Chapter 4

Post Cold-War Iranian Relations with Central Asia
The disintegration of the former Communist Power and the emergence of Central Asia Republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as Iran's new neighbours have brought tremendous changes in the geo-political and economic environment of the region. These developments have far-reaching implications for the Islamic Republic of Iran as it shares land and sea borders with these five republics. Central Asians have had long historical and cultural ties with Iran as until the early nineteenth century parts of Central Asia and the Caucasus belonged to Iran. The Aryans, who were descendants of the Iranians, originally came from Central Asia. They retained many of the customs and traditions which created common bonds with the people of Central Asia. During medieval times many rulers of Central Asia were either under the Persian kings or had close relations with Persia. During the 11th to 13th Centuries, the Turkish tribes flooded the entire north territory of Iran from Oxus to Anatolia and it was here that they came into contact with the Arabs and Persians and embraced Islam. The Turks were mostly converted to Islam by the Sufi-mystics of Iran who sent active missionaries across the Oxus.

The use of Iranian territory for the transit of goods from the south to the north and vice-versa goes back very far in history. Even before Vasco de Gama discovered the sea way to India in 1497, Russian merchants had commercial interactions with the Indian subcontinent through the Caspian Sea and the Iranian routes. In addition to the famous 'Silk Road', which passed through Iran and connected to Europe through Asia Minor and Syria, another route through Iran and the Caucasus made Russia's trade with India possible. The establishment of trade to Europe to the Portuguese, threatened Russian interests and the Russian Czars began to look for new transit routes through the south. This was the main motive that compelled Ivan and its successors to expand their possessions towards the south, taking over the city of Hashtarkhan, reaching
the Caspian sea around Daghestan, beginning encroachment of the caucasus, and paving the way for their traditional transit route to India and the Central Asian territories. From then, the political and economic rivalry between Russia and England, through Iranian territories tot he east, the west and the south, affected the turbulent history of this region. The Iranian leadership one after another became involved or were sacrificed in these rivalries. Therefore, from the ascendance of Russia as a major power in the eighteenth century to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran's northern neighbour was a source of continuous security concern. Iran played the classical games of power balancing by relying on anti-Russian states of Europe. Iran invited third parties to offset some of the effects of the Russio-British rivalry and when all else failed, by granting further concessions to its northern neighbour.

Iran's identification with Central Asia is cultural in nature. Central Asia is deeply influenced by Persian culture and originally a focal point of Iranian interest. Relations between Iran and the area, therefore, goes back to time immemorial, traces of which can be found in Iranian mythology through the concept, 'Iran-o-Turan' a traditional mode of spatial sub-division. The concept of Turan is not based on ethnicity and the legendary wars between Iran and Turan, uniquely reflect conflicts between the Iranians and the nomads. After the migration of population that came from the heart of Europe, Turan was slowly identified with the Turks and the Chinese. Known in Europe since the 17th century, the term, recognised only in the 19th century and its vague character made it popular at a time when the notion defied rigorous definition. The history of Turan thus was always linked to that of Iran - a linkage that goes back to pre-Islamic times. With the incorporation of the region into the Soviet empire, the Muslim inhabitants were completely cut off from their neighbours and the rest of the world. The Central Asians were thus isolated by an iron curtain that was established much earlier than its European counterpart.
The post-Bolshevik revolution witnessed a new era of suppression of religion and restriction of the Muslims. Stalin vigorously pursued the Sovietisation of the Muslim with the aim of strengthening the Soviet Union’s control on Central Asia. In 1924, the Central Asia region was divided on ethnic/linguistic lines and virtually till the late 1960’s the Soviet Muslims link with the outside world was cut off. However, by the late 1970’s the development in Afghanistan and the Islamic revolution in Iran brought a new awakening among the Muslims of Central Asia. The formation of new Muslim states in the region created a new situation and have ushered a new phase in the relationship between the Iran and its new neighbours. For the first time in its modern history, Iran now enjoys relatively more power than its neighbours.

The Islamic revolution and its impact on Iranian foreign policy

The Islamic revolution in Iran was a turning point in the modern history of Iran. It changed not only the politics and role of Iran in the region, but also underscored the profound transformation in super power relation with Iran. Prior to the Iranian revolution the government of Shah Mohammad Raza Pahalvi had been the primary American surrogate in the south-west Asia. The Iranian revolution had radically altered the systematic structure in the country. Not only was the old system destroyed, but the new set of variables have been introduced. The then government of Iran had charted its own course in her foreign policy which was not only fully independent of the United States, but also of the two countries that had for more than a century interfered regularly in Iranian affairs, i.e. Britain and Russia. The government holds firmly to the slogan: ‘No East, No West’ and refused to associate with either greater power block. During this period (1979-92) the principal guidelines of Iranian foreign policy was based on this dictum. Some murmurs of support from the Islamic republic had appeared among the Muslims of the Soviet Central Asian republics particularly in
Azerbaijan. Moscow rapidly took measures and with the activation of Tudeh party’s Central Committee and appointment of its new leadership, attempted to change the revolutionary trend in its favour. On the other hand, the Soviet Union was quite happy upto the removal of the largest western politico-military base in its neighbouring country, elimination of US monitoring facilities from the northern part of the Iran and finally Iran’s exit from the CENTO treaty and its joining the Non-Aligned Movement. But at the same time, the Soviet Union was now confronted in the southern part of its territory, with more than 50 million Muslims who held a common border and religion with a new revolutionary and religious system. The occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979 was indeed an attempt to allay some of the Soviet Union’s anxieties. Although history proved that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was like a whirlwind that entailed Soviet collapse and for Iran this invasion clearly signaled the extent of Soviet expansionism toward the south and the Persian gulf.

The cultural and religious magnetism of Iran was greatly feared by Moscow particularly after the Islamic revolution. To combat this, a highly negative image of the Iran and its regime was propagated in Central Asia by the Russian print as well as electronic media. With the result that in popular perception Iran was ‘the enemy’, ‘the chief threat’ to the stability and prosperity of the region. During the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, although the Soviet regime hoped to weaken Iran and the Islamic government by sending large amount of tactical weapons to Iraq, the Muslim peoples of Central Asia republics thought differently. They on the one hand were witnessing the resistance and sacred defence of the Iranian people against a force extensively supported and strengthened by Moscow and the west and on the other hand, were observing the exhaustion of Red Army Forces in an unequal and erosive war against the Afghani Muslim resistance forces. In this period, Moscow was intent to do its best to keep the people of Central Asia away from any kind of official contacts. One example of such kind
of Soviet disposition is the closing of the Iranian Consulate in Leningrad (1981) and the fact that the Soviet Union was not willing to give permission for the establishment of an Iranian Consulate in any of the capitals of the Central Asia republics even at the cost of losing its consulate in Rasht. However, as long as the possibility of Iranian victory seemed high, the Soviet leadership took a more favourable approach toward Iran. Soviet leadership pursued a two-track policy hoping to prod the Islamic Republic of Iran towards the Soviet Union and at the same time acknowledged the Islamic Republic of Iran as anti-imperialist, but vigorously opposed any Islamic movement and tendency. The Iranians, for their part, cherished dreams of bringing Central Asia back into the Islamic fold, but were unable to do much beyond beaming radio transmission of Quranic recitation and traditional music and poetry towards the Central Asian republics. Thus, by the end of the Soviet period, there was very little first hand knowledge among Central Asians about the neighbouring countries.

