CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION

IN CENTRAL ASIA
The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) from Moscow in 1991 has brought to the surface many unresolved conflicts that threaten regional peace, stability and security on the one hand and open manifold opportunities for cooperation on the other. The emerging political, social and economic orders in Central Asian region are fragile and are passing through a transitory phase.¹

The post-independence period of these Central Asian states is, however, marked by a number of challenges arising from various primary problem areas. These are the titular nations frequently represented the ethnic majority of their populace, the boundaries of the respective states also contain large minorities of other ethnic groups of this region, as well as sizeable Russian population. Second, the boundaries of the nation states which were created during the early years of the USSR did not evolve from historical processes or ethnic settlement patterns, but were more or less arbitrarily established. A third problem area is the current economic situation in all Central Asian states, with the exception of Uzbekistan, is the cause for great concern and has been showing few positive signals of stabilization. Fourth, the environmental degradation of several region, the area around the Aral Sea

has taken a dramatic proportion resulting in the rapid deterioration of living conditions, including a noticeable reduction in life expectancy. Finally, after the independence of the Central Asian states, serious conflicts have arisen over the usage of natural resources, especially water. Whereas, some countries possess sufficient stores of water, others, (particularly Uzbekistan) are dependent on water supplied by neighbouring states.\(^2\) Apart from the above mentioned hurdles, the foreign countries are also creating some challenges on the way of regional cooperation among the Central Asian countries. Because, they know that if such a political and military unity comes about in the heartland of Asia, that will be a great hurdle for the 'New World Order'.\(^3\) According to Prof. Ahmed Hasan Dani (a Pakistani expert of Central Asian Affairs), the West has a vested interest in propagating the so-called conflicts between the Central Asian states. The re-emancipation of the Central Asian states is thus a crucial factor, not only at the regional level, but also relevant in the global political order. Given numerous unresolved ethnic and territorial conflicts among the states, there is also a possibility to further fragmentation and emergence of new states in that region.

**Historical Basis of Conflicts:**

Central Asia remained a turbulent and conflict prone region for much of its history. The history of the five Central Asian countries is the history of the region. For centuries, Central Asia has been ruled either by foreign empires,
which incorporated the region into their territories as a single political unit by a few regional multi-ethnic states.\(^4\) As far as Russia is concerned, before to launching the process of “Russification” and “Sovietization”, Central Asia was a single geo-political entity called “Turkistan”. There were three old empires within that entity, stretching from the Black Sea to the desert of Mongolia. The three Central Asian empires which existed before the Russian occupation were:

a. Kokand Khanate, which stretched over parts of what is now southern Kazakhstan, Osh Oblast in Kyrgyzstan and the Farghana Valley in Uzbekistan.

b. Empire of Bukhara which included Samarkand and all of what is now south eastern Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

c. Khanate of Khiva, which stretched over the existing territories of western Uzbekistan and eastern Turkmenistan.

The breakdown of the Central Asian political order was mainly due to the result of imperial rivalry between the Russian and British empires in 19\(^{th}\) century. Finally, both Britain and Russia decided to draw a line and demarcate their spheres of influence. After that Central Asian kingdoms became part of the Russian Tsars and territories which were south of the Durand line were accepted as part of the British Crown.\(^5\) The “great game” which Great Britain and Russia had played during 19\(^{th}\) century planted the seeds of existing


conflicts in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{6} The process of "Russification" deprived Central Asians of their cultural and religious identity severely.

The Russian rulers, particularly the post-1917 governments arbitrarily changed the Central Asian boundaries by planting the seeds of future discord and tension among local population. The result of the Soviet policy was that various nationalities and minorities of the population in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan led to bloody fighting, particularly in the Ferghana valley. The growing Uzbek nationalism is a source of anxiety for the non-Uzbeks in and outside Uzbekistan. The civil war in Tajikistan has been the most crucial issue in the region today. Here two factors are important. The Russian factor is important because of its military pressure. The Uzbek factor is important because of its geography and ethnic proximity. All the Central Asian states are supporters of Russian military intervention in Tajikistan to contain fundamentalists from the southern border. Radical ethnic nationalism are more likely to appear in the politically backward republics. Anti Uzbek feelings are more probably next to anti-Russian sentiments in the republics.\textsuperscript{7}

Since 1860s, the Russian expansion began in Central Asian states, the Central Asian ethnic scenario was made fairly complex by the Caucasian groups, who were forcibly settled by Joseph Stalin during the Second World


War. The sudden concentration of several nationalities sharpened the existing ethnic relations in Central Asia in the post-Stalinist period.8

A brief glance at the history of Central Asia reveals that it has passed through a turbulent past. Isolation from the rest of the world, disunity, constant warfare, despotism, and religious fanaticism turned the once prosperous lands into deserts, ruined the economy, impoverished cultural life and prevented the process of modernization. After having absorbed Kazakhs, Russia began their advance into the heart of the Central Asia in 1864. She met no resistance from the weak and backward societies ruled by the Khans of Khiva and Kokand, and the Amir of Bukhara. It took less than a quarter of a century to turn Central Asia into a tightly controlled colony of Russia.9

