but also because of intense rivalry among foreign powers.

There were thus considerable opportunities for trade; the Central Asian states could pay increasing attention to political events in Afghanistan. With the barriers previously erected by Moscow once fallen, one might even see the transformation of the entire region of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan into a zone of economic and political cooperation. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan have already joined the economic cooperation organization formed by Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. Consensus on economic and political forms and on state identity has yet to emerge in all of these states. But the need for economic reconstruction in Afghanistan and Central Asia in line with regional and global trends toward marketization and liberation may bring these countries closer to one another.

The Central Asian states with the rich resources are looking for a way to escape the Russian stranglehold on their economy and communications. They welcomed Pakistani overtures to economic cooperation, just as they welcomed Iran’s hand of friendship. However, both countries were left without doubt that none of these states welcome either one’s brand of political Islam, nor did they evince an interest in a bloc based on religion or ethnic communality. The chief concern here was for economic outlets – pipelines, roads, railways, all leading to the markets of the world, an access denied them by circumstance and geography. What was assessed to be the next largest oil and gas reserves, the region did not suffer unduly from lack of foreign interests.
Western oil men were soon to be seen in all the newly independent states, but problem that confronted them was the lack of a reliable access.

III. The U.S. Involvements in Afghan Civil War

A. The U.S. Bid to Contain Iran's Involvement in Afghanistan's Affairs

The problems between US and Iran started as early as in 1953 when the Americans intervened in the internal affairs of Iran by overthrowing the democratic government and reuniting the Shah. However, in late 1970s, the two countries had managed to clear up a lot of misunderstanding, followed with the split between the modernist forces and those favouring Islamic regime. Islamist groups and organisations were in existence in nearly every Muslim country. The struggle between the two forces was going on with the vision of their countries' progress. In Iran, things began to change and the balance began to shift in favour of the Islamist organisation from the mid-1970s. The Saudis, flushed with petrodollars, after the oil crisis of 1973 began to support the Islamist groups and organisations in Muslim countries to spread their own version of Islam. This evidently weakened the modernist. The US was ambivalent towards this because Saudi Arabia was one of the two pillars of American policy in the Middle East. Iran's effort to spread its own version of Islam after its revolution was bound to result in fierce competition with the Saudis and consequent and deterioration in their relations and rise in tension in the Islamic world. As Iran posed a frontal challenge to the existing order and to the United States' hegemony in the region in particular, Iran's defeat became the focal point of the American policy. After the fall of Pro-American regime (Shah) to the anti-American Islamic fundamentalist revolution led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, not only the United States lost a strategically located ally, but the whole American psyche was deeply shaken by the November 1979 seizure of the US embassy in Tehran and the taking of more than seventy Americans as hostages. Ayatollah Khomeini justified the hostage-taking as action against the great Satan-America. Pro-Iranian Shiites militant beholden to revolutionary and clerical regime which had overthrown the Shah were bombing US marines and kidnapping Americans and others Westerns in Lebanon. Those developments were quite traumatic for Americans, unaccustomed to
sense of vulnerability that the Iranian hostage crisis evoked. Thus shock waves were felt – strategic and politically.\textsuperscript{66} It caused US lost of friend in helping stabilizing the entire oil-rich Persian Gulf region.

The United States had secretly setup a number of intelligence posts along Iran’s northern border with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{67} In addition, what America faced as a severe blow by the changes in Iran was that the American influence had to retreat from Iran – Soviet border down the Southern shore of Persian Gulf. The lost of its control over the strait of Hormuze which is the strategic passage for the Persian Gulf oil transport route. A US ally and gendarme, who used to guard the American interests in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, turned into its foe; the US companies were forced to withdraw from Iran, and the US traders had to evacuate the Iranian market.\textsuperscript{68} And more important thing was that US lost is monitoring sites. They monitored Soviet communications and missile telemetry emitted from the Soviet missile and space base at Tyaratam, in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{69}

During this period America was facing with Arab (OPEC) embargo on their oil to America, the only Persian Gulf producer (Iran under Shah Period) was to defy the OPEC embargo and ship oil to the United States after the October war. The Iranian crisis of 1978 stunted Washington, where the Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations had applauded the Shahs efforts to modernize his realm through a top-down white revolution financed by petrodollars. Although the most obvious short-term impact of the Islamic upheaval that swept the Shah from power in January 1979, the rejection of modernization and Westernizations by Ayatollah Khomeini, whose theocratic worldview was antithetical to the secular democratic creed that the United States had been preaching in the third world since early 50s. Because free elections, free markets, and free people had long been articles of faith among US policy makers and the social scientist who frequently advised them, their rejection by Islamic radicals constituted a fundamental challenge to the core beliefs that shaped American relations with the Middle East. By the late 1980s the conflict between traditional Islam and modern America had become so intense that some pundits spoke of ‘a clash of civilizations’.\textsuperscript{70} But in others views, the taking of the American hostages in Iran was also exploited, not without cynicism, as a target of opportunity in the process of overcoming the ‘Vietnam syndrome’ shortly after the crisis erupted, the New York
times ran a front-page story by Hedrick Smith “Iran is helping the US to shed fear of intervening abroad”. Smith reported “an important shift of attitudes in Washington that many believe, will have a significant long-term impact on the willingness of the United States to project its power in the third world and to develop greater military capabilities for protecting its interests there”.

However, US regarded Iran an important location to maintain her geo political strategy and economic interests there. The Carter doctrine was required to maintain U.S. imperialism in the Middle East. When the Shah of Iran was overthrown, and US military and intelligence installations were put out of order as Pentagon official worded it “the US government was left without any coherent imperialist strategy in the Middle East”; and there was no immediate surrogate who could take over the Shah’s role. Therefore, the US government had to reassert a stronger military presence.

After the Islamic revolt against Reza Shah Pahelvi’s regime in Iran which was considered as pro American, Khomeni Ayatullah the spiritual leader had argued that ‘the imperialism, the oppressive and treacherous rulers, the Jews, Christians, and materialists are all attempting to distort the truth of Islam and turn the Muslims astray ‘he cautioned’. . . the entire contemporary international system are totally illuminate, for they perpetuate an unjust order imposed on ‘oppressed’ Muslim by the ‘oppressive’ great powers. Muslims are therefore obliged to ‘overthrow the oppressive governments installed by the imperialists and bring into existence an Islamic government for justice that will be in the service of the people’. An Islamic world order would see the territorial state transcended by the broader entity of the umma. Further more, After Khomeini riding victoriously it was necessary to eliminate all things western. He said it was time to launch a holy war against the West and the traitors of Islam.

Robin Wright (1986) makes this point in her examination of Shiite Islam titled Sacred Rage. According to Wright, the Ayatollah Khomeini was guided by the message of Karbala. Along with the Shiite clergy of Iran, he believed the Iranian Revolution was the first step in purifying the world. Israel must be eliminated and returned to Islamic rule. The west had become the handmaiden of the Jews, but the west was and remains the source of imperialism. Its influence is satanic and must be
destroyed. Holly warriors were called to battle. Wright says Iran exportrd terrorism in this vein with revolutionary zeal.

The primary target of Iran's external religious zeal has been Lebanon. Shiite fundamentalists began to flock to Lebanon in 1982 after the Israeli invasion, and Iran helped establish two terrorist organizations to support them, the Islamic Jihad (Islamic holy war) and Hizbullah (party of god). By 1996, both groups, though still supporting terrorism, were capable of acting as autonomous militias.