The emergence of Central Asian Republics as sovereign independent entities after the collapse of Soviet Union, coincided with Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI)'s endeavour for ending its diplomatic isolation under the presidency of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsangani. It is worth mentioning here that the advent of Islamic revolution in Iran in February 1979 had won it 'more enemies' than friends because the bonafides of the new Islamic regime were doubted by the United States and other western countries. The objectives of the Islamic revolution were misconstrued even by most of the Islamic countries. Coupled with these factors was the concomitant development in the form of Iran-Iraq hostilities which 'enforced diplomatic isolation of Iran' virtually almost for a decade. However, the Iranian leadership being aware of this isolation had started taking steps to break these barriers right from early 1980's by offering its hand of friendship without comprising its principles. In 1984, the then President of Iran, Ali Khamnaei had advocated an 'open door' foreign policy for Iran, involving rational, sound and healthy relations with all countries in consonance with Iran's national interest.
and ideology. But Iran's efforts were thwarted by ongoing Iran-Iraq war.

It was after long period that the Iran-Iraq war came to an end. The hostility between the two countries which lasted nearly eight years (1980-88), inflicted tremendous damage on the Iranian economy. According to official Iranian estimates Iran sustained $100 billion material damage during war. It will certainly take decades for Iran to make up these losses, and at present full scale reconstruction of economic infrastructure is going on. The war shattered economy was already in a decline due to the political instability during the revolution. One characteristic feature of Iran's economy, like that of other oil exporting countries, is the crucial dependence on oil. During the 1980s an average 95 percent of these countries income came from oil. With the wide fluctuation in the price of oil in international market, the economies of the oil exporting countries have been badly affected. This has compelled Iran to take comprehensive measures to reduce its dependence on oil as a major foreign exchange earner and switch to non-oil exports as an alternative source of foreign exchange earning.

Regarding the development strategy and the new economic policies, there was two viewpoints in Iran. The moderate group believed in opening up and having more contacts with the outside world and a greater role for the private sector with limited governmental control over industry. The hard-liners advocate limited contacts with the west and firm government control over key industries. After 1988, the former group dominated in the formation of policies. Nevertheless, the latter group at time pressed for the implementation of some of its demands. It is with this objective in view that the new government has embarked upon a programme to bring economic reforms and rectify the problems. Therefore, Iran has renewed its membership of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank and it has availed of loans from these financial institutions. There is also a noticeable trend in Iran's relations with the neighbouring countries and western Europe. Iran has established working relations with most of the countries (except the United States). These trends show that the Iran is trying to bring its foreign
relations in harmony with its economic policies which need long term stability
and peace. On the other hand, Iran is facing shortage of capital as the
reconstruction programme needs huge investment. Taking into consideration
the limited resources and the imposition of quota on the expert of oil by the
Organisation of Petroleum Countries (OPEC), Iran is frantically endeavouring to
attract foreign investment. Therefore, efforts were being made to relax restrictions
and controls and create an atmosphere of trust. Iran is putting emphasis on
confidence building measures among the foreign investors. Secondly, Iran is
searching for new areas to export its non-oil exports. Thus, in an emerging
scenario Iran’s economic interests in Central Asia have increased. Meanwhile,
Iran’s advantage of geographical proximity and availability of cheap source of
energy for producing intermediate and consumer goods give it a clear edge
over other competitors.

Trade and Communication

The landlocked countries of Central Asia who have long been entirely
dependent on Russia for channels of communication with the outside world, are
now looking for access to the land and sea routes. They are seeking to diversify
their economies and alternative access to promote their trade. The transportation
and communication are the areas which have great potential for beneficial
cooperation between the Central Asian countries and Iran. This has brought
into sharp focus the geographical location of Iran. It has ushered a new era of
cooperation among the countries of the region. As an Iranian daily wrote, “Iran
is gateway to the outside world for the landlocked Central Asia.” It is here
necessary to mention that besides Russian, the newly independent Central Asian
republics have three options for access to the world, namely through (i) China,
(ii) Afghanistan and Pakistan, and (iii) Iran. While the route through China is the
longest and that of passing through Afghanistan and Pakistan is the shortest,
however, due to crisis in Afghanistan, the possibility of Central Asia’s access
through the Afghan route is ruled out in the near future. Therefore, the only viable alternative route of access to the world for Central Asia passes through Iran which has already concluded agreements with Central Asian republics. The six fertile provinces of Iran viz., Khorasan, Gilan, Mazarbran, Sakalan, East and West Azerbaijan, offer great areas of cooperation and border trade with the new states. There can be enormous impact on trade with these countries as these provinces offer goods and services at reasonable prices. Iran can give transit facilities to these countries to Europe (via Turkey), the Persian Gulf and the southern ports of the Bandar Abbas and Chak Bahar. These ports are closer than the ports of the former Soviet Union and, can, therefore, provide a cost efficient outlet for trade. The construction of road links is also receiving priority treatment. Three border crossings between Turkmenistan and Iran are now open and cross-border traffic is growing rapidly. Passenger flights already exist between Tehran and some capitals of these republics. Sea routes across the Caspian Sea are also to be extended and new ports are being developed.

For the Iranians, Central Asia represents the key to the potentially lucrative markets in Europe and Far East. The Iranian railways geared up for this purpose and to avail this opportunity, they recommended work for the expansion and development of Iran’s own north-south railway network, which includes the Mashad-Kerman-Zahirdan line and Bafgh-Bandar Abbas line as well as the Astara-Ghazvin line. This project provides the Central Asia republics with the passenger and freight access to Iranian markets, as well as to other parts of the Near and Middle East and via the Gulf to international waterways. Iran has placed orders with the local Pars Wagaon Factory for the delivery of 4,000 train cars and agreements for the purchase of 120 locomotives had been signed with Canada. Iran is also wooing Saudi Arabia on the reconstruction of the economy of the Central Asia and its rail roads. In May 1996, Iran inaugurated a 295 Km railway network called - Mashad Sarakhs Tjan railroad, linking Central Asia as well as China to the Persian Gulf. The new railway also links Central Asia to
Turkey via the Iranian railways and from Turkey to Europe. For Central Asian republics and China, the new network is the shortest route possible to Europe. Thus, Iran's railroad connection makes Iran a real crossroads of the east and the west.

The establishment of the new railway between Iran and Central Asia will take away the region of Central Asia from Russia by giving the latter the first alternative route to the landlocked states. The importance of the new railway link to international trade was reflected in the fact that heads of state of 11 countries attended the inauguration ceremony presided over by the then Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani. At the same time, it gives Iran new advantages in the 'great game' for oil, trade and economic influence in Central Asia. In short, for Iran the completion of the railway network is a great success in terms of both its economic penetration and political influence in Central Asia.