The colonial policy of Tsarist Russia and the forced industrialization by the Soviet Union triggered migratory movements, which decisively altered the ethnic composition in these republics that paved the way for various nationalities and minorities living in each republic.10

Kazakhstan was the gateway for Russia to enter into Central Asia, and in this republic, the Slavic population is most assertive as compared to that of in other former Soviet Central Asian republics. As a result of the Russian policy of subjugation, which was first implemented by the Tsars and then by the

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communist rulers, Kazakhs became a minority in their own homeland.\textsuperscript{11} Under the Tsars, all personal names were Russified. In 1920s Moscow ordered that the Latin alphabet replace Arabic script, which had been used since Central Asians embraced Islam in the 8\textsuperscript{th} century. In 1940, it replaced the Latin alphabet with the Slavic Cyrillic alphabet, the effect was to limit its use to homes and the streets making the Central Asian people illiterate in their own language.\textsuperscript{12} Actually, the 'great game' which occurred between Russia and Great Britain was responsible for existing conflicts in the Central Asian region. After Russification, Central Asia became aross-bed for Russia to exploit their natural resources by planting various conflicting factors in Central Asia. The Soviet disintegration and the emancipation of Central Asia from Moscow has not substantially changed the Russian approach vis-à-vis its former republics. The Russian elites have a strong desire to maintain their hold over the supply of raw materials form Central Asia. The new relationship between Moscow and Central Asian republics is still unequal. Thus, Central Asia's quest for real independence is a long-standing dream. It has a capability to destabilize the political order and unleash a perpetual state of chaos and anarchy.

\textbf{Ethnic, Linguistic and Religious Problems}

The upsurge of ethnicity is a global phenomenon and its intensity is growing rapidly in the later part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. If one observes the nature of conflicts going on in different parts of the world, he will find majority of


\textsuperscript{12} Robin Wright, \textit{Report from Turkistan} (New York, 1992), pp.63-64.
these conflicts have ethnic or lingual basis.\textsuperscript{13} The former Soviet Central Asian republics are not an exception to the contemporary escalation of ethnic conflicts. After decades of Russian and the communist tutelage, the people of the five Central Asian states have got an opportunity to revitalize their lost position and achieve the sovereign status.\textsuperscript{14}

The Soviet disintegration not only paved the way for the independence of Central Asian countries from the Russian tutelage but also exposed the vulnerability of these state's various unresolved conflicts. The emancipation of the Central Asian states is thus a crucial factor not only at the regional level but also relevant to the global political order. Due to these various unresolved ethnic and territorial conflicts among the states, there is also a possibility of further fragmentation and emergence of some new states in that region.\textsuperscript{15}

As far as the ethnic conflicts in Central Asia are concerned, one can examine these conflicts in two different perspectives. First, the strong presence of the Russian minority in nearly all the Central Asian states, especially in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Secondly, the ethnic tension prevailing between the Central Asian groups, conflicts between the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan are quite noticeable.\textsuperscript{16} The indigenous people of Central Asia can be divided into

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\footnote{Moonis Ahmar, op.cit., n.9, p.63.}
\footnote{Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, "Impact of Central Asian Changes in South and West-Asia", \textit{Regional Studies}, Vol.2, Spring 1992, p.18.}
\end{footnotes}
sedentary and pastoralists. The pastoralist as well as the sedentarists attached in different ways to their land. Therefore, the Kazak, Kyrgyz and Turkmen though nomadic pastoralists, nonetheless had distinct territoriality. And in the same manner, inhabitants of the Oasis towns and its surrounding villages lived on the land, and in more outlying areas hardly experienced political change when ruler changed from Iranian Samanid in the tenth century to Turkic and subsequently from Turkic to Tsarist in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{17} Most of the existing ethnicities and their denominations in Central Asia are of recent origin and continue to alter in response to the changing circumstances. Though the names of some ethnicities, like Uighurs, Tajiks, may be very old; but often the same name has been used by very different peoples, who had little or no genetic or social connection between them.\textsuperscript{18} The ethnic structure had to withstand fierce and recurrent onslaughts when borders of the republics and autonomous were recarved, multiethnic capitals raised, entire people deported, enormous labour immigration encouraged, atrocities committed against peasants, collectivization established, and sedentarization of nomads achieved before ethnic elements could arrange into a new order. The ethnic structure appeared to be on its way to radical transformation, but all eponymous people managed to redeem their structural weights.\textsuperscript{19} As far as the political factor is concerned, no political party or ruling group deliberately determined to change the lives of identities of every member of Central Asian

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.37.