In addition, Khomeini made his God promise of exporting the struggle. In November 1979 and February 1980 wider spread riots erupted in the Shiites towns of the oil - rich Saudi province of Hassa, in Bahrain, while Kuwait became the target of a sustain terror and subversion campaign. In June 1979, the revolutionary regime began publicly urging the Iraqi population to rise up and overthrow the socialist and secular Ba'th regime. Tehran escalated its campaign by resuming support for the rebellious Iraqi Kurds (which had been suspended in 1975), and initiating terrorist attacks against prominent Iraqi officials. These pressures eventually led the Iraqi invasion on Iran in September 1980. The US having long record of Iran backing terrorist groups to further its perceived strategic interests, containing Iranian influence in West Asia became major U.S. foreign policy objective, and there was increasing evidence that covert war was growing in scale.

Media reports suggest the US was making use of the Mujahideen-e-Khalq – a far-right organization complicit in the 1991 anti-Shia massacres in Iraq, and designated a global terrorist organisation in 1997 – for attacks inside Iran. US covert support was also thought for a Kurdish terrorist group that had executed strikes against Iran. On April 13, Iran announced the arrest of 90 Jundulloh cadres, who were reported to have created stockpiles of weapons and explosives. Iran's Intelligence Minister, Mohseni Ejeie, also pointed to the threat from the west. The United States itself was willing to back "radical" Sunni Moslems as well as Saudi-backed, Wahabist movements against pan-Shiites Iran, which was regarded as the "greater" of two "evils." By 1982-83, the US along with Saudi Arabia, fully supported Saddam Hussein's war with the ayatollah Khomeini, which was instigated in reaction to Iranian support for Shiites and Kurdish faction in Iraq, while Washington looked the other way, Saddam Hussein engaged in horrific war crimes in fighting Iran and against Kurdish and Shiites factions, and other groups regarded as alighted with Iran'
in the war of cities, (a war resulting in the loss of over a million people). From other point of view, Saddam Hussein had hoped to take advantage of Iran’s revolutionary state; it’s extremely weakened military capabilities, and its international isolation, and further more he was supported by the United States, which had welcomed Iraq’s invasion as an increased pressure on Iran to release the embassy hostages. War was launched against Iran to bring an end to any threat to Iraq from the export of the Islamic revolution; and possibly to overthrow the clerical government.

After eight years of bitter fighting with Iraq, Iran accepted United Nations Security Council resolution to ceasefire with Iraq, and soon after international isolation, it mended fences with the Gulf States, re-established diplomatic ties with the major West European powers, and even eluded with the United States, the ‘Great Satan’. When a combination of international and regional developments offered new opportunities in the early 1990, the Ayatollah’s imperialist ambitions were quickly enforced and expansion of the country’s military arsenal was accompanied by sustained efforts to project Iranian influence in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, as well as in Central Asia and the Trans Caucasus.

While, Iran renewed and substantially accelerated it’s nuclear development programme. There was a strong concern among intelligence services and arms control agencies around the world that Iran was seeking nuclear weapons. Iran was known to have been shopping for nuclear know how and material in the West, the successor states to the Soviet Union, especially Russia – from which Iran had acquired two reactors of four hundred megawatts thermal each and selected third world countries, such as Brazil, North Korea, and China, which had long been involved in the Iranian programme. On their part, the Ayatollahs made no secret of their interest in the bomb, at least until they came under heavy American pressure to bridle their nuclear ambitions following the 9/11 attacks.

The question of US interest fit in factional rivalries in Afghan’s civil war to contain Iran was seen in the background of Iran-Iraq war explosion, where ‘the United States itself was willing to back “radical” Sunni Muslims as well as Saudi –backed Wahabist movements against pan-Shiites Iran’. And during Gorge Bush regime where he himself denounced Iran’s oppressive regime for Middle East and again during Clinton administration after Gulf War, he denounced “dual containment
policy" against Iran and Iraq. Speaking at conference of former American and Soviet officials involved in the Afghan crisis in Norway in September 1995, General Valentin Varennikov said that Soviet leaders feared and were militarily prepared for US invasion of Iran to overthrow Khomeini regime, however, according to KGB defector, Vasily Mitrokhin the KGB was alarmed by the prospect of improvement of relations between Iran and Afghanistan or taking place of an Islamic revolution in Afghanistan.

With the growing Iranian influence in Afghanistan affairs, in the absence of major powers involvement in the Afghanistan’s conflict, Iran assumed a larger role by backing the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani. During the war of resistance to Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Shi’a Hazaras group was largely dismissed by fellow Mujahideens belonging to the non-Shiaiit camp. But the external donors such as the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan excluded Hazaras from receiving any military and financial aid. The contrary they promoted Pushtun Mujahideens over their Hazara counterparts. Caught in this internal sectarian and external ideological divide the Hazaras were left confined to rely upon Iran for their cause. Iran’s involvement in the Afghan conflict primarily to secure the interests of the Afghan Shiites as particularly the Hazaras went through two distinct phases. In the first phase during the resistance to Soviet occupation, Iran selectively helped only the Hazaras. Iran’s ability to arm and fund the eight Afghan Shia groups was officially recognized by Tehran. In 1988 with the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Iran immediately worked to unite those recognized groups into a single Hizb-e-wahdat party. It then pressed for the Wahadat’s inclusion in the international negotiations to form a new Mujahideen government. As the Afghan war intensified between 1992 and 1995 so did the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistani attempts to bring all those factions together always had sidelined the Hazaras and Iran. In the Peshawar Accord (between the groups of Mujahideen on power sharing in Kabul) or the Jalalabad Accords to end civil war, this trend prevailed. Iran over the years came to realize that its exclusive focus on the Shiites factor had left it with little effective say in Afghanistan developments. This caused Iran shift in its policy on Afghanistan, Iran started backing not just the Afghan Shias but all the Persian speaking groups who were resisting Pashtun domination Iran has natural link with the Tajiks, they originate from the same ancient race and spoke the same language. In late 1991 Iran signed an
agreement with Tajikistan and Afghanistan’s Jamiat-e-Islami to strengthen its influence on Persian speaking Sunni Afghans. Iran also contacted the Ismaili Shiites and Uzbeks in Afghanistan. Their effort was to combine together to oppose Pushtun hegemony. As a strategist, they were most organized and effective. Their motivation and dedication to their resistance movement was spurred by their vision of having a central role in post-Soviet Afghanistan and replacing the rival Pushtuns. In addition, as Professor James clad of the Georgetown University pointed out that “… Iranian meddling in religious disputes within Pakistan (which pitted Shia against Sunni) there was the vexatious Iranian patronage of ethnic Tajiks combatants in Afghanistan, partisans war against Islamabad’s preferred factions in that country’s civil war.”

Iran’s interest in Afghanistan was to counter the interests of the Saudi – Pakistan – US combine for obvious reason. USA refused to accept the Islamic revolution in Iran; the Saudi’s used their money power to foment counter revolutionary forces that would dislodge Iran from the high pedestal it gained after the revolution and Pakistan joint its interest with these two.