As soon as travel restrictions in Central Asia were relaxed, trade links between Iran and Central Asian republics were initiated. In the private sector the main thrust has been in the establishment of joint ventures, mostly concerned with import-export operations. In Turkmenistan, the 'Pars' group has been attempting to set up a tri-lateral venture, involving their German partners. A highly successful exhibition was held in Ashqhabad in 1992, the products on offer included clothing, shoes, textiles, sanitary ware, building materials, automobiles and food. The Pars group has also been active in Kazakhistan. In 1992 the first step towards establishing regular supply routes between the two countries was inaugurated by a 'caravan' of five Kam Azov tracks that set off from Almaty, loaded with Kazakh sports equipment for the Iranian market and returned with a consignment of Iranian consumer goods that had been brought by the Kazakh Ministry of Trade. In Uzbekistan a joint venture with the government cooperation 'Shak' was launched in 1992. These including washing machines, clothing and shoes. There were also plans to develop carpet weaving, ceramics and wood carving. Private sector initiatives have been supported by bi-lateral
government efforts. In 1992, trade fair organised in Ashaqabad brought together representatives of 163 Iranian firms, mostly from Khorasan and Mazandaran; 15 contracts and 25 protocols of intent were signed. Another trade fair was held in 1993, in which Bonnyad Trade Consortium was particularly successful. The Iranian government owned bank ‘Saderat’ opened a branch in Ashaqabad and there were plans to open such branches in other capitals of Central Asian republics. The bank is seeking to attract private as well as commercial organisations as customers. The bank is also able to offer access to the international banking system through its network of foreign branches. Following the completion of the railroad linking Central Asia, as well as China, to the Persian Gulf, the Iranian are now planning another pursuit that would link Mashad with Chal Bahar, a port on Iran’s Indian Ocean Coast. The new rail link would take Turkmen oil to the port for delivery to Asian customers. Tehran was negotiating with an European Company to build the rail link on a build operate transfer contract. Meanwhile a law, signed by President Bill Clinton in August 1996, had imposed sanctions on foreign companies. But most of the European governments as well as that of Russia, Japan, Canada and Australia have already said that they would not heed the US extra-territorial law. By expanding its trade and economic outlets, Iran hopes to frustrate the US attempts to contain and isolate it internationally.

Iran-Turkmenistant agreement was opposed by United States, arguing that oil and natural gas from Turkmenistan could reach Europe via the Caspian Sea and on through Georgia and via Chechnia. However, Turkmenistan’s President, Saparmurad Niyazov, has favoured the Iranian routes, which he considers to be more stable. Apparantly, Russia has also favoured the Iranian route, indicating that both Russia and Iran have a common interest in weakening relations between Turkey and the Central Asian republics, and, thus, indirectly in reducing America’s influence in the region. Iran’s nightmare is that just as the Arab states in the Persian Gulf have come under the spell of the United States,
the oil rich Central Asian republics might do likewise. In other words, there is a suspicion that the United States might try to persuade the republics to keep Iran at arms length, as Washington has done with the Persian Gulf Arab states. However, this is unlikely, as there is a greater historical affinity between Iran and Central Asian republics than there is between Arabs and the Iranians, who have in the recent past been more in conflict that at peace with each other. There is also greater economic incentives for the Central Asians to cooperate with Iran than there is for the Gulf States. Iran is hoping to benefit from the new phase of friendship with the Russians who could go further than their hitherto verbal support for Iran's position and press Azerbaijan and Kazakhistan to enter into serious negotiations for the establishment of legal status for the Caspian Sea. In other words, Iranians hope that Russia would try to counterbalance the increasing American influence in Central Asia, where Iran has much at stake both economically and from the point of view of its national security.

The subsequent division of Soviet Union into a number of independent states has tripled the number of Iran's northern neighbours and thus increased the number of Caspian Sea littoral states, from two to five. Prior to the disintegration and thanks to the bipolar system, the two countries Russia and Iran were the only littoral states of the Caspian Sea. However, when Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhistan joined the littoral states fold and when they began independent activities in the fields of fishing, shipping, exploitation of gas and oil reserves it became apparent that the establishment of a legal status for the Caspian Sea was not only necessary but a matter of priority. It may be mentioned here that the Caspian Sea is the largest lake in the world and third in terms of hydrocarbon resources after the Persian Gulf region and Siberia. It is believed that western, eastern and northeastern parts have about 150 billion barrel of oil and 75 trillion cubic metres of gas reserves or in other words 16 percent of the oil and 53 percent of the natural gas reserves of the globe. For several decade the Soviet Union exploited oil from oil-field in Azerbaijan and faced with no
objection. Iran had little choice, but to keep political silence in order to maintain peace between them. Objections from Iran were likely to be ignored or Moscow could have attempted to create troubles along the Soviet-Iranian border or encouraged the Tudeh (Communist) party to create internal disturbances in Iran. Now that the super power has gone and Iran is no longer constrained by the consideration of the old global rivalry between the super powers, it can push for new arrangements concerning the optimal use of the sea resources. Even some Iranian writers, specialised in the area, have argued that the exploitation of the Caspian resources should be administered by a 'Condominium' under an international authority comprising the littoral states involved and that the sea should be declared a demilitarised zone. Azerbaijan has concluded contracts with a Consortium composed of western and non-western oil companies for the exploration of oil in the Caspian Sea. Iran was also to be a partner in the Consortium with a 5 percent stake in it. But in April 1995, Azerbaijan cancelled the agreement with Iran, reportedly under the pressure from the United States. Azerbaijan, at the same time increased the Turkish stake in the Consortium to 6.75 percent. The apparent favouring of Turkey over Iran was a double blow to the Iranians. For one thing it has given an extra edge to Turkey, which has been Iran's traditional rival for influence in Central Asia and for another Iran had thought it had secured a favourable position with the government of Baku. After all Iran had taken Azerbaijan's side in its war with Armenia and in addition Iran had provided shelter, with little foreign financial contribution. Azerbaijan's cancellation of the oil agreement triggered an angry response from the Iranians who described the new arrangement as a hostile act and threatened to question the legality of the Consortium. Iran is now pressing ahead with a strategy to import oil from the nearby Caspian basin states. Iran has also signed trade protocols with Kazakhstan, one calling for building a pipeline from Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field to the Caspian port of Aktou up to two million tons of crude oil a year from the Tengiz field could be shipped to north Iran. Iran and Turkmenistan have also
reached an agreement for Iran to construct a $190 million gas pipeline (4000 KM) to transfer Turkmen natural gas to Europe via Iran and Turkey. In the first phase, the pipeline will allow the delivery of 15 billion cubic metres of gas to Europe, while the second phase of the project, expected to be completed by the year 2000, upto 28 billion cubic metres will be exported to Europe.

**Security Considerations**

Iran's security priorities that had existed during the Soviet era have undergone a sea change after the collapse of Soviet Union and in the wake of the emergence of a number of independent states in the vicinity of Iran. Iran has, immediately after Soviet Union's disintegration, called for drawing up a fresh security policy taking into consideration the needs and the existing capabilities while advocating formulation of long term security plan. The developments within the Central Asian region were bound to have direct as well as indirect effects on Iran. Indirectly due to new configurations in the world power structure and directly in terms of their impact on the Islamic Republic of Iran's frontiers.

Iranian foreign policy since its re-emergence as a unified state at the end of fifteenth century, two themes have repeatedly surfaced in Iran's conduct of diplomacy: the restoration and maintenance of territorial integrity and the quest for independence. This is because, despite a highly evolved sense of nationalism Iranian nationalist aspirations have been frequently threatened and frustrated by great powers. Iran's defensive posture reflected in various strategies explicitly designed throughout the recent history to resist the encroachment of foreign powers. Other strategies adopted were the third power strategy to balance the presence of the two rival powers, and the alliance with a great power strategy. Clearly, the assessment of the successes and failures of these strategies in regard to the two mentioned themes of Iranian foreign policy have been instrumental in the formulation of the post-revolutionary non-aligned or "Neither
East nor West* strategy, a security strategy which has gained particular urgency with the eight-year war with Iraq and the subsequent events that led to the collapse of the bipolar order and drastically enhanced US presence in the region. Presently, three distinct but interrelated areas of concern can be identified: (i) regional instability prompted by the collapse of the bipolar world and the effects of the second Persian Gulf War, (ii) The extreme militarisation of the region, and (iii) concerns generated from a position of economic vulnerability.