\textsuperscript{18} Andre Gunder Frank, \textit{The Centrality of Central Asia} (Amsterdam: Central European University Press, 1992), p.22.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp.27-28.
society until the installation of Soviet nationality policy by Stalin, and the continuation of that policy by Moscow later. Prior to this, an official, politically significant ethnic identity was quite important insofar as extended sedentary families or clans and tribes in pastoral nomadic areas, were partially based on ethnic association.20

Central Asia is something of an ethnic tinder-box with an intermixture of ethnic groups in large numbers in each state. It must be said to the credit of the Central Asian leaders, however, that they have managed to contain these conflicts, keeping their adverse fallout to the minimum level. The Russian rulers, particularly the post-1917 governments, arbitrarily changed the Central Asian boundaries to their advantage by planting the seeds of future discord and tension among local population. On the eve of the Soviet disintegration, the ethnic division of the former Soviet Central Asian states was as follows:

1. Kazakhstan, population 16,538,000 Kazakh; 36%, Russian: 41 % Ukrainians: 60%, Tatars: 2%.
2. Kyrgyzstan, population: 4,372,000, Kyrgyzs: 52%, Russians: 22%, Uzbeks: 13%.
3. Uzbekistan: population: 19,906,000. Uzbeks: 69%, Russians: 11% Tatars, Kazaks and Tajiks 4% each.
5. Turkmenistan: population: 3,621,700. Turkmens: 68%, Russians: 13% , Uzbeks 9%.21

20 Ibid.
21 Moonis Ahmar, n.9, pp.67-72.
From the above mentioned facts, it appears that these states are the patchwork of several ethnic groups. Kazakhs are a minority in their own land. There is a sizeable Russian minority in Kyrgyzstan. The most assertive ethnic group parallel to Russian is Uzbek. There are 16 million Uzbeks in Uzbekistan alone and several million in other Central Asian states. Tajiks and Uzbeks claim cultural superiority over Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Turkmenian. Tajik consider themselves to be the most cultured nation by virtue of belonging to the ancient and rich Persian civilization. They are the biggest non-Turkic community in Central Asia. Turkmens are considered to be uncultured and illiterate: whereas Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs sometimes were called as semi-barbarian nomads who recently converted to the Islam. Except for the Tajiks, all ethnic groups in Central Asia speak a language which is close to Turkish. Slogans of pan-Turkism are raised purely on linguistic and ethnic grounds. It would be equally erroneous to assume that the population of Central Asia constitutes a uniform mass of Muslims of Turks. The difference among the people of Central Asia are vast. Although most speak Turkic languages, but they are not mutually intelligible, Turkmen and Uzbek being no closer to the other than Italian is to Spanish. The Tajiks, of course, speak Persian, an Indo European language unrelated to Turkic. The Kazakhs, known in days of Tsarist period as Kyrgyz, were until recently nomads. Their ancestors were converted to Islam nearly a thousand years later than the people of the southern region that had been part of the Iranian Sassanid empire. Compare with the situation among the Uzbeks and the Tajiks, Persian was the native language of the Tajiks and

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22 Ibid.
the second language of many Uzbeks. The Mullahs knew Arabic, their religious and cultural identity was strong and largely impervious to Russian influence.23

The arguments concerning on political order for Central Asia are unacceptable to those who are assertive with regard to their ethnic, linguistic, and religious and cultural identities. Centuries of Russian rule has divided the people of Central Asia at many levels. Though the people of Central Asia share so many common things but the existence of ethnic, lingual and religious contradiction undermine the endeavours for cooperation among the Central Asian republics.24

The series of ethnic riots that rocked Central Asia since 1989 have profoundly created problems at regional as well as in global context. In all the Central Asian countries, the difficult economic situation has put the ethnic minorities under pressure and not surprisingly there have been very violent group clashes in recent years. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups were involved in violent clashes over the land dispute in Uzbekistan's Andizan oblast in 1989. Again in 1990, competing claims made by new ethnically based association in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan led to violence between the above groups.25 Similarly, a dispute over claims to irrigation and farm land led to violence between Tajiks and Kyrgyzstan villagers on the border of the two republics in 1989. Equally, the tension between the Tajiks and Uzbeks reached in a crisis

23 Ibid., pp.67-71.
proportions in August-September 1992, when thousands of Uzbek refugees left Tajikistan as a result of what they describe as “pograms” in Uzbek-speaking villages.\footnote{26 The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, Vol.XLIV, No.38, 1992, p.9.}

Ethnic Kazakhs, and Uighur nationalities overlapping into the Kazakhstan-Xinjiang frontiers may create potential irredentism and border conflicts between Kazakhstan and China in the Pamir region. Xinjiang has been restive since early 1989. The Xinjiang Daily, the official newspaper, frequently issues stern warning against Muslim militancy and Turkic nationalism saying that separatist will be seen as traitors, hence, will be prosecuted. The trend of ethnic conflicts within Central Asia in the recent years shows that there have been more cases of non-Russians killing non-Russians rather than ethnic Central Asian killing Russians.\footnote{27 Ibid., p.37.} In other words the region is more fertile for intra-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic conflicts.