The Clinton administration, which was following a policy of dual containment of Iran and Iraq, saw the increasing Iranian role in Afghanistan as a disturbing one in the ground of rising Iranian influence in Central Asian republics as well. After the collapse of Soviet Union, the birth of five Central Asian states gave Iran a new impetus to end its international isolation. Iran moved to gain footing in Central Asia. In November 1991, an agreement to build a railway line between Iran and Turkmenistan was signed. In its Central Asian foray Iran was however, careful not to antagonize Russia. Tehran declined to support Azerbaijan in its war with Armenia even though 20 per cent of Iranian population is Azeri; Tehran also helped Russia and the UN to end the civil war in Tajikistan. One may see, the US approach to Central Asia was also driven by overarching geopolitical considerations, with an underlying goal of containing the influence of China, Iran and Russia. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of the newly-independent states in 1991, US policy toward Central Asia centered on security relationship with Kazakhstan. US focus to secure Kazakhstan’s nuclear arsenal and in December 1993, resulted in the signing of a cooperative threat reduction (CTR) agreement to dismantle and destroy the country’s more than 100 SS-18 missiles.
By 1994, the US cemented its bilateral security cooperation with Kazakhstan through a defense doctrine and training the neighboring states of Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan also joined Kazakhstan in entering NATO’s partnership for peace program (PFP). Central Asian membership in the NATO (PFP) served as the main avenue for Western security engagement. As a result the United States gave Pakistan a free hand in Afghanistan and indirectly supported the Pakistani efforts to build up the Taliban militia as a counterweight to the Iranian – backed Rabbani regime. The United States regarded Pakistan as a strong ally throughout the cold war then continued to act as a frontline state for America and America increasingly viewed Afghanistan through the Pakistani prism. One needs only to recall Robin Raphael’s strong plea before the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee to revise the 1990 Pressler Amendment which had ended all military and economic assistance to Pakistan. Pakistan however, always had its own axe to grind in neighboring Afghanistan. American interest in Afghanistan renewed only when it became increasingly clear that Pakistan’s protégé Hekmatyar had failed to capture Kabul. And because Hekmatyar was suspected of harboring Islamic terrorists who had carried out attacks against western targets and his increasing closeness with Iran was also viewed with alarm. In 1990-91 he had backed Iraq in the Gulf war. The USA stressed to Pakistan that, in view of his divisive attacks on other Afghans, Hekmatyar was not to receive US aid. Hekmatyar’s failure to support Saudi Arabia against Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait cost him heavily from a power that had seen him as their chosen instrument to combat Iranian power in Afghanistan.

The final step against Hekmatyar came from Pakistan. Pakistan (or more precisely, the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency of Pakistan) had also long seen Hekmatyar as their chosen policy instrument in Afghanistan. But his divisive ways hurt Pakistan’s position in newly independent Central Asia and the desire to end war in Afghanistan led the Pakistan starting to cut off Hekmatyar from their support in late 1991. But he did not lose all his foreign supporters. Arab supporters, who agreed with his stand over the Gulf war, continued to provide suitcases of dollars. Libya provided both funding and terrorist style urban combat training; it remained an ally. There were even unconfirmed reports of an attempted Hekmatyar rapprochement with Iran’s long
time opponent. The Clinton administration was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban as they were in line with its anti-Iran policy, as Taliban forces were supported by many Arab militants most of them were strongly anti-Shiite; they contributed accentuating the common prejudice among Afghan Sunni against the Hazara Shia, which led to various massacres of civilian Hazaras living in Kabul after the fall of the city in May 1992. Fight fire with fire, was the US reasoning: combat the militant Shiaism of the Iranians with even greater militancy and violence by some groups which were considered as orthodox Sunni Muslims.

This served well the purpose of Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were troubled by Iran's power, even though that power had been reduced through Iran's virtual defeat by Saddam Hussein in the 1980-88 war in the Gulf. The Saudi rulers were also vexed by the 'heresies' of its own persecuted Shiites minority centered in the sensitive region of the eastern oil fields. Anti-Soviet and simultaneous anti-Shiite policies did suite Saudi objectives perfectly. Pakistan anxious to exclude both Russian and Iranian influence from its region and thus secured trade routes to the west markets of Central Asia. And Taliban could be a counterweight for Pakistan for its keenness to achieve success depth in the strategic confrontation with India over Kashmir Issue, and Taliban as an alternative to the unreliable Hekmatyar, whom they had earlier selected as their point man because Hekmatyar had failed to capture Kabul and later he jumped side, to be a client of Iranians.

The emergence of the Taliban was closely related to the balance of power and an evolution among the fundamentalist movements. While the Hezb had been supported by Pakistani Jamaat-e Islami, the Taliban had been helped by more conservative fundamentalist movement from Pakistan, namely the Jamat-e Ulema-I Islam. They received discreet support from Saudi Arabia, who became estranged from more radical Islamists like Hikmatyar. The Americans then strongly opposed to radical Islam, might have been in search of another Muslim card in line with Saudis, with the aim of not leaving Islamic fundamentalism with no other choice than to move closer to Iran. Pakistan was still playing the Islamic card in Central Asia and also needed Islamic leverage in its policy to establish a corridor from its territory to Central Asia through Afghanistan. This allowed Pakistan also to play on the Pushtun
connection (since many high-ranking military officers and civil servants in Pakistan were Pushtun).

The Taliban which took shape in mid-1994 and began to spread their influence in the large part of the country had backing of Pakistan and the Saudi governments. The US also had supplied Taliban with military equipments and weapons through Pakistan. The US long supplied arms and training to the most ferociously reactionary fighting forces in the Islamic world, including those Mujahideen who spawned a second generation reform movement known as the Taliban to that extreme that Ayatollah Khomeini condemned them as a branch of Islam-i limrikai, “American Islam.”. While, Saudis were betting heavily on the Taliban to eliminate all traces to Iranian influence, mainly in the form of the Shiite factions which the Saudis, as well as Zia al-Haq always opposed. This effort suited Israel also, as some Jewish lobbies in the USA were not initially critical of the Taliban. In line with the US State Department Israel saw the Taliban as an anti-Iranian force which could be used to undermine Iranian influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Israel’s intelligence agency Mossad developed a dialogue with Taliban through Taliban liaison offices in the USA. Pakistan’s ISI supported this dialogue even though Pakistan did not recognize Israel. The ISI had developed links through the CIA with Mossad during the Afghan jihad. But as US policy toward the Taliban shifted so did Israel’s as the Taliban gave refuge to Bin Laden and encouraged the drugs trade. Turkey convinced Israel that the Taliban were a security threat to the region. Mossad opened contacts with the anti-Taliban alliance. Israel now had an interest in seeing that the Taliban did not take control of the whole Afghanistan, even though it remained suspicious of Ahmad Shah Masud’s support from Iran. Both the Taliban and the Northern Alliance were to accuse each other for receiving Israeli supports.

While, Iran perceived the Taliban to be a creation of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia with US support. It was also convinced that the Taliban was put together not just to contain the Iranian role in Afghan affairs, but the Taliban were perceived to be a ‘trap’ set up by the US, Saudi and Pakistan to drag Iran into war with Afghanistan. A ‘conspiracy theory’, sought to explain that since the Gulf war of 1991, the US was seeking to lure Iran into some war or the other that would serve as an opportunity to destroy its renovated military machine and further to exhaust its economy – with the
over all objective of restoring Iran to its former status as a piece of US strategic chess board. And since the US would prefer to distance the war as far as possible from the Gulf region – to avoid repercussions that might prove hard to control later on – a war between Iran and Afghanistan would be ideal.

Iran shares a 900 km long border on the east with Afghanistan. The relations between the two slipped to lowest point in late 1998, when ten Iranian diplomats and journalist in Mazare Sharif went missing and were presumed to have been killed. After the Taliban stormed Mazar-i-Sharif, it was later reported that 2,000-6,000 Shia Hazara civilians had been systematically massacred by the guerillas after recapturing the city Iran amassed 70,000 Revolutionary guards and conducted the largest ever ground and air exercise on its Afghan border.

However, in mid-October the Taliban agreed to free all Iranian prisoners who were held in Afghanistan and to punish only those found responsible for the killing of the Iranian diplomats (or military advisors, according to Taliban). By the end of the year the situation became calmer, with the Taliban having expressed regret for the deaths of the Iranian nationals, and Iran too having scaled down its border forces and announced that it had no intention of invading Afghanistan.

B. The U.S. Attempt to Prevent Iran from being Alternate Oil Pipeline Route

Apart from political aspect, the Talibans were also used as a southbound route of the Central Asian oil and gas, a route that would be projected and promoted in lieu of the Iranian route. Certainly the Taliban appeared to serve the US policy of isolating Iran by creating a firmly Sunni buffer on Iran’s border and potentially providing security for trade routes and pipelines that would break Iran’s monopoly on Central Asia’s southern trade routes,’ wrote Reuters.