In more recent times, Iran's most immediate security concern was directed towards the north. The erstwhile Soviet Union was considered to be the only country capable of invading and ultimately occupying a large part of Iran. Often the actual behaviour of Russia during the Qajar period and the Soviet Union subsequent to the second world war, this was clearly a legitimate concern. But as demonstrated by the Iraqi invasion of Iran, this view under-estimated the threat coming from the south. However, the post-cold war dynamics have altered the nature of both sets of threats to Iran. The break up of Soviet Union and the creation of a number of independent republics along Iran's northern border has eliminated, or at least temporarily, emasculated the only real threat to its independence. At the same time, the defeat of Iraq during the second Persian Gulf War has enhanced Iran's security situation as the war resulted in the dismantling of Iraq's nuclear programme and the near elimination of its chemical and biological warfare capabilities.

Although the break up of the Soviet Union has weakened the real security concern for Iran, yet the tension ridden situation in Central Asia and Caucasus which includes war between and domestic political unrest within the two bordering states of Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as power struggle and the civil war in the nearby Tajikistan, has potentially disruptive effect on the region. Iraq's nuclear future, ethnic and power tussle in Afghanistan are also fundamentally worrisome to Iran. Iran is also concerned about the adjacent conflicts having the potential of spilling over into Iran. Accordingly, Iran is very sensitive about its internal
unity being threatened by the possible unravelling of the neighbouring states. The overwhelming military presence of the United States in the Persian Gulf and its hostile policies also add to Iranian worries. Instability in the region also has a variety of other consequences including increase in the flow of refugees, limitations in the expansion of trade and other forms of economic cooperations, creation of fertile grounds for all sorts of activities ranging from drug smuggling to subversions all of which constitute security concerns both for the Iranian state and its regime.

The dynamics of Iranian policy towards Central Asian republics may be analysed at domestic, international and regional levels. Domestically, the policy makers in Tehran have had to deal with 15 different republics in four regions instead of just one centre namely, Moscow. To coordinate the various agencies responsible for both external and internal security, the national Iranian security Council was created. Its main aim was to monitor the developments of policy towards the region. In general and compared to other policy making bodies in the country, the Council has moved with greater caution in most foreign policy domains, for example, steering the country towards a neutral position in the Iraqi-Kuwait crisis of 1990 in accordance with the resolution of the United Nations Security Council and playing a leading role in setting Iran's policy agenda with respect to the former Soviet Republics. The decisions of the Council, presided over the President, have been much more moderate than earlier ones. One of the ripple effects for Iran of the Soviet collapse has been the increasing significance of the country's own northern provinces. The emergence of three republics of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkmenistan has facilitated contacts between people on both sides of the borders with Iran and the increasing level of contact between the officials of these republics and those of the Iranian border provinces has helped elevate the border provinces status compared with that of other provinces.

At the international level, the demise of the Soviet Union deprived Iran of
its useful Soviet Russian card. Over the years since the mid decades of the
nineteenth century, Iran had become quite adept at playing this card to receive
western aid or to solicit support from the Russian or the Soviets. Although that
game over, Iran still remains at the crossroads between Central Asia and the
Caucasus and the four neighbouring geographical regions, which assures Iran’s
status as a major regional power and a crucial partner in any security arrangement
in the region. At the regional level, Iran has played a much more prominent role
in the organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Economic Cooperation
Organisation (ECO) following the demise of the Soviet Union. The emergence
of several new regional organisations i.e. those of Caspian Sea states, the
Central Asian States and the Persian speaking countries provides additional
economic, political and cultural links between Iran and post-Soviet republics. It
is obvious that Central Asian region is of interest to Iran for three reasons: to
build ties with the neighbouring states for political and strategic reasons in
order not leave the area free for its rivals; to break its isolation from the Gulf
and the new eastern areas, and to become active in the region, by re-launching
its foreign policy and by re-invigorating its regional diplomacy. To achieve this
objectives, Iran has been intensely active at the multilateral and bilateral levels.
However, there are other dimensions of the problem such as the domestic factors
are also a degree of wariness inside Iran about the new developments, particularly
the implications which the changes would have for Iran’s security. The post-
war period and the beginning of the new construction era in 1988 required certain
changes in economic policies. During that period, the Iranian economy had been
facing high inflation, sharp rise of population, unemployment, shortage of
education and health care facilities, high budget deficit, huge cost of
reconstruction and several other economic bottlenecks. These problems have
certainly kept the decision-makers engaged and serious efforts have been made
to overcome the difficulties. The government had to resort to austerity measures
to control the expenditure and kept the budget deficit within manageable limits.
Thus subsidies have been withdrawn. The cumulative effect of these factors put tremendous pressure on the middle and lower middle classes and caused economic hardship to them. Obviously, in such situations, the government has to pay greater attention to these domestic problems rather than embarking on foreign policies which draw Iran into the vortex of ethnic, linguistic and border conflicts in Central Asia.

The other security implications which the new republics might have for Iran is the existence of diverse ethnic groups which is a potential source of tension. There are large Russian minorities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and in other republics. Taking into account the enormous economic difficulties, the prospect of economic development is not bright and there is a likelihood of the situation getting aggravated, which may lead to an anti-Russian direction. This would invite Russian military intervention and the instability will spill over to Iran as these Muslim states may look to Iran for political and moral support. The existence of artificial borders which cut through ethnic and linguistic lines, provides additional source of tension. There had been riots against Meshket Turks in Farghana and Tashkent. In Kyrgyzstan there were bloody clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. With the resurgence of radical ethnic nationalism, these tensions might exacerbate, which again will have a potential effect on Iran as some of the ethnic groups - Turkmen, Azeri - have their counterparts in Iran. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region is another instance of regional conflict which is drawing the big powers into it. Hence, its adverse effect on Iran's security.

Another factor which precludes the influence of Iran on the Central Asian republics is the presence of well entrenched secular elites in the Central Asian republics. Many of the former Communists have formed new political parties. Nevertheless, while at the grassroot level, the strength of Islamic forces is increasing, the secular elites who are the products of about seven decades of Communist rule, are still dominating the key positions. Moreover, the majority of
the Central Asian Muslims are Sunnis whereas in Iran, the overwhelming majority of the population is that of Shias. Generally, there is an impression among the Central Asian countries that Iran is not a progressive country and pursues radical Islamic policies. The elites and the decision makers in the new states, therefore, prefer secular Turkey to Iran.

The dependence of the economy of the new countries on Russia is another factor which prevents them from switching to new partners. The Central Asian Republics conduct their major trade with the Slavic republics. The inter-republic trade as a percentage of their trade to their Gross National Product in 1989 was on average 70 percent, which shows their dependence on the Slavic republics. Thus Iran's desire to establish an Islamic common market in the region will not materialise in the near future. It will certainly need the cooperation of Pakistan and Turkey. Iran should also be prepared to accept the cost and burden of such a plan as the economy of Central Asian countries is weak, and change to a market economy will be slow and painful. It needs financial support which at present seems to be very difficult for Iran with its meagre resources. Moreover, both Turkey and Saudi Arabia with their financial support and western political help are united in denying Iran its ultimate role in the region.

Although Iranians do not feel that Turkey's influence in Central Asia constitutes a threat to their national security, but the recent Turkish-Israeli military agreement signed between the two countries in February 1996, alarmed the Iranians. The agreement alarmed the Iranians so much that Foreign Minister Dr. Ali Akbar Vilayati, visited Ankara to express Iran's national security concerns regarding the agreement. The Turkey have apparently assured the Iranians that Israel would not be allowed to use the Turkish airbases to attack Iran. Iran, however, can hardly take the Turkish assurances seriously, considering the very close relationship between Turkey and the United States and between the United States and Israel and also considering that the latter two countries view Iran as a 'rogue' state and threat to the Middle East peace and security. Iran is
trying to offset the pressure from the west by developing closer contacts and extending linkages through commerce, culture, ethnicity and religion with the new countries of Central Asia. But the United States is systematically blocking Iran's efforts. Recent military treaties between the United States and Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia and joint exercises by the Navies of the United States and Arab countries are adding to Iran's sense of insecurity.