As far as complex ethnic make-up of Central Asia is concerned, the Uzbek nationalism is the most potent factor. There have been numerous fights between the Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. The Uzbeks also fought Mekshketian Turks in Tashkent and Ferghana valley in 1989. The hatred of Uzbeks is high and growing among the non-Turkic people especially, among ethnically Iranian Tajiks who are of the ancient Persian civilization which dominated Central Asia before the nomadic Turks came into the region.
Besides the Alma-Ata riots of December 1986, all other ethnic movements were the consequence of unsettled economic and social issues. But it is very much important to think that the events in Dushanbe, Ferghana valley, Novyi Uzen, Ashkabad, Osh and elsewhere were primarily the consequences of pressure from below rather manipulation from above. Although there was greater casualty in these ethnic strifes, but disturbances were not aimed at political sovereignty.28

The origin and dynamics of the ethno-political situation are highly complex and depend on many domestic and external factors. Social fragmentation is a new feature of the Central Asian reality that forms a potential threat to the new states stability, ethnic instability, along with mass pauperization and criminalization seems to be the most vulnerable aspect of Central Asian states. It is only in the last six years that the newly born states, share a common legacy of the past, have chosen different paths in almost all realms. Paradoxically, with the rapid fragmentation of the region, a greater deal of cooperation is needed. But fulfilling such a need appears unlikely in the present circumstances. The combination of religious and corresponding ethnic differences may greatly destabilize the region and more effective methods of managing these differences have not been developed.29 Ferghana valley, which has recently been the scene of two massacres is a vivid example of

Central Asia's conflict potential. According to experts' analysis, at the beginning of the 21st century Central Asia may become the epicentre of world economic, political, and military conflict.\(^{30}\)

During the Soviet times, not only a serious process of ethnic crystallization took place, but there was also approbation of different models of development. Currently each republic has to face its own combination of possibilities in order to move forward or regress to the past. Frequently ethnic divisions within and between the Central Asian republics are perceived as the primary source of conflict throughout the region. During the Soviet period, all citizens were united under the banner of a new historical community, with an army of ideological workers advocating the idea of friendship of the peoples, now ethnic unity has completely fragmented.\(^{31}\) Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Empire, ethnic conflicts between mainly Central Asian Muslims began to emerge. This polarization among the ethnic and religious communities also overlaps other sources of social and economic identity.

Central Asia has never been a monolithic set of people or states. The diversity of the region is quite obvious today. The increasing political polarization between newly independent states acquires ethnic coloration and is more acute in Central Asia than elsewhere in the former Soviet space. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have adopted relatively open and democratic free-market systems. While Uzbekistan is not willing to reform its political


\(^{31}\) Ibid., p.14.
institutions, remains stuck with an authoritarian regime and a relatively closed economy. Turkmenistan is an extreme case of totalitarian states which reverted to medieval tyranny. Justifying his authoritarian rule, the Uzbek leader points to the need to combat the Islamic threat, facilitate market reforms and "prepare" the society for democracy. Turkmenistan's president uses his own personality cult as the basis of his authority. Initially, Tajikistan had all but collapsed under a quite unpopular, pro-Russian government that was unable to control the country's situation from regional and clan-based clashes. The second level of fragmentation was between the Slav and the indigenous population. In the current ethnic mosaic of Central Asia, Russians still constitute the second largest ethnic group, in contrast to the region's titular nationalities which are rapidly increasing in number, mainly due to high birth rates. The share of Russians in each Central Asian state varies considerably: 36 percent in Kazakhstan, 15.5 per cent in Kyrgyzstan, 6.6 per cent in Turkmenistan, 5.6 per cent in Uzbekistan, and 3.4 per cent in Tajikistan in the period between 1995-1996. If other Slavic populations are included, such as Ukrainians and Belorussians the numbers would be greater.

Russians are concentrated in the urban areas, mostly in the capitals and northern areas. Despite the fact that the capitals are undergoing a gradual process of indigenization, the native still constitute a minority in Almaty and Bishkek. As a result, they frequently see their own major cities as dominated

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by outsiders. In Kyrgyzstan, some homeless descendants of the nomads try to end the historic injustice by demanding ownership of land.\textsuperscript{34} Any local attempt to undermine the privileged status of the Russian minority will be counter productive. Besides that the ethnic tension among the Central Asian groups, conflicts among the Uzbek minority in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the Tajik minority in Uzbekistan is a case in point.\textsuperscript{35}

In the post-Soviet period, the absence of a clear-cut nationality policy within Russian or in Central Asian states has made the position of Central Asian non-natives even more precarious.

The de-Russification process has begun in all the five former Soviet Central Asian republics. Even various street names have been changed, for example, in Almaty (Kazakhstan), the major avenue, Gorky street, has been renamed Jibek Joly; the Great Silk Road; to honour the famous ancient trade route traveled by Marco Polo.\textsuperscript{36} In January 28, 1993, constitutional resolution passed by the Kazakh-dominated parliament, undermined the position of the huge Russian population treating them as second class citizen. It will encourage the Kazakh nationalism but is likely to promote disunity between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs, a negative factor for regional cooperation in the region.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Abidan Bozday, "Crisis and Democracy in Kyrgyzstan", \textit{Aussen Politik}, Vol.43, No.3, 1992, pp.75-78.