Such a project was aimed to deprive Iran of transit fees: it also aimed to deprive Iran of South Asian markets for its oil and gas. And most importantly, it aimed to deprive Iran of a potential political and trade influence in South Asia. Technically speaking, Iran would be the cheapest long-term export route option for the Caspian Sea Republic. Moreover, Iran was interested in playing an active role in solving the problem of transportation of oil and gas resources of the Caspian republics of the CIS to world markets. Russia could gain if they would support project meant to transport oil and gas of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan through Iranian territory onwards to
potential markets of South and South-East Asia. Iran was also keen to export natural gas to Pakistan and India. Both South Asian countries could benefit from the proposed $5 billion Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, which was expected to cost around $700 million revenue per annum to Pakistan - $500 million as annual transit fee and additional $200 million saved through cheaper gas. Pakistan is geo-strategically located as a transport corridor for supply of gas and also in a position to obtain it at cheaper prices from Iran, Qatar and Turkmenistan. This pipeline holds greater prospects than the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline. Originally, the Iranian Gas company planned to deliver 2 billion cubic feet of gas daily to Karachi and Multan with an option to extend it to India and onwards to some countries in the Far East. However, Indian had reservations about this land route as in their view it would pass through ‘hostile’ Pakistani territory. This India looked for an alternative sea route being developed by the Russian company Gazprom that has a 10 per cent share in the South Pars offshore gas fields of Iran.

In addition, in the first phase of its programme, Iran proposed swapping its crude oil with Central Asian crude. Since 1998 crude oil from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan has been transported across the Caspian Sea to Iran's Caspian port of Neka, where it is refined and consumed in Iran. In exchange Iran allowed companies to lift oil from Iranian ports on the Gulf. With pipeline projects indefinitely delayed, this appealed to the oil companies who, despite US pressure not to do so, began to negotiate further swaps with Iran. Two US companies, Chevron and Mobil who had oil concessions in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan applied to the Clinton administration in May 1998, for a license to carry out swaps with Iran - a move that created a major policy headache for Washington and would become a test case for the future of US sanction against Iran.

Whereas, the west had tried to exclude Iran, having influence in this region since post-Soviet era by encouraging the politics of pan Turkish ideas. It received boost from western policies that supported pro-Turkish tendencies against reemergence of Iranian interest in the Turkish region of the former Soviet Union. Turkey herself was not reluctant to adapt itself to this new international atmosphere and forged new links with the countries in this region. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) was found in 1992. The BSEC handled small projects and sought to develop transportation, communication and environmental projects. The BSEC, initially founded by Turkey, Pakistan and Iran during the late
1960's was expanded by the addition of five Central Asian States, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan in 1993. This became a catalyst for building private sector banking for building infrastructure and scientific technical cooperation. The Turkish world was expanded from Europe to Eurasia.\textsuperscript{115}

One could notice that US did not want energy resources pipeline go through Iran. A serious conflict between China and the US rose over this, as China’s support for the extension of pipeline routes from Central Asia through Iran had the potential to generate conflict between Beijing and Washington. China’s oil agreements with Kazakhstan included a Chinese pledge to help construct pipeline from Kazakhstan to the Kazakh-Turkman border with the goal of eventually extending it through an Iranian port. This could run counter the US policy of denying Iran access to Central Asia oil.\textsuperscript{116}

In the months before the Taliban came to power, the then US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Robin Raphael, waged an intense round of shuttle diplomacy between the powers with possible stake in the UNCAL project. ‘Robin Raphael was the face of the UNCAL pipeline; said an official of the former Afghanistan government who was present at some of the meetings with her. In addition tapping new sources of energy, the project also suited a major US strategic aim in the region: isolating its enemies Iran and stifling a frequently mooted rival pipeline backed by Iran. It would eliminate the need to deal with Iran, a country towards which Washington nurtured deep antipathy and resentment, and gave the US and its partner’s control of the new supply of energy.\textsuperscript{117}

Pipelines through Afghanistan would exclude the possibility of direct supply by Iran of resources to meet Pakistan’s energy needs, and the consequent flow of foreign exchange earnings into Iran’s coffers. The Isolation of Iran was not especially an obsession of the State Department, but there were such strongly anti-Iranian attitudes in sections of Congress, reinforced by the lobbying of pressure groups such as the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), that a President had little incentive to take his political life in his hands by exploring the possibility of a less antagonistic relationship with Iran. The policy of ‘dual containment’ of Iran and Iraq, initially articulated on behalf of the Clinton Administration by Australian born former lobbyist Martin Indyk, was providing increasingly creaky. The Irony in the case of Afghanistan was that the attempt to exclude Iran by means of the expansion of
Taliban power had adverse effects on Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan revived the Iranian suspicion regarding the pipeline; it feared long term US hegemony in Afghanistan and a fierce competition for Central Asian energy resources among American multinational companies. In view of the US determination to block the route through Iran, the Afghanistan – Pakistan corridor could emerge as the only alternative to unleash Central Asian energy potential.

C. The U.S. Support to Afghan groups in order to secure oil and gas pipeline route through Afghanistan.

The post-cold war model of war was seen as quite a less threatening, more diffused, and less intense. The military and intelligence posture were to deal with the Soviet threat as unnecessary. Indeed, the fundamental threats to American national security no longer arose from military challenges but from economic challenges. The entire sphere of military challenge was degraded to the level of subsidiary threat, while the perceptions of national interest shifted to the economic sphere. The defeat of America’s cold war enemy blinded the US political elites to the extent that US policy failed to adapt the new world order.

America’s foreign policy had been shaped during half a century of cold war. A generation of diplomats had been raised in the shadow of Soviet containment; the dismembering of the Soviet Union left them in a political vacuum, without specific guidelines. To fill that vacuum, American diplomacy turned to business. As such they became ambassadors and diplomats of the strong Washington lobbies that backed their own parties. Almost overnight, it became apparent that US foreign policy had turned into powerful vehicle for American cooperation seeking opportunities everywhere instead of promoting international stability. This imperialist approach was an engine powering the foreign policy of George W. Bush.

In the early 1990s impelled by the oil lobby, George Bush Sr. underestimated the consequences of the disintegration of the economic equilibrium in Central Asia. The dismantling of Soviet power was perceived as the beginning of lucrative period of exploitation, with US oil companies controlling the vast energy fields of the region. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, little attempt was made to focus on US energy. Even though after the collapse of bipolar world and the contours of

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a multi polar world order American continued entry and continued presence in any region was guided by her long-term national interest.123

The United States was actively involved in the region since early 1990s. Beginning in the 1970s the US government and private Foundations funded detailed research on the region. From the late 80s the regions newspaper and journals were regularly collected translated and analyzed. At the time of the independence of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) the United States was among the first to set up well-staffed embassies throughout the region.

One of the key concerns for the American policymakers was how to secure access to the oil and natural gas reserves in the first half of the 21st century. The answer laid in the Central Asia and Caucasus. This was the primary reason why the United States was among the first to engage with these states soon after they declared independence. The Caspian Sea reserves were estimated to hold 100 billion to 200 billion barrels of oil. Natural gas reserves were estimated at 7.9 trillion cubic meters.124 According to Kees Van der pijn, the oil reserves of the Caspian region were initially estimated at around 150 billion barrels, half that of Saudi Arabia or equals to the reserves of Iraq and Iran combined.125 Western experts believed that the untapped hydrocarbon resources of the Central Asia Republics could make the region the Persian Gulf of the next century. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan oil fields are believed to have significant amount of oil reserves and the largest gas reserves are believed to be in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan126 (see annex-1).