**BILATERAL RELATIONS:**

Iran-Turkmenistan

The Republic of Turkmenistan is one of the first Central Asian republics having established diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This republic shares a long border with Iran and since the declaration of its independence Iran extended its recognition and opened its Embassy in Ashkabad. There are large number of Turkmen living in Iran who share a common ethnic and linguistic background with the people of that country. Iran and Turkmenistan have opened border points at each others frontier. The two share a common frontier of 922 kilometers stretching from the Caspian Sea in the west to the Iran-Afghan border in the east. POL border point passes through Inche Brown where the Iranian Turkmen live. There are other points called Bajgiran and Sarakhs. Through the Bajgiran outlet, Turkmenistan has all weather road links to the Persian Gulf and Europe (via Turkey). The nationals of Iran and Turkmenistan living near the border are also entitled to cross the border to either country without formalities and travel within radius of 45 kilometers from the common frontier. The road between the Iranian border in Birjgiran and Ghochan has been broadened and improvement work to convert it into an international highway was going on a war-footing. Presently buses are plying between Mashhad and Ashaqabad and daily hundreds of passengers pass through Birjgiran border point. The connecting of Tehran-Ashaqabad by air service was another important measure for closer relations between the two neighbours.
Politically, there have been high level diplomatic visits and discussions between Iran and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan was the only Central Asian republic to which President Rafsanjani had visited in April 1992 and attended a summit meeting of the Central Asian Republics. This was an important landmark in the relations of the two countries. He was extended a warm welcome and a large number of agreements were signed between the two countries. It is agreed that Turkmenistan would supply its surplus oil to the northern provinces of Iran in exchange for Iranian exports of oil for the former through Persian Gulf outlets. President Niazov of Turkmenistan also visited Iran on several occasions. These visits were followed by other officials of the foreign ministry which resulted in the new agreements and diplomatic interactions.

However, relations between Iran and Turkmenistan were given concrete shape with the exchange of visits between the two countries at the highest level with Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani visiting Turkmenistan (22-24 October 1993) and the reciprocal visit by President Niazov of Turkmenistan to Iran during the first week of January 1994. During both the visits, the respective heads of state recalled the countries old religious and cultural ties between the two countries that formed the basis of cementing their existing friendly relations. Membership of both countries of the ECO and the Caspian Sea littoral states organisation provided another opportunity for mutual cooperation in different areas. The visiting Iranian President while expressing satisfaction over the growth of bilateral relations and implementation of earlier agreements, asserted that there were no obstacles in the way of expanding cooperation between Iran and Turkmenistan. Making a pointed reference to the ongoing ethnic crisis in Tajikistan and dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia, President Rafsanjani, while laying stress on the need to maintain stability in the region said, "More than at any time, our region needs stability and peace through closer cooperation and unity. Central Asian countries should solve, above all, regional problems and issues and Islamic Republic of Iran is prepared to help in this context."
The Joint Communique issued simultaneously in Tehran and Ashaqhabad on 24 October 1993, laid stress on the need for finding a political solution to the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. With regard to the crisis in Tajikistan, it asserted that peace and national reconciliation in that country could be facilitated through constructive dialogue with opposition groups in accordance with the wishes of the people of Tajikistan. Iran also expressed its readiness to render all possible support to Turkmenistan until the latter's national currency was put into circulation.

The President Rafsanjani's visit to Turkmenistan was followed by the five-day official visit by President Saparamurad Niyazov along with high level delegation from 2 to 6 January 1994 to Iran. President Niyazov, who was accorded rousing welcome on his arrival in Tehran, held prolonged parleys with his Iranian counterpart and other Minister and officials. President Niyazov said that the aim of his visit to Iran was to benefit from Iran's successful experience and to explore new avenues of expanding bilateral relations "in a new era of cooperation between the two countries". President Rafsanjani while commenting on the occasion hoped that after this visit the peace and cooperation between the two countries would be faster. He further added, "I think that the rest of the countries in the region can also benefit from our cooperation. No country should think that our cooperation with Turkmenistan is at odds with their interest. I believe that this visit will pave way for others to join in."

Iran and Turkmenistan also signed their first postal and telecommunication agreement on 5 January 1994, which has facilitated the establishment of a 480 channel telephone exchange linking Tehran to Ashaqhabad. There has been appreciable progress in the overall volume of trade between the two countries. About 1000 tons of goods are exchanged between Iran and Turkmenistan daily, of which half constitutes Iranian exports comprising mainly citrus fruit, food and engine oil worth $2,50,000. Turkmenistan is also exporting electricity to third countries via Iran.
As mentioned earlier, transport is a vital area of economic cooperation between the two countries. The new Iranian 'Silk Road' project is aimed at establishing a network of linkages between the two countries, the most important being the Mashhad-Sarkhas-Tedzhen connection. The operationalisation of this railway line in May 1996 has permitted the establishment of an Iranian linkage with the whole of the Central Asian railway system. Though theoretically this railway construction gives Central Asian countries an access to Europe and to Iranian ports on the Persian Gulf, the completion of subsidiary roads on this network will facilitate easy communication between the two countries.

In addition to the opening up of frontiers and the establishment of communication links, Iran is encouraging Turkmenistan - the second largest producer of natural gas to use the shortest route - which is through Iranian territory to export its products to the west. To achieve this objective, Iran had offered various facilities and on 29th of December 1997, the Presidents of Iran and Turkmenistan inaugurated a gas pipeline which is passing through Caspian Sea and without touching the Russian Territory. This project was completed without any aid from world agencies like World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). With the completion of this pipeline Iran has achieved dual objective - the objective of demonstrating that Iran is the most natural outlet and the objective of launching its own gas production in cooperation with Turkmenistan.

Although at the cultural level, Iran seems less active in Turkmenistan, but at the economic level, Iran has pursued an active policy by growing thicker relations during the past couple of years. The Turkmens are also trying to squeeze political mileage out of this relationship for close relation with Tehran make it possible to resist pressures from its powerful neighbour, Uzbekistan, and to consolidate its own autonomy vis-a-vis Russia and other CIS members. It seems that both countries are imbued by the desire and determination to further consolidate their existing friendly relations. Turkmenistan has given Iran a special place in its foreign policy and is not apparently fearful of Iranian Islamic ideology.
Iran-Tajikistan Relations:
Among the newly independent states of Central Asia, Tajikistan occupies a special place for Iran. Tajiks are one of the oldest branches of Iranian people who have shared history, language, religion and cultural heritage with Iran. Tajikistan is the only Farsi speaking state with a strong linkage to the Iranian cultural milieu. While Iran continues to claim a cultural and religious relevance in the whole of Central Asia, Tajikistan’s linguistic connection with Iran separates it from others and gives it a certain level of closeness and importance to Iran that does not exist with other Central Asia states. In fact, it is this cultural element that presents Tajikistan not only as an opportunity but as a 'burden' or 'responsibility' for the Iranian leadership.  