Dissolution of multi-ethnic Soviet Union resulted in still unresolved territorial problems. According to an estimate of the Geography Institute under the Russian Academy of Science, there are 180 territorial ethnic dispute spots in the territory of the former Soviet Union. At present the regional conflict is exacerbated by the ethnic factor. In the view of president Karimov of Uzbekistan, the multi-ethnic factor is undermining both national and regional stability in the Central Asian republics. The ethnic factor might become more pressing as more and more ethnic frontiers unravel in Central Asia.

Though there is potential for Kazak nationalism coming into sharp confrontation with the Russian population within the republic, there is also potential for ethnic or territorial disputes between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, given the large number of Uzbeks who live in the southern region of Kazakhstan along the Uzbekistan border. The Karakalpak autonomous region of Uzbekistan is also ethnically closer to the Kazakhs than to the Uzbeks, making it a potential trouble spot, if borders in the region begin to be rearranged along more ethnic lines. Kyrgyzstan a heavily mountainous region and referred to as the Switzerland of Central Asia is besieged with internecine rivalries and regional divisions. With Russian constituting 21 per cent of the population, it faces ethnic tensions which could threaten its survival. A considerable Uzbek minority (13 per cent) also exists in Kyrgyzstan.

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Kyrgyzstan has had one very serious ethnic clash with Uzbekistan in 1990 in the oblast of Osh in the Ferghana valley and expresses fear to Uzbek expansionism. Also, the Uzbeks are likely to become the country's second largest ethnic group within 2-3 years due to continued Russian emigration. With Islam Karimov whipping up Uzbek nationalism, the Kyrgyz republic could face a renewal of the 1990 inter-ethnic rioting in Osh.\(^{39}\) One of the most explosive issue is the north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan. The regional rivalry and suspicion between the two halves of the country is lying latent. In 1993, Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev expressed concern that with an estimated 50,000 drug users, Kyrgyzstan had one of the largest drug abuse problems in Central Asia. His fears about drugs and drugs abuse in the republic may be based on his concern that personal political ambition, the drug mafia and rumblings of south-Kyrgyz separation may be connected.\(^{40}\)

Tajikistan has realized the full impact along its southern border of the war and large scale drug trafficking in neighbouring Afghanistan. Its own resulting civil war has been exacerbated by divisions among Tajikistan's leaders, a paucity of resources and a populace awash in Soviet weaponry.\(^{41}\) Tajikistan has the most active movement of militant Islam within the former USSR. The Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) is deeply embroiled in politics. The republic is beset by conflicts among northern and southern clans, between

\(^{39}\) *The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Report, 1*\(^{st}\) Quarter, 1996, p.17.


\(^{41}\) S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996, p.82.
Uzbeks and Tajiks (Uzbeks constitute 23 percent of the population and Tajiks constitute 60 percent), between communists and reformers and between the poor and the establishment. This volatile situation can cause a spillover effect in the rest part of the Central Asia.42

Uzbekistan has a population of about 22.5 million, with Uzbeks constituting 71 per cent of the population and Russian 8 per cent. Though Uzbekistan lies of the geographic center of Central Asia and has vast political, economic and intellectual assets as it was the hub of activity before the break up of the erstwhile Soviet Union. Uzbekistan possess a sense of national self-identity, and other states in the region tend to feel threat used by Uzbek dominance. Uzbekistan is the chief rival of Kazakhstan for regional influence over its neighbours, and Uzbekistan is most likely to have a conflict with Tajikistan. Given the 5 percent of the Uzbek population is Tajik, who constitute a majority in Samarkand and Bukhara, there are increasing demands from the Tajiks for greater cultural autonomy and more widespread use of the Tajik language.43 Equally significant is the large Uzbek population in Tajikistan (23 per cent) which is mainly concentrated in the northern part of the republic who also regard themselves as victims of discrimination.44 Fundamentalist leaders have a strong presence which is a potential challenge to state stability since they tend to question the legitimacy of the existing government and call for an 'Islamic government' and an 'Islamic way of life'. While such movements

42 Bezanis, op.cit., n.40, p.7.
43 Fuller in Banuazizi and Weiner, n.38, p.30.
44 Ibid., p.30.
are kept in check through strict police measures they can become factors for popular national dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, Islamic parties have been known to be functioning in Tashkent also and a strict watch is maintained on their activities.

Language has an important position among the various factors that are considered important for ethnic identity. Generally, the language people speak is seen as an important shaping aspect of their culture and particularly their cognitive categories. Most scholars analyzing nationalism by giving more emphasis on linguistic aspects of ethnicity as important for identity. However, others have pointed out that as distinct from language, other factors such as territorial attachment, genealogical grouping may well have been of crucial significance.\(^45\) This is not to ignore the importance of language as one important element in the intricate pattern of ethnic identity.

In Central Asia, an examination of linguistic affiliation in determining ethnic identity become crucial. The goal of Soviet nationalities policy in the region in the 1920s was to create separate national republics by means of a national territorial delimitation' based mainly on ethno linguistic criteria.\(^46\) As such it is necessary to examine the nature of linguistic identity in the region prior to the division, particularly since the linguistic situation was extremely confused and complex one.