In the earlier phase of its engagement with the region, the United States encouraged the newly independent states (NIS) to adopt western style economic reforms. Economic growth and the integration of the CARs was to serve a very important purpose: ensuring the economic sovereignty of the NIS, and the eventual elimination of the Russian and Iranian influence, while at the same time securing lucrative markets for US goods and services.127

The end of the confrontation with the Soviet Union created opportunities for the United States to redeploy as effectively as possible the considerable resources these were no longer needed to deter or counter Soviet aggression those resources included not only steel and coal, oil and food, and fibers and plastics, but also the effort and
talent of scientists, engineers, and many other people at the skill level in both public and private sectors. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and following the collapse of the USSR, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed. While the Central Asian states were eager to invite the overseas oil companies for commercial deals because they hoped that the export earnings would then put substantial funds at their disposal for reconstructing their post-Soviet economics. They also considered that as a way of reducing their dependence on Moscow which, in spite of their independence cornered them in a tight noose. The Central Asian states also required an access to the sea for their trade. The existing routes involved long distances, and were prohibitively expensive. Just by way of illustration, Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan as located by road some 3,200 km from Bandar Abbas in Iran, 3,400 from Odessa in the black sea and some a 500 km Vladivostok in the pacific. In this regards the Pakistani ports in the South Karachi, port Qasim, Pasni, Gwadar, Jewani and Ormara in the Arabian Sea – was thought to be an alternative proposition. In comparison Karachi being around 2,720 km from Dushanbe and from Ashkabad, capital of Turkmenistan, about 2,000 km. These attractions had opened up the possibilities for the Central Asian states to avoid dependence on any one state for ports and pipelines. Therefore, they were opened to options and follow policies which would allow them to deal with anyone. This was demonstrated in Turkmenistan’s broader policy of ‘positive neutrality’ which had allowed it to build political and economic interests with Iran on the one hand and the US on the other. For Central Asia states the location of Iran was very useful. It could help them by providing access to the sea. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan viewed Iran as a better route through which its gas and oil could be exported to western markets (see annex-2). Not withstanding its espousal of Shia fundamentalism, Iran was accepted as a more stable economic partner by all Central Asian states. In this regards Russia and India were also not opposed to the engagement with Iran and viewed this possibility in their own economic and strategic interests. However, the US in furtherance of its containment policy on Iran was determined to shut Iran out of the emerging oil game in Central Asia. With these reasons the US government was slow to pick up on the importance of the region (and those former Soviet republics) forged relations with US business. The US approach to Central Asia was also driven by overarching
geopolitical considerations with an underlying goal containing the influence of China, Iran and Russia.

Another US policy was even more ambitious with long term goals of democratization and marketization, a consolidation of regional security and cooperation and an open unfettered environment to allow the development of the regional energy resources. The private western entrants into the new great game included well-placed individuals, maverick companies and large oil companies – in that order. It was not until Clinton’s globalization offensive of 1994, that the US developed its own geopolitical offensive to wrest control of the region from Russia. The discovery of new hydrocarbon reserves led Central Asian region to gain in importance as it could serve as a replacement once the oil reserves in the Gulf start depleting seriously by the Middle of the next century. The assessment of the hydrocarbon reserves of the region had been speculative, but in anticipation of the potential oil and gas resources, a subtle yet big battle had started to establish control over these energy resources. The export routes out of Central Asia had then become one of the central issues in post cold war politics. It was in this context that Central Asia was again emerging as a murky battleground among big powers. The agenda was being set by geopolitics and oil.

The object of the revived game was twofold: firstly, to establish friendly relations with the leaders of the Central Asian republics controlling the oil and gas resources. Secondly, to secure alternative pipeline routes to world markets. The landlocked nature of the Central Asian states created obstacles to proposals for creating new alternative routes. The major existing pipeline systems ran north through Russia. Both passed through Chechnya where one system serves Russia and the other the export market, via the Russia black sea port of Novorossisk. But at present there is no pipeline heading south.

While, Turkmenistan as a gas-rich country avoided it’s dependence on Russia which was keen to export it to Pakistan and India and then onwards to South-East Asia. The proposed $2 billion trans-Afghanistan pipeline covering 1,464 kilometers was a 48-inch diameter pipeline that was proposed to connect the Daulatabad gas fields in Southern Turkmenistan to Multan in central Pakistan. It was proposed that it may be extended 600 km into India after traversing 750 km in Afghanistan. Reportedly, the expected supply of gas would be at the rate of 2 billion cubic feet per
day. The Turkmenistan government on its part had guaranteed deliverability of 25 trillion cubic feet of natural gas exclusively for the Central Asian gas pipeline. It had signed a deal with the consortium comprising UNOCAL, Turkmenistan government, Delta of Saudi Arabia, Stochu of Japan, Gazprom of Russia, Inpex of Japan, Hyundai of South Korea and Crescent of Pakistan. Talks on the above proposal between Turkmenistan and Pakistan had gone on for many years but had been hampered by the then ongoing war in Afghanistan. For countries like Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, the preconditions for societal uplift were to build gas and oil pipelines as soon as possible for transportation of their hydrocarbon assets to the outside world.\textsuperscript{134}

While, the US oil production began to decline and the American companies began to plan for replenishing reserves by investing in friendly countries, the Central Asian republics looked more lucrative than even the Middle Eastern allies due to their refusal to 'countenance foreigners running their oil industries in 1993, the American oil company Chevron concluded a deal worth $40 billion to develop Tengiz oil field on the north eastern shore of the Caspian sea. However the deal required construction of oil pipelines which in turn depended on regional stability. Peace and stability in Afghanistan was a prerequisite to the construction of pipelines through alternative routes other than through Iran. Subsequently, when the Central Asian republics became a hunting ground for the international companies with their governments looking for ways to break the Russian monopoly to lower the cost of delivering their oil to the outside world by construction of alternative oil pipelines the American companies also stood in the queue. One of the US companies, UNOCAL had planed for the construction of an oil pipe line through Afghanistan at a cost $ 8 billion. The Clinton administration had openly applauded the UNOCAL project\textsuperscript{135} (see map-1).

The United States was by then, after a period of neglect, trying to revise its contacts in Afghanistan with the new foray into the former Soviet republics in the Caspian area. Afghanistan became important once again.\textsuperscript{136} During the first presidency of Bill Clinton Afghanistan was conspicuous by its absence. It would however, be incorrect to state that Washington had nothing to do with Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal. On the contrary Pakistan which was a strong ally through out the cold war now continued to act as a frontline state for America and America increasingly viewed Afghanistan through the Pakistani prism. After the end of cold war US had halted it's military and economic assistant because of its breaching
nuclear proliferation issue. But later US had to turn to Pakistan again when US found its interests in Afghanistan, because Pakistan always played important role in neighboring Afghanistan. American interest in Afghanistan renewed only when it became increasingly clear that Pakistan’s protégé Hekmatyar had failed to capture Kabul and America’s calculation of gains from Central Asia’s oil and gas transportation appeared to be in jeopardy. But by and large America’s understanding of the area continued to be influenced by Pakistan’s reading of the situation. Thus, when Pakistan created and promoted the Taliban, America went along with the exercise sharing Pakistan’s belief that they would be able to provide some governance and stability in Afghanistan that would allow ambitious oil projects to take off.

Oil has been a major US concern. America was in serious search to set itself free from ‘OPEC tentacles’. Refusal of Middle Eastern allies to agree to foreigners running their oil industry forced US to look around for alternative sources. Newly independent states of Central Asia provided a willing alternative avenue. As Massoud the leader of a group rival to Taliban defined the goal of Taliban and their foreign patrons in the following words- “As always, it is the question of money. Western companies are interested in resources-rich territories of northern Afghanistan. They also want to penetrate the adjacent countries of Central Asia: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan for Gold and aluminum but most importantly-oil and gas. All theses, according to the plans of the true instigators of war, must go by the shortest route-through Afghanistan – to the Pakistani seaport of Karachi. This is the essence of the war, not the struggle for the ‘true faith’. The Holy Quran and jihad are, unfortunately, only cover in this rather dirty affair”.