The Iranians have an emotional closeness to the Tajiks, which circumstances and history had deprived them from developing for many years. The sentiments that link the two countries and neither circumstantial nor are they in any way determined by Iranian politics, what is really common between the two peoples in culture and religion. The intermingling of culture and religious affinity has created a complex and at time confusing element in Tajik-Iranian relations and in the long run, this cultural element may prove to be the most enduring element in Tajik-Iranian ties. Further more, the Tajik significance also lies in the fact that it was clearly the bastion of the most active Islamic tendencies among Central Asia states. During the Communist era, the Soviets exploited the common cultural ties that bound the Tajiks and the Iranians and gave the Tajiks a distinct Soviet character. But the Tajik intellectuals found indirect ways to escape the prohibitions imposed by Moscow to keep them away from Iranian history, culture and language. With the emergence of glasnost and perestroika, Tajik intellectuals and political personalities affirmed more and more openly their affinities with Iran. For the first time since 1929, the law permitted them to use Arabo-Persian alphabet, thus giving them direct access to Persian language.
classics and contemporary texts. Iran has undertaken to provide all the necessary textbooks for this purpose. Mashad radio broadcasts special programmes for Tajikistan and the 21st clock TV news from Iran is relayed live for Tajikistan television. Iran has also offered a wide range of educational facilities to Tajikistan. Among them are admission in Iranian universities and training of diplomatic cadres in Iran.

Soon after independence, the Republic of Tajikistan was pushed into the throes of civil strife especially after the victory of Islamic Mujahideen in Afghanistan in April 1992. The developments in Afghanistan influenced the Tajik domestic scenario. However, the domestic scenario did not effect the growth of friendly relations between Tehran and Dushambe and in 1992, there had been high level exchange of visits by leaders of the two countries. In February 1992, the Foreign Minister and Oil Minister of Tajikistan visited Iran and held discussions with their Iranian counterparts. The Tajik Ministers expressed their country’s eagerness to "expand relationship and co-operation with Iran". At the request of Tajik Oil Minister, Iran agreed to send a delegation to study grounds and potential for co-operation in oil sector with Tajikistan. The Finance Minister of Tajikistan, in his meeting with Iranian President in early June 1992, handed over a personal letter from Tajik President, Rahman Nabiyev. In the letter he thanks Iran for "paying attention to Tajikistan’s problems and expressed desire for further expansion of friendly ties" between the two countries. Reciprocating the warm sentiments, the Iranian President said, "In our relations with the region’s countries, we should like to give special priority to Tajikistan and we are prepared to see co-operation between the two countries expand in all political, cultural, economic and other fields".

During most of the Tajik official contacts with Iran, the cultural theme has been emphasised while the issue of political Islam, politely or openly, was ignored or rejected. Nabiev's visit to Tehran in June 1992 was in this regard rather
symbolic. This was the President to Tajikistan's first trip to any foreign state and took place in the midst of severe political crises at home and the initial stages of the armed clashes among the opposition groups. Among the variety of protocols signed by the two countries, the cultural agreements were the most extensive and far-reaching. These included co-operation in the areas of language, publication of Persian education books for Tajik Schools, student exchanges, scholarships, book exhibitions and rebroadcasting of Iran's television programmes. In his report to the Tajik Supreme Soviet after the visit of Iran, President Nabiev was very particular about the cultural emphasis in the shaping of relations with Iran, with which "until the 15th century we lived in a single state". In an interview with Naradnaya Gazeta, Nabiev characterised Iran and Tajikistan as two countries closely linked by "hundreds of threads of joint history and culture, unity of language and literature". Particularly symbolic was the Nabiev's trip to Shiraz, where he conversed in the poetic language of Farsi and worshipped at the holy sepulchers of Shaykh Saadi and Kaji Hafiz, whose immortal works long since conquered the hearts of people of East and West.

The joint communique issued in Tehran on 30 June 1992 on the of departure of Tajik President envisaged the framework of mutual co-operation and conveyed the determination of both countries to expand their ties based on mutual respect of each others territorial integrity and sovereignty. It also said, "The two sides will not resort to force or threat for the settlement of possible disputes and will observe human rights, political freedom and international commitments."

The communique inter alia envisaged the broadening of the scope of bilateral relations to include parliamentary relations, cooperation in trade and finance, oil, gas, banking industry and other areas. Both Iran and Tajikistan expressed their ardent desire to have the region free of nuclear and chemical weapons to ensure peace and tranquility in the region. While both countries
supported a peaceful settlement of the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Tajik side lauded Iran's mediatory efforts in this regard. The communique also conveyed the keenness of both countries to augment their contacts in the fields of science, religious affairs, art, literature, medicine and health, mass communication, tourism, sports, etc.

Even during the coldest period of the relations in late 1993 to early 1994, the issue of cultural linkage still remained a central theme in Tajik-Iranian relations. In a somewhat bizarre parliamentary manoeuvre in 1994, the Tajik Supreme Council passed an unusual amendment to the 1989 Language Act. The amendment states that the Tajik language is no longer Farsi (Persian). This amendment was put forward by Shukrat Sultanov, chief of organisational Department of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, who himself speaks Tajik with great difficulty and this amendment was clearly playing up to the current anti-Iranian mood. The kidnapping and assassination of Muhamed Asdnei, a leading scholar of Tajik culture and history and a proponent of the revival of the Tajik language, has had a negative impact on Iranian-Tajik relations.

In January 1994, Iran hosted the ECO foreign Ministers meeting in Tehran. The Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, Rashid Olimov, who represented his country, utilised the opportunity of meeting Iranian President Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Valayati. During his meeting with President Rafsanjani and his counterpart, Tajik Foreign Minister explained the current situation in his country and handed over a written message from Tajik President Rahmanov to the Iranian President and assured his government's determination to restore peace and stability in that country. In response the Iranian President said, "The only solution for the well being of the people of Tajikistan is in cooperation reconciliation and solidarity — we hope that we will be able to witness the return of calm and stability to Tajikistan as soon as possible and we are prepared to help you achieve this goal."
The issue of Iranian culture as a source of linkage and support has survived to a certain degree even the deterioration of Iranian-Tajik relations, after the takeover of the government by pro-Communist factions. The government has continued to support the teaching of Persian in elementary schools and Iran has provided the core of the educational support and facilities including 2,50,000 Persian books for elementary and high school students in 1993, and 4,00,000 in 1996. In addition 1,20,000 Persian alphabet books have been provided by Iran. Seven Iranian book exhibitions in Dushanbe, a project for the joint publication of a weekly Relations Journal, and the continuous support of Iran for the development and progress of the Persian language and annual conference in Persian literature are part of the joint protocol signed between the Iranian Ministry of Guidance and the Tajik Ministry of Media and News.

It is now obvious that in addition to challenges from other actors, Iran's economic and technical limitations will continue to be one of the key obstacles to Iran's economic and financial assistance to Tajikistan was driven by both Iran's own financial difficulties, especially in the area of hard currency, and its unwillingness to provide such assistance to a regime with an opposing, if not possible, ideology. An effective and influential role of Iran in Tajikistan will continue to depend not only on Iran's cultural linkage, but on its ability to become a source of material and development support for an impoverished state. Iranian officials have complained of various occasions about the lack of interest, among Iranian business circles, to engage in economic trade activities in Tajikistan. In comparison, however, Iran's business community is much more active in other Central Asian republics. In fact, in this regard not only Russian, but other actors such as the United States, China and Uzbekistan may play a more significant role than Iran.

In the final analysis, however, Iran's limited material resources are hoped to be compensated for by its unique cultural, linguistic and religious ties to
Tajikistan, a new state in search of not only economic development but an independent national sense of identity. Islam will continue to be an important factor effecting Iranian-Tajik relations. To the extent that Islamic groups remain united and a visible political force, Iran will remain an important source of external support.