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The divergence between language use and ethnic identity is interesting since it belies the Soviet claims of linguistic identity as crucial in the determination of ethnic frontiers and leaves open at least one territorial claim that is made by the Tajiks on Uzbek lands. It is now widely acknowledged that to satisfy the criterion of nationhood, two new literary languages Tajik and Uzbek – were created. Despite the long symbiotic relationship between the two languages, the possibility of “Turkicisation” of Tajik or of “Iranisation” of Uzbek was denied. It was maintained that the original language of Samarkand and Bukhara was Uzbek, Samarkand Uzbek simply having more Tajik elements and Tashkent Uzbek more Turkic one. The Uzbek and Tajik cultural and historical heritages were also defined chiefly on the basis of linguistic and territorial criteria. However, since the Uzbeks and the Tajiks had occupied the same territory and had similar religio-cultural background, whose chief linguistic vehicles were Arabic and Persian, this compartmentalisation created confusion and overlap.

Language issue is most important ethnic predicament in Central Asia. Majority of the population in Central Asia speak languages which are closer to Turkish. The only exception is Tajikistan where Persian is spoken. The Slavic minorities speak Russian and Ukrainian. There is also noticeable German speaking community in Kazakhstan. The lingual discord in Central Asia has its basis in Stalin’s policy of ethnic division of that single geographical area into

several republics. The lingual contradictions in Central Asia are of a complicated nature. The role of Moscow in this regard is also relevant.

Until recently, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz were considered one people speaking two very similar dialects. Under the Soviets, these dialects were given separate literary forms to discourage creation of so called national identity. When Turkey changed to Latin script under Ataturk, Stalin decreed that all the Central Asian languages had to be written in Latin and later in Cyrilic (Russian) character. Such a policy disoriented the Central Asian people from their centuries old cultural heritage and divided them on lingual, ethnic and territorial basis.

Russian language is still an indispensable language for the most urban Central Asian region and for more professionals. It continues to be important for people who are at the most productive stages of their lives, between the ages of twenty-five and sixty five. They use Russian for communication, particularly outside their own republics.

It is also likely that Russian will continue to play an important role in the educational system of the newly independent states of Central Asia if they are to create a large local skilled cadre to take care of their future requirements. According to Prof. Ajay Patnaik, the recently adopted language

laws would take some time to come into force and their strictest implementation under the present political set up is doubtful. Most state laws provide for the continued use of Russian language. Turkmen law even talks of national – Russian bilingualism; Tajik law proclaims that "the Russian language as the language of inter-ethnic communication functions freely in the territory of Tajikistan and the laws of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan proclaim freedom of choice of language of instruction."51

Kazakhstan is an important flash point in the current language controversy in Central Asia. Given the delicate ethnic balance between the Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan is facing an uphill task of protecting the Kazakh language and also appeasing the Russian speaking population. But it clearly seems that the lingual and ethnic contradictions in Kazakhstan can erode the very basis of the Kazakh state. On January 28, 1993, the Kazakh-dominated parliament passed constitution which declared Kazakh as the official language but declared to give Russian a special status, as the main communication tongue among the various ethnic groups.52 However, according to the constitution of Kazakhstan, it is essential that the head of the state must speak Kazakh fluently. Such a step of the Kazakh parliament had created resentment among millions of Russian speaking population of the state. Russians have blamed the Kazakh president of fanning the flames of hatred and animosity by undermining the

status of their language by giving it second class-status.\textsuperscript{53} The declaration of Kazakh as an official language will encourage Kazakh nationalism that will alienate the Russians, due to which the anti-Kazakh feelings will develop, which is like pouring petrol on to a fire. It is like a time bomb.

In the post-independence period, the Central Asian states are in a dilemma what to do with their native languages and with the status of Russian and other Slavic languages. Some Central Asian states are reverting back to the Latin script, whereas, there is a possibility that Tajikistan may adopt the Arabic script. Russia is aware of the fact that the switch over the Central Asian republics from Cyrillic to Latin or Arabic script will undermine decades old cultural supremacy of the Russian inhabitants over Central Asian republics.

As far as religious conflicts are concerned, a single most important aspect in this regard is the revival of Islam and Christianity in the former Soviet Union. In most of the Central Asian republics, Islam is a convenient symbol which allows local nationalists to distance themselves from Slavic culture and aspirations.\textsuperscript{54} However, for some observers, the revival of Islam in the newly independent Central Asian states is conceived as a threat to regional integration in that region. The reopening of mosques, the growing activities of the Islamic Renaissance Party (banned in nearly all the Central Asian states) and the role of the Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

in this regard is viewed with suspicion and mistrust. The neighbouring
country of Afghanistan is an Islamic theocracy, from where Islamic ideology is
exported. In this case, radical preachers from some Muslim countries are
paving the way for it in the ideological vacuum. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and
Tajikistan have become hotbeds of Islamic extremism. According to some
reports, the Jordanian-born Chechen field commander Khatlab and Central
Asian fellow-militant Jumabai Namanghani have declared that the creation
of new Islam states in the Commonwealth of Independence States (CIS) is
their main objective. They propose to do so with the backing of the
fundamentalist movements in Afghanistan, Pakistan and West Asia. The
Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), financed by Osama bin Laden, and
extremist Wahhabi groupings, is said to be operating in Fergana valley,
creating instability in the region. 55