The Clinton administration, writes Ahmad Rashid, “was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban, as they were in line with its anti-Iran policy and were important for the success of any Southern pipeline from Central Asia that would avoid Iran. Turkmenistan would be the supplier of the gas. In fact from the Iranian coast oil and gas could be shipped via the existing Iranian network. But US companies were prevented from using this route by the Iran-Libya sanctions Act (ILSA), which prohibited commercial ventures with those two countries. The cost of longer route through Afghanistan to the Pakistani was more expensive but considerably more advantageous for the US. It would eliminate the need to deal with Iran, a country towards which Washington nurtured deep antipathy and resentment, and gave the US
and its partner control of the new supply of energy. Since the mid-1990s the Americans had been pursuing that avenue. The US government was impressed by the ruthlessness and willingness of the then emerging Taliban (movement) to cut a pipeline deal. The state Department and Pakistan’s inter services intelligence agency agreed to funnel arms and funding to the Taliban in their war against the ethnically Tajik Northern Alliance. Until 1995, US taxpayers paid the entire annual salary of every single Taliban government official.

The UNOCAL deal was also regarded as the jewel in the crown of what was known in Washington as the strategy of the silk route this policy pursued the exclusion of Russia from the Asian pipelines: the energy highway that travel from the basin of the Caspian Sea westwards and from Central Asia, South and eastwards. Finally, by establishing a strong presence in these areas, the US wanted to lock Iran and China out of the energy business in the region, since Washington feared they could assist the Central Asian republics in setting up their own oil companies. ¹⁴⁰

The award-winning Journalist, described that: When the Taliban took Kabul in 1996, Washington said nothing why? Because Taliban leaders were soon on their way to Houston, Texas, to be entertained by executives of the oil company offered them a generous cut of the profits of the oil and gas pumped through a pipeline that the Americans wanted to build across Afghanistan. This was going to be an underground highway that would connect the rich energy fields of Turkmenistan with the coastal shores of Pakistan and India. Naturally, the US would have had full control upon it. The Taliban will probably develop like the Saudi did, commented a US diplomat; summarizing in this sentence the hopes of the white House Washington envisaged Afghanistan as an American oil colony. ¹⁴¹ As pointed out by Professor William O. Beeman, an anthropologist specialist in Middle Eastern studies at Brown university, “US support for the Taliban had nothing to do with religion or ethnicity, but only with the economics of oil the UNOCAL consortium which feared that as long as the country was split among squabbling warlords, the pipeline would never be built. Political stability was required to implement the $ 4.5 billion project and the US believed that the Taliban regime would be the most suitable government to achieve such a goal. Thus, in the aftermath of the Taliban's conquest of Kabul in 1996, the State Department avoided criticizing the methods the Taliban used to establish control over the country”. ¹⁴² John K. Cooley writes that “by 1989, the US having at first
sympathetically watched (if not helped) the rise of the Pakistani created Taliban, was observing with a mixture of sympathy and trepidation, the US oil company, UNOCAL, as it sought to negotiate with the Taliban authorization for energy pipeline from the ex-Soviet now independent, republic of Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. If successful such agreements would probably be viewed by Brzezinski the multi-national energy firms and like - mined economic and political strategists as one of the positive long-range outcomes of the Afghanistan conflicts. It could therefore, be argued that the US administration’s endeavor to secure its oil base led it to support the UNOCAL project and the Taliban advent on the Afghan scene with a promise of stability in 1994. When the Taliban captured Kabul in 1996 Chris Targert, a UNOCAL executive said that pipeline project would now be easier to implement. The US administration was not far behind to appreciate the development within hours of Taliban capture of Kabul. US State Department announced that it would establish diplomatic relations with the Taliban by sending an official to Kabul. State Department spokesman Glyn Davies said that the US found nothing objectionable in the steps taken by the Taliban to impose Islamic law, to him; the Taliban appeared to be anti-modern rather than anti-western which was not perhaps as worrisome. Senator Hank Brown who favored the UNOCAL project also assessed the advent of the Taliban as a positive development in Afghanistan. The good part of what had happened was that one of the factions at least seemed capable of developing a government in Afghanistan. Assistant Secretary of the State for South Asian Affairs Karl Inderfurth testimony before the Senate Committee in July 2000 which recalled the high hopes that greeted the Taliban movement in 1996 clearly indicated the US line that time.

D. The U.S. policy of containing Russian dominance in oil rich Central Asia

The US approach to Central Asia was also driven by overarching geopolitical considerations with an underlying goal containing the influence of China, Iran and Russia. It was not until Clinton’s globalization offensive of 1994, that the US developed its own geopolitical offensive to wrest control of the region from Russia.

In the earlier phase of its engagement with the region, the United States encouraged the newly independent states (NIS) to adopt western style economic reforms. Economic growth and the integration of the CARs was to serve a very
important purpose: ensuring the economic sovereignty of the NIS, and the eventual elimination of the Russian and Iranian influence, while at the same time securing lucrative markets for US goods and services. One might see that US involvement with factional rivalries in Afghan’s civil war fit with US strategy to contain Russia, in Cogan’s analysis of American motives, and their possible consequences including the alliance with the Islamists than senior figures like Brzezinski. As some very senior CIA and other administration officials had serious reservations and apprehensions. Cogan acknowledged that the Americans, as well as the Soviets, had already in 1979, become victims of the tide of Islamic revivalism sweeping the Muslims world. Main antagonists of the Americans were the Shiites Muslims, followers of the Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran; whereas the main adversaries of the Soviets were the Sunni Muslims – doctrinally and in many other ways quite different from the Shiites of South and Central Asia. Cogan quotes “an unnamed CIA colleague, still active in the Agency’s clandestine operations in 1993, describing the CIA – Islamist partnership; “we took the means to wage war, put them in the hands of people who could do so, for purposes for which we agreed.”

Brzezinski’s goals were, and remain for more grandiose and truly strategic. Asked whether he regretted favoring extremist Islamism or arming and training future terrorists, his reply was, “which was more important in world history? The Taliban or the fall of the Soviet empire? A few over - excited Islamists or the liberation of Central Europe [Brzezinski’s original Polish homeland was of course in Eastern Europe; perhaps this is what he meant] and the end of the cold war?”

No super power could afford to ignore a region which held immense energy potential further, it would not be in its own strategic interest to allow any other power to gain influence on the region. US interests in Central Asia were keen similar to Russia’s. While, like Russia, it could not lay historical claims but it definitely had the capacity and make every effort to insinuate itself as the principal power broker for the region on the line of the role it had defined for itself in the Gulf. It would not only like the export routes to be controlled by any one other than itself but also the control over the oil reserves that would help the US to perpetuate its influence over Russia.

But what those states regarded as hardheaded commercial interests was viewed by Russian as incipient interventionism. Russia was worried about theses developments and the possibilities of hostile hands on pipeline taps. Russia had
historic and legal claims to the Caspian Sea and had insisted that it must be made a
duty to any agreement on sharing oil and natural gas resources of the region. Russia
had attempted to have a finger in the pie. But the Russian ambition and determination
to control the flow of oil and gas from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan had
been viewed in western perceptions as attempts by the Russian security establishment
to impose a single direction for the pipelines north via Russian territory. This would
give Russia tremendous control over the flow of oil and gas to western markets and
would make the west vulnerable to Russia’s political whims. Russian energy policy
could also be part of an overall policy which aims to keep the west out of the Central
Asian states preserving it under an exclusively Russian sphere of influence. With
this scramble over energy resources in Central Asia Afghanistan become rivalry place
again.