Iran - Uzbek Relations

Uzbekistan has not been as attractive to Iran as the other republics of Central Asia. This is because Uzbekistan is neither a neighbour nor a Persian speaking republic. Although two of its most important cities, Samarkand and Bukhara, are regarded as the cradles of Persian culture and literature, Tashkent was the last Central Asian capital in which Iran opened an embassy. Iranian policy towards Uzbekistan is heavily based on consideration that take into account its demographic and economic importance and its regional ambitions. Besides, Tehran is conscious of the fact that Persian culture enjoys great prestige in Uzbekistan and of the traditional and central role played by Uzbek Islamic centres in the whole of former Soviet Central Asia. Perfectly aware of Tashkent's capacity of action in Tajikistan and even beyond in Afghanistan, Tehran took initiatives seek out Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan was reticent developing relations with Iran right up to the visit of its President to Tehran in November 1992. Earlier on numerous occasions the President of Uzbekistan had openly criticised Iran, accusing Tehran of supporting the fundamentalist movement - the Renaissance Party, the Islamic Tajik Coalition ad the Islamic Agitators in the Forghana Valley. All these criticisms irritated Iran and the official press began to express its fears of Uzbek-Russian intervention in Tajikistan. There were numerous signs that the deteriorating situation in Tajikistan was going to have a negative effect on the evolution of relations between Tehran and Tajikistan. However, there was radical
shift in the foreign policy of the two countries, when both the countries were convinced that it was in their interest to seek mutual and pragmatic understanding on regional issues. They found a common ground and concluded a number of economic and commercial agreements.

Like other Central Asian republics, Uzbekistan also utilised the opportunity provided by Iran, by hosting the first summit meeting of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO). During the first week February 1992, Haji Mohammad Nader, then head of the Economic Reforms Committee of Uzbek Parliament visited Iran and held discussions with various Iranian leaders on exploring the prospects of mutual cooperation. In an interview with the Iranian News Agency (IRNA), the visiting Uzbek leader said that this country could tackle its economic problems with the help of other countries especially Iran. He also called for the establishment of a railway link between Tehran and Tashkent through Turkmenistan. Expressing Iran's readiness to have any type of cooperation with Uzbekistan and to help remove the latter's difficulties and constraints, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister reiterated his country's principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of others. On 5 November 1992, an Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was formally inaugurated in Tashkent. This was symbolic of growing cooperation between the two countries.

An impetus to newly inaugurated friendly relations between Iran and Uzbekistan was provided by the official visit of Uzbek President, Islam Karimov to Iran during the last week of November 1992. During his visit he held meetings with Iranian President and other leaders and exchanged views on mutual and wide ranging issues. While addressing a press conference in Tehran on 24 November 1992, President Karimov said that his visit to Iran had been very fruitful and hopes that it would pave way "for greater co-operation between the two countries and closer bilateral ties in the future". The joint communique issued in Tehran on 25 November 1992, laid stress on the need to respect the
sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and to prevent interference in its internal affairs. Both countries also expressed their willingness to help put an end to the fightings in Tajikistan and assist in its reconstruction. The President Karimov’s trip to Iran was followed by the Iranian Foreign Minister’s official visit to Tashkent in February 1993.

The Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO) provided an ideal context for maintaining constant touch with Uzbekistan. During December 1993, the Uzbek Foreign Minister visited Tehran and met officials of Iranian Foreign ministry, where he underlined the importance of Tehran - Tashkent ties and called for further dynamism for the ECO and co-operation among its member states. At the ECO foreign ministers meeting in Tehran on 26 January 1994, contacts between Iran and Uzbekistan were further renewed. During his meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Valayati, the Uzbek Foreign Minister underlined the need for broadening of relations and swift implementation of the accords between the two countries.

All the agreements signed between the two countries stipulated the establishment of joint ventures, the development of their communication lines and co-operation in banking system. These agreements permit Iran to have access to Central Asian markets and allow Uzbekistan to have an outlet at the Persian Gulf. However, right from its independence, the Uzbek President Karimov remained very distrustful of Iranian Mullahs, and did not specially want to sacrifice the relations of his country with the United States to the reinforcement of its ties with Iran. Moreover, relations also began to encounter problems due to Uzbek bureaucratic inadequacies and the Iranian financial difficulties.

Iran - Kazakh Relations

Historically the Kazakhs are the last Islamicised of the Central Asian peoples and they have undergone large scale Russification. Kazakhstan, largest
in area among the Central Asian republics, has no direct land border with Iran, but can be reached through Turkmenistan. However, Kazakhstan is a littoral state of the Caspian Sea. The absence of any great Iranian influence in Kazakhstan is due to a number of factors. The first clearly is the presence of a very large European community (Russian-Ukranians and Germans) in the country who do not apparent favour the emergence of any close ties between Iran and Kazakhstan. The second is the recent conversion of Kazakhs to Islam, as a result of which their attraction to the religion is not deep-rooted and the third is the Kazakh President's apparent determination to contain any expansion of Islam for fear of inter-ethnic tensions.

The politico-diplomatic interaction between Iran and Kazakhstan was inaugurated when a high level delegation led by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev paid an official visit to Iran during the third week of November 1992. The Kazakh President and officials of his entourage held wide-ranging discussions with Iranian President and other authorities on bilateral, regional and global issues. Commenting on Kazakh President's visit to Iran, president Rafsanjani termed it "Successful and productive". While attending to Russian Kazakh President's suggestion on Asian conference, the Iranian President said, "We readily accept. We believe that we should co-operate with and pursue the idea. We had previously proposed the establishment of sincere co-operation between the Caspian Sea littoral states in order to present that sea as a peaceful model of friendly co-operation. We have agreed to accelerate the realisation of that idea." A joint communique issued at the conclusion of Kazakh President's visit, showed identity of views of both sides on major issues and also manifested their readiness to continue to maintain high level political consultations. While calling upon all the countries to eschew the use of threat of force, the communique urged for using peaceful means to resolve regional and bilateral disputes both sides expressed concern over the dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan and
the crisis in Tajikistan, and expressed interest in helping to bring armed clashed in Tajikistan to an end.\textsuperscript{66} The significance of this trip was further underlined by three facts: Nazarbayev went to Iran after participating in the Turkic speaking Nation Summit in Ankara, he visited the shrining of Imam Raza in Mashad - a token of the importance of religious ties and a reminder of the centrality of Mashhad in the Greater Khorasan area which once encompassed Central Asian, and a significant statement that he made upon his arrival in Almaty, when reflecting on his trip to Iran, he said, he was able to see the true, liberal face of Iran, an image that contradicts the current view of Iran as 'a country where fundamentalism had been victorious'.\textsuperscript{67}

The reciprocal visit paid by Iranian President to Kazakhstan in the last week of October 1993, received a similar spirit of goodwill and warmth. During the visit, President signed nine agreements with his Kazakh counterpart which provided a framework and ground for co-operation between Tehran and Alma Ata in the fields of transport, communication, agriculture, banking, energy, trade and industry, customs and consular affairs.\textsuperscript{68} Both the Presidents addressed a press conference jointly. Kazakh President expressed his country’s gratitude to Iran for having repatriated the Kazakhs living in Iran. He also complimented Iran for playing a positive role in the establishment of peace and stability in Asia. While describing the Iranian-Kazakh joint co-operation in solving regional crises as highly significant and practical, the Kazakh present said,