The native population of Central Asia is overwhelmingly Sunni, and
among the Sunnis secular power has had greater legitimacy than it has among
the Shias. For centuries, the Caliph, spiritual leader of the Sunni’s, was also
the Sultan, ruler of the Ottoman empire. The clergy, although important, has
not had the influence or independent power it enjoys among the Shias of Iran
or Lebanon. It is therefore unlikely that the Central Asian republics would turn
into a theocracy of Iranian type. This, however, does not mean that the
influence of Islamic fundamentalism will not continue to grow and affect the
daily life of the population. The Islamic fundamentalism of the Sunni or Shia

55 Dadan Upadhay, “Central Asian Nation to Back Russia in Fight Against Terrorism”,
Indian Express, September 27, 1999.
variety is not merely resistant to democracy but wholly contemptuous of and hostile to the entire structure of regional cooperation in Central Asian region.\textsuperscript{56} However, Mushahid Hussein, a leading Pakistan political analyst, sees the Islamic reassertion as positive in at least three dimensions. Politically as challenging the existing \textit{status quo} culturally as the assertion of an Islamic identity differentiating between modernization and westernization and in foreign affairs, as assertion of sovereignty over natural resources, struggle for liberation and matching military power. It has every potential to exacerbate regional tensions, which could even lead to direct conflicts in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{57} However, the revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the newly independent Central Asian republics is conceived as a threat to the regional cooperation in that region.

Islam has been a dominant factor in Central Asia. Samarkand and Bukhara were traditionally great centers of theological studies and the region had never remained isolated from the Islamic mainstream. Now, there is a sudden resurgence of Islam in all the republics. The prospect of a rising Islamic bloc out of these newly independent states in alliance with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, as well as the possible incorporation of China’s western Muslim province of Xinjiang, is one kind of scenario which paves the way for growing tension and instability in this region. The idea of pan-Turkic bloc to form “Turkestan” on the other hand, could endanger the


territorial integrity. It has the potential to exacerbate regional tension, which could even lead to direct armed conflicts in that region.\textsuperscript{58}

**Border Disputes**

After the ethnic, linguistic and religious problems, the territorial boundaries are the most important area of conflict. Numerous territorial changes, effected by the Russian rulers by disregarding the will of the local people has sown the seeds of territorial conflicts in this region. On this account, the present map of Central Asia is clearly seems to be temporary.

The borders of Central Asia were changed frequently since 1921 and around 90 territorial changes have been made since then. Out of 23 internal borders existing between 15 former republics of the Soviet Union, 20 are still disputed.

The resolution of border issues peacefully and transparently would have a positive impact on regional security, economic cooperation, ethnic relations and effort to combat drug trafficking and religious extremism. But progress has been slow, and no immediate breakthrough can be seen in an all too after antagonistic process that is defining the new map of Central Asia.

Independence for the Central Asian states reopened a pandora’s box of border disputes. Many of the current difficulties can be faced directly back to a difficult Soviet legacy. Moscow established administrative borders of its

\textsuperscript{58} FBIS-SOV.92-031, 14 February, 1992, p.9.
Central Asian republics in the mid 1920s which followed neither natural geographic boundaries nor strict ethnic lines.59

Ethnic populations that had long enjoyed access to friends and families just across border were now isolated and often faced visa requirements and other access difficulties. Much of the population views these new restrictions with hostility and has felt the disruption in traditional patterns of commerce and society acutely.

The resolutions of territorial disputes is obviously emotional and goes directly to each country's definition of national interests. No nation wants to make territorial concessions. Nonetheless, the failure to resolve border issues prevents neighbours for normalizing relations and dealing with pressing social and economic issues which is directly creates hurdles for the regional cooperation.60

The borders particularly problematic in Fergana valley. Most of the valley within the territory of Uzbekistan is bordered by Kyrgyzstan on the north east and south, and by Tajikistan in the southwest. Kyrgyzstan shares a 1300 k.m. border with Uzbekistan, while the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in 990 km long. The Uzbek-Kyrgyzstan and Uzbek-Tajikistan borders in the Fergana valley zig-zag back and forth across the valley's main roadways. The valley's main east-west road and rail transit routes pass through northern Tajikistan enroute out to Uzbekistan. The result is a situation in which virtually all traffic

59 The Times of Central Asia, April 11, 2002, p.5.
60 Ibid.
and freight repeatedly cross several international borders. Monitoring of these and other Central Asian borders is doubly complicated in an age of globalization when people, capital, goods, services and ideas can move more swiftly across frontiers than ever before.61

The territorial disputes have long been a source of problems between the Uzbeks and other groups in Central Asian region. Today many of these disputes have become grounds of secessionist and irridentist sentiments within Central Asia.62 Many of the current state borders result from a Moscow-appointed Commission to re-draw Central Asia in 1924. During the Soviet period, the borders were never well surveyed or marked. Today, several borders, particularly between Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been established not by legal demarcation but by popular usage.