Like before, as the battle between British India Empire and Tsar’s Russian
empire over communication links as both empires indulged in massive railway
projects. The Russian built railway lines across Central Asia to their border with
Afghanistan, Persia and China, while the British built railways lines across India to
their border with Afghanistan. The centre of gravity for both powers was Afghanistan.
The British feared that a Russian thrust on Herat from the Turkmen region could
threaten British Baluchistan, while Moscow gold could turn Kabul’s rulers against the
British. Russians feared that the British would undermine them in Central Asia by
supporting revolts by Muslims tribes and the rulers of Bukhara and Kokand against
Russia. In another replay in the 1980s, the USA encouraged the Afghan Mujahideen
to cross into Central Asia and attack Soviet army posts. And in replay Soviet troops in
Afghanistan frequently called the Mujahideen ‘Bashmachers’.

The current great game was between expanding and contracting empires. As a
weakened and bankrupt Russia attempted to keep a grip on what it still viewed as its
frontiers in Central Asia and controlled the flow of Caspian oil through pipelines that
traverse Russia, the USA was thrusting itself into the region on the back of proposed
oil pipelines which would bypass Russia. Iran, Turkey and Pakistan were building
their own communication links with the region and wanted to be the preferred route of
choice for future pipelines heading east, west or south. The strategic interest of
Washington and the US oil companies in the Caspian was growing and Washington
began to snub Russia. Turkmenistan’s economic plight was worsening due to its
inability to sell its gas. For the USA the prospects of a gas pipeline through Afghanistan was not only attractive because it avoided Iran, but it would signal support to Turkmenistan, Pakistan and Taliban while clearly snubbing Russia and Iran.

From a geopolitical point of view, Afghanistan formed a potential ‘land bridge’ for bulk trade or oil and gas pipelines to be constructed from the Central Asian states to markets in Pakistan, India and elsewhere in the world via Karachi or another Pakistani port on the Arabian sea. Irrespectively of which government was in place in Kabul, Afghanistan’s territory could provide access to world markets and an alternate to total dependence upon Russia’s monopoly on trade routes.

The civil war (1992-97) between the neo-communist government and an array of Islamist forces devastated the country of Tajikistan. Once again thousands of Tajik rebels and refugees found refuge in northern Afghanistan, while Tajik government forces were backed by Russian troops. President Boris Yeltsin declared in 1993 that the Tajik Afghan border was in fact Russia’s border and the 25,000 Russian troops stationed there would be defending Russia. It was a reassertion of Moscow’s role in Central Asia. And another change to be as a pretext for Russia to influence in this region that found some groups of Islamic movement which linked Taliban against the secular government of Karimov. This underground radical Islamic groups some of them Wahabist, entered in the Ferghana valley. Many of those Uzbek militant trained in Afghan Mujahideen camps in the 1980s. In addition, the Kremlin’s senior planners had plenty of reasons to fear the backlash of the Afghanistan war in Chechnya. Immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Grozny, the Chechen capital, became a transit point for the Afghan veterans, especially the Arab ones. In August 1995, a spokesman of the Russian federal security service reported that units from Afghanistan and Jordan – which had a large and influential Chechen community in residence - were fighting on the side of Chechen. There were said to be about 300 foreign mercenaries at that time, out of total Chechen guerilla force of 6,000. Shamil Basayev, the leader of the seizure of the Buddenovsk hospital and a right hand man of Dudayev, was reported by the Russians to have been trained in Afghanistan by none other than the disciples of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

A diffused anti – Russian terrorist organization in Chechnya was believed by Moscow to have links with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The Russians had a much
more serious Islamist problem in Chechnya. In the Russian view, the main problem in Chechnya was “Wahabi outsiders” shorthand for Islamist Saudis. The Russians also regarded the Wahabis as behind the Taliban regime. Chechen fighters were a very serious unit, very well trained, very well prepared possibly by Pakistan’s ISI and American CIA during the 1979-89 jihad. The Russians believed that the United States was backing the Chechen rebels in order to get a lock on regional oil supplies. The United States had extremely close relations with Edvard Shevardnaze, president of Georgia. The arms were being smuggled into Chechnya from Georgia and that this was one of the main supply routes to the Chechen rebels. The Russians also believed that the Americans knew this and supported it because the Americans wanted an independent Chechnya.

The USA could not develop strategic clout in Central Asia without Uzbekistan, the largest and most powerful state and the only capable of standing up to Russia. Both cautiously wooed each other. Karimov became supportive of NATO plans to build a Central Asian NATO battalion, a move that was vehemently opposed by Russia. ‘We don’t accept NATO in our backyard. The US must recognize that Central Asia will remain within the near a broad Russia’s sphere of influence. By late 1995 the West and most notably the US had clearly chosen Uzbekistan as the only viable counterweight both to renewed Russian hegemonies and to Iranian influence; wrote Dr Shireen Hunter.

Thus there were the makings of two coalitions emerging in the region. The US lining up alongside Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan and encouraging its allies - Israel, Turkey and Pakistan – to invest there, while Russia retained its grip on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The USA was now prepared to confront Russia as the battle for the Caspian’s resources escalated. While US policy makers certainly did not want to see a hegemonic Russia, the potential costs of such hegemony became far greater if Russia was able to dictate the terms and limit western access to the world’s last known oil and gas reserves. Even minimum US involvement there provided for maximum Russian suspicions; said Dr Martha Brill Olcott, a leading US academic on Central Asia. US oil companies were faced with what they could not do, rather than what they could do since they were forbidden to build pipelines through Iran and Russia. When Washington finally articulated its policy of transport corridor from the Caspian to Turkey (avoiding Russia and Iran) the oil
companies were reluctant to oblige, given the costs and the turbulence in the region. The essential issue which the USA declined to tackle was peace-making in the region. Until there was an end to the civil wars in Central Asia and the Caspian (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Georgia, Chechnya, Nagorno Karabakh, the Kurdish issue) and there was a broad consensus with Iran and Russia, pipelines would neither be safe to build nor commercially feasible, as every step of the way Iran and Russia would block or even sabotage them. As said by President Boris Yeltsin in 1998, by keeping the conflict in Afghanistan on the boil Russia kept the region unstable and has the excuse to maintain a military presence in the Central Asian Republics.

It was in the interest of Iran and Russia to keep the region unstable by arming the anti-Taliban alliance. Russian also reportedly had a hand in backing northern alliance when Taliban forces assaulted on the Shias of Hazara. They saw that Pakistan interference in Afghanistan through the Taliban provided an opportunity for American influence in the region. Its political and economic interest lied in denying the Americans presence in Kabul. Russia was backing Iran in that design. Russia also sent military supplies to northern forces through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan by road.

Russia had built a bridge over the Amu Darya in Tajik controlled Takhar province to provide a land route through Badakshan. This allowed Russian trucks by passing Mazar-e-Sharif and the Salang highway which had always been prime Dostum territory. US satellite pictures were claimed to have shown Toloquan being developed as a strategic rear base for Massoud, in an effort that seemed to replicate his moves in the beginning of the war. With this effort US pipeline plans could never succeed. Even today the USA is muddled on the critical question of whether it wants to save Central Asia's depressed economies by letting them export energy any way they like to keep Iran and Russia under blockade as far as pipeline are concerned.

It became apparent that the strategy over pipelines had become the driving force behind Washington's interest in the Taliban, which in turn was prompting a counter-reaction from Russia and Iran. The old associations between the intelligence agencies continue, Harrison said, 'the CIA still had close links with the ISI' that money and those weapons had helped built up the Taliban, Harrison said, 'the Taliban are not just recruits from madrassas but are on the payroll of the ISI.' Harrison further
said that UN Security Council Resolution Number 1333 called for an embargo on arms to the Taliban 'but it is a resolution without teeth because it does not provide sanctions for non-compliance; he said 'the US is not backing the Russians who want to give more teeth to the resolution.'