"We share same opinion as the Islamic Republic of Iran on the need to solve the regional and international crises, and, while observing the principle of refraining from interfering in the internal affairs of others, in order to end the massacre of innocent Muslims in Bosnia, the Karabakh crises and Tajikistan crises, we would like to assist these countries"\textsuperscript{69}

Kazakhstan also expressed its willingness to co-operate with Iran in the
ECO and the Caspian Sea Co-operation Organisation. Reciprocating the similar friendly view, the Iranian President said that the Iranian-Kazakh co-operation was "in the interests of entire region and there are no obstacles in the field."\(^{90}\)

In Tehran, Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan was officially opened on 26 January 1994. Speaking on the occasion, the Kazakh Foreign Minister said that with the opening of Kazakh Embassy in Tehran, mutual relations between the two countries in political, cultural, commercial and economic areas would be actively expanded.\(^{91}\) The relations got further impetus when Kazakh Prime Minister paid a three day to Iran during the third week of May 1994. He signed a number of agreements and memorandum of understanding with Iranian authorities which covered visa arrangements, formation of joint chambers of trade and industry, banking co-operation and formation of joint company in the free trade zone of Geshm - Island.\(^{93}\) On 16 May 1994, Iran and Kazakhs were also linked by air when direct flights between Tehran and Alma - Ata began to operate.\(^{93}\) Besides economic relations, Iran is nourishing other ambitions, the most important of which are potential co-operation in the petroleum sector and in marine transport on the Caspian Sea. the establishment of regular line, connecting the southern Iranian ports with Kazakhstan ports will offer the latter inexpensive outlets and an alternative to Russia. The realisation of such project will also fulfil various aspirations in the transport sector in Central Asian - an aspiration central to Iranian objective - with a direct access to China through Kazakhstan.\(^{94}\) There have been some reports regarding the transfer of nuclear armaments, but both the capitals have categorically denied this information.

**Iranian-Kyrgyz Relations**

Among Central Asian republics, Kyrgyzstan's relations with Iran are the least developed, probably because of its remoteness from Iran. The level of relations between the two countries has remained at low ebb, despite the fact that both countries have exchanged visits by their respective leaders. Iranian
Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati visited Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, in November 1991. Iran was among the few nations that opened an Embassy in Bishkek. To expand bilateral relations, discussions were held between Kyrgyz Education Minister and the Speaker of Kyrgyzstan's parliament with their Iranian counterparts during the last week of August 1992. On this occasion Iran and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement on air and road links between the two countries. Under the agreement, Iran agreed to provide Kyrgyzstan with expertise in road transport and the management of airports and airline companies. But in 1993, the relations between the two countries strained ostensibly due to the extensive relations. However, the resulting strain in bilateral relations was short lived.

President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, visited Iran in June 1993, which was followed by Iranian President Hashmi Rafsanjani's visit to Kyrgyzstan in the second half of October 1993. During the visit, both countries signed an over Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) providing framework for future co-operation and 12 agreements and protocols pertaining to formation of joint economic, technical and cultural committees, banking, transport, etc. was signed. The relations got further fillip, when the Speaker of Kyrgyz parliament along with a high level delegation visited Iran on 24 May 1994. During his visit he discussed the prospects of parliamentary co-operation between the two countries, expansion of co-operation in economic and technical fields and in other fields within the framework of the Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO).
Notes:
1. The wars of 1812 and 1826 between Persia and Russia resulted in the Persia's defeat and the subsequent annexation to Russia of Persia's Caucasus provinces of Georgia, Mingrelia, Karabakh, Shirvan, Derkant and Baku. Persia had also to concede to Russia the exclusive rights to maintain warships in the Caspian Sea.
11. Prior to the advent of Islamic revolution, Iran was one of the most trusted allies of the United States under the Shah regime and bulk of Iranian oil revenues was invested in procuring sophisticated American weapons. The post-revolutionary Iran served its relations and dependence on United States. The American hostage crisis further embittered Iran-US relations. Washington started accusing Tehran of encouraging international terrorism.
12. The Shia character of the Islamic revolution in Iran was not reconciled by most of the Islamic countries which professed Sunni sect because of the historical and religious factors. Islamic Iran’s call for export of revolution was misconstrued by some Islamic countries as imposition of Iranian model of revolution by force. The outbreak of the hostilities between Iran and Iraq further perpetuated such
misapprehensions especially among the Arab countries.

14. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid., Fn. 18
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. It is these very long term security concerns that make apparent the significance of political developments in the region, and the need for change. Even if Iran shows no reaction in the face of the regional and domestic developments in those republics, hagomonist countries and the principal enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in particular, America and Israel, have begun extensive and increasing attempts to growing influence and the foothold in the region, with the aim of preventing the spread of revolutionary Islam and implementing their long term plans based on subjecting Iran to an economic and security siege. Commentary over Radio Tehran an Central Asian Republics, 25th August 1992 in SWB/ME - Part IV. 27 August 1992.
29. The four regions include the Persian Gulf, the Eastern parts of the Arab World, the mediteranean sea - insofar as Turkey is dependent on Iran for significant
land communication with Central Asia and the Iranian subcontinent at least until Afghanistan achieves greater stability.


32. This Organisation represents Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenstan and the Republic of Azerbiajan.


34. One Iranian observes wrote:

"The Soviet Union with all its wills at least assured us of the security and peace in our northern borders. But the succeeding countries are generally in the grip of the internal tensions, sick economies, cultural vaccum and political disillusionment, in brief they are weak and susceptible to influence. These two characteristics will pose a threat to our national security since it provides the big powers and Iran's adversaries opportunities against us. In addition, the elites and statesmen in these countries have high ambitions and extremist tendencies which can be attributed to their inexperience and excitement caused out of their newly acquired independence. These tendencies can be exploited by vested interests and eventually create problems for themselves and others".


35. According to an observer, "Turkey is not simply Turkey, it is the west, it is Europe ... Turkey is window to the west, a symbol of progress, democracy, nationalism, independence and secularism - in short, the ideology and practice of European liberal democracy - but with a Turkish face in a Muslim society. The Iranian Journal of International Affairs, Vol.IV. No.1 1992.


37. According to this agreement, Israel now has access to Turkish air space and air bases and Israeli pilots can fly between Tel Aviv and Ankara on exercise missions. *Central Asian Survey*, Cambridge vol. 16, No. 2, 1997.


44. Ibid.

45. Pakistan Horizon, Vol.48, No.1 1995


48. Ibid., ME 1830, MED/1, 27 October 1993.

49. Ibid., ME/1886, MED/12, 4 January 1994.


51. Ibid.


55. Ibid.


61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.


67. Shiraz, a city in the south of Iran, the capital of Fars Province, is one of the most
traditional Iranian cities and famous for its romantic and literary traditions and contributions to Iranian culture. Hafiz and Sa'adi are the two greatest Iranian poets with influence not only among Iranians, but in the Iranian culture milieu of Central Asia and the Asian sub-continent – India and Pakistan. Central Asian Survey, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1997.

68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
71. Mohamed Asenei, a former member of the Academy of Science of the Soviet Union, had numerous publications on the history, culture and language of Tajikistan and was head of the Farsi-speaking Association and International Organisation for teaching Central Asian Civilization. Ettela'i, at 30 July 1996.
73. These books were provided as a result of a Tajik request and have been prepared with the cooperation of the Tajikistan academics.
74. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid.
81. FBIS-NES, South Asia, 3 January 1994.
82. SWB-ME Part IV, 26 August 1992.
84. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
88. SWB-ME/1830, MED/1, 27 October 1993.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
96. Ibid., 1 September 1992.
98. Ibid., 26 May 1994.