Now it is Pakistan that 'holds the key to the future of Afghanistan, Harrison had said 'the creation of the Taliban was central to Pakistan's pan-Islamic vision'. The creation of the Taliban had been actively encouraged by the ISI and the CIA. As Pakistan looked across the frontier to Afghanistan, they saw a nation that had been occupied by the Soviets, thereby putting Pakistan into a buffer between Soviet and Indian forces – making Pakistan heavily dependent on United States. Pakistani military and intelligence leaders wanted to secure their western flank. They saw in the Taliban movement the only tool available to unify Afghanistan into a long-term buffer for Pakistan. Moreover many ISI leaders, who had worked under CIA control during the Afghan war, were close to leaders of the Mujahideen who were advising and fighting alongside the Taliban. There was much history there. Therefore, Pakistan did everything it could, to bring the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. Behind the scenes in the United States, however, there were even then some fairly obvious clues. Americans then also thought they would serve a bulwark against Russian. In fact, the Taliban movement was the only contemporary Islamic movement whose basis was a network of rural madrassas. Afghanistan was also one of the few countries where the Islamist fought mainly against communist or at least pro-Soviet forces.

In addition, there was one point of major subsequent difference. As the captured US classified documents published in Tehran in 1979, it was an integral part of the US design that the Mujahideen (Taliban was a factional group of Mujahideen) could not form their own government after the eviction of the Soviets and the US administration fundamentally came around to the view that it was important to secure first of all the withdrawal of Soviet troops as the precondition for any settlement of the Afghan problem, and in the process also to try to moderate the Islamic tone of the Afghan resistance so that a Mujahideen- led government should it eventuate after the Soviet pull out, would not be as extreme as that of the anti-American Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. In contrast, the Taliban not only succeeded in attaining their aforementioned objective by evicting different factions and in the process also
serving the (actual) major US interest – eviction of the Moscow-Kabul-Tehran nexus under the Rabbani / Massoud government in Kabul and eviction of the pro-Iranian warlord controlling Western Afghanistan. But unlike the Mujahideen, even after the capture of Kabul (September 1996), the Taliban showed no signs at all of any internal disunity or disarray. In fact, unity of their political and military command kept getting stronger day by day. Besides, their success in bringing peace and order to the territory under their control attracted volunteers from other factions including even the former communists. All these factors clearly showed that the grass root support and organizational competence of Taliban enabled them to establish a durable government in the country. 172

However, the policy of making Taliban strong appeared broken down shortly after the seizure of Kabul. The Taliban proved markedly less sensitive to US political interests than some one in Washington had hoped. The most mortifying example of this was the hospitality which the Taliban provided to the Saudi billionaire Osama Bin Laden, who was suspected by US agencies of having financed anti-American outrages, such as the bombing of a barracks in Saudi Arabia, in which US military personnel were killed. The report by Steve Levine that Bin Laden had been a significant source of the monies which fund the Taliban’s final thrust to Kabul helped explain the hospitality, but did not lessen the American mortification given Washington’s strong stance against sponsors of terrorism. More seriously, some of the Taliban’s powerful Pakistani supporters also adopted a hostile stance towards Washington, notably Maulana Fazlur Rahman of the Jamiat-e Ulema –Islam, who made a vituperatively anti-American speech following the murder in Karachi in mid-November 1997 of four staffs of US Oil Company. 173

It was at this juncture that the US Taliban policy underwent a visible change in 1997, applying various modes of coercion and sanctions to pressurize Taliban into political subordination, if not subjugation; albeit, also ensuring at the same time not to completely lost them. And this time there was a lobby especially comprising the Afghans settled in the West which is presenting serious misperceptions about the Taliban, persuading the US policymakers to adopt a completely anti-Taliban policy. 174

US policy took fresh direction with appointment of Madeline Albright as Secretary of State in early 1997, and the replacement of the entire chain of command
responsible for Afghan affairs at the State Department by experienced staff, who had little experienced staff, which had little experience about Afghan realities. The new Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs, Karl Inderfurth, made a clear policy statement to the US Senate in October 1997. He said that Washington’s objective was an Afghan government that is multi-ethnic, broad-based, and that observed international norms of behaviors. The reasons that made US not to recognize the Taliban was that suppress on women rights, as Albright replied when she was asked about the reason that US opposed Taliban, by a local reporter during her visited to an Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar “... because of their approach to human rights, their despicable treatment of women and children, and their general lack of respect for human dignity”. While, the Clinton administration was no doubt also beginning to feel the pressure in an election year of American feminist groups that condemned the Taliban for their treatment of women. 175

The Taliban’s treatment of women, widely publicized following the fall of Kabul, was a provocation to key values, for which the United States avowedly stood. Women’s groups which previously had not been involved with the Afghanistan issue voiced their solidarity with Afghan women, and in the run up to presidential election. This effectively blocked any rapprochement with the Taliban for which the oil companies and their bureaucratic sympathizers might have hoped. 176 Albright statement was seen as a significant indicator of the US distancing itself both from the Taliban and Pakistan’s support for them. Yet the Taliban appeared least concerned about these international pressures and in fact generated greater anti-western feeling. The Ulema in Pakistan and Kandahar told Omar that he should throw all aid agencies out of Afghanistan because they were spies and the enemy of Islam. 177

However, Gill Dorronsoro writes “the split with the United States was precipitated more by the presence of radical groups (which Taliban had inherited the networks and training camps which had been established in the 1980s when collaboration between Islamic movements and the Afghan parties had been actively encouraged by the United States) on Afghanistan soil rather than human rights violations or drudges.” 178
Sarandoy was a brutal secret police and special militia that was created by People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and was aided by Soviet Russia in (1979-89) The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was a conspicuous element in the long civil war in Afghanistan which began about 1974 and grew intensity after the Saur (April) revolution of 1978. The military coup of 27 April 1978 brought to power the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a small group of left-wing intellectuals and military officers who embarked upon a programme of radical reform Of this, the central feature was a comprehensive land reform intended to break the power of the notables and enlist peasants for the revolution, but which instead unleashed a series of rural disturbances which the PDPA found it difficult to contain. Moreover, the PDPA was divided and struggle for power led in September 1979 to the victory of the leader of the radical Khalq (People) faction, Hafizallah Amn. Later Soviet found that Amun ran policy which did not go through what Soviet wanted. Consequently, in 1979 between September and December Soviet intervened with military forces, overthrow Amun, and establish a broad-based government under Babrak Kamal, leader of the Parchami faction of the PDPA. It seemed the USSR hoped that new government would shortly stabilize the situation and Soviet troops could be quickly withdrawn. In fact Karmal proved unable to form a broad-based government or to offer a sufficiently conciliatory programme. And unable to face with heavy resistance of a group of seven Islamic parties (Mujahideen) based in Peshawar in Pakistan supported by overwhelming international condemnation of the Soviet action, gained in strength. In 1980 there was very little attempt by the Soviet and PDPA forces to do more than try to protect the resistance had a free run in much of Afghanistan. In many areas they fought little but conducted their own affairs when they did fight they usually fought from ambush. It caused difficulties for Soviet forces to deal with this problem. New tactics were developed involving the use of helicopter-borne troops to seize commanding heights and to cut off the retreat of the Mujahedin. In the meantime the PDPA improved its intelligence and gradually rebuilt its forces, training new officers, extending conscription and developing new forces such as the Sarandoy, a heavily armed militia, Revolutionary Defence Forces to guard installations, commando brigades for strike action, and much later irregular militias recruited from ex-resistance fighters. In the late 1980s these last units undertook an increasing amount of the fighting and they became dominant in certain localities. Also with Soviet aid, the air forces were greatly improved (Malcolm F.

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Fergana Valley is an intermountain basin of Uzbekistan, in the Western outlier of Tien Shan mountain system. Formerly known as Fergana Valley under the USSR. The region, after the 1991 independence of Uzbekistan, adopted the Uzbek form for its name Fargana. Situated mainly in Uzbekistan, with some margins extending into Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it covers an area of 8,500 square miles (22,000 Sq km).

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