Popular usage has not legitimized many of these borders. Recent events make this fairly apparent. Turkmenistan border with Uzbekistan is defined by the water course of the Syr-Darya river at some points creating a continuous possibility of border redefinition. After talks with respect to the border, Turkmen and Uzbekistan officials issued a protocol saying neither had territorial claims on the other.63 In early 2000, Uzbekistan unilaterally commenced a survey of its border with Kazakhstan. After Kazakhstan officials


publicly objected, a bilateral demarcation commission was established in February 2000 to settle the problem.\textsuperscript{64} Tajikistan officials similarly objected to Uzbekistan's unilateral border survey.\textsuperscript{65} In June 2000, the Tajik and Uzbekistan governments signed a memorandum to set up a joint Intergovernmental Commission on the delimitation of their state border, the delimitation was to be based in the existing administrative territorial border. The goal was to establish a framework for cooperation between border guards on issues of customs, migration and other forms of control.\textsuperscript{66} In September 2000, despite protests from Tajikistan, the Uzbekistan government began mining some portions of the common border with Tajikistan as counter-insurgency measure. During 2001, Uzbek and Kyrgyz officials were in almost continuous negotiation over their common border.

At present, the border problem is the most delicate problem in relation between the states. To settle the border problem, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek government delegations held a talk on the delimitation and demarcation of the state border between the two states in Bishkek on 17 February 2000 at the Institute of Geology and Cartography.\textsuperscript{67} Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev and the Uzbek counterpart Islam Karimov agreed to speed up the

\textsuperscript{66} Tajikistan Uzbekistan Agree to set up Commission, \textit{ITAR-TASS}, 15 June 2000.
\textsuperscript{67} "Documents", \textit{Contemporary Central Asia}, Vol.4, No.1-2, April-August 2000, p.93.
process of negotiating the issues of delimitation on the border between the two states on a telephone conversation on 16 March, 2001.68

To settle the Tajik and Kyrgyz border issue, a group of representatives from the Tajik Border Protection Committee went to the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in Tajikistan's northern Sughd region to hold talks with senior representatives from the border department of Kyrgyzstan, to settle the border dispute in January 2003. Nuralisho Nazarov, (First Deputy Chairman of the Tajikistan Border Protection Committee) told to Asia-Plus that the purpose of the delegation's trip was to solve problems that have arisen on the Tajik-Kyrgyz border in the area of the Isfara district in northern Tajikistan.69

Uzbekistan has officially rejected a request by Kyrgyzstan for maps of Uzbek mine fields along the country's common border and also for the removal of some of the mines on February 26, 2003.

Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman Kadyr Yusupov told a press conference in Tashkent that Uzbekistan insists on its right to defend its borders in the face of international terrorism. Kyrgyzstan formally protested to Uzbekistan over the death of a Kyrgyz citizen who was killed by the Uzbek mine.70

According to some sources, Uzbekistan is considered as an expansionist state given its territorial claims over other states. It is the most

powerful Central Asian state in terms of population, economic resources and military buildup. In this scenario, territorial conflicts in the former Soviet Central Asian republic are explosive in nature and have a potential for outbreak of hostilities. Such a situation may lead to further disintegration of Central Asia and emergence of several states on ethnic lines, which will be the main obstacle for regional cooperation in that region.

Natural Resources, Environmental Problems and Regional Instability in Central Asia

After the independence of the Central Asian states, serious conflicts have arisen over the usage of natural resources especially water and other environmental issues. Two striking examples for these types of problems and the resulting need for regional cooperation are the ecological crisis around the Aral Sea and the controversy between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan over the use of water. Where as some countries posses sufficient stores of water, others, particularly Uzbekistan, are dependent on water supplied by neighbouring states. 71 There are many factors which contribute to water shortage and increasing environmental degradation in Central Asia, for example, water intensive crops production. Poor water and land management practices and pollution of water and land from intensive use of agrochemical are the main reasons. 72 Due to the pollution of drinking water the rate of infant mortality, cancer, anemia and kidney disease are increasing day by day.

From the geographical point of view, the northern part of Central Asia is relatively well endowed with many rivers and lakes, but the arid south has been facing severe water crisis. As we know the main sources of water are the Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya rivers, which has its sources in the Tien Shan and Pamir mountain ranges to empty into the Aral Sea. With a combined length of about 110 km, these two rivers carry approximately 90 percent of Central Asia's total water. During the 1969's, the inflow rate into Aral Sea was between 50 and 60 km per year, whereas today the sea receives hardly any river water. By the late 1980's as a result of intensified agricultural production, and particularly the expansion of the cotton monoculture favoured by the USSR, nearly 90 per cent of the river water was used for agricultural purpose, only 3 percent was used to supply cities and various communities. Throughout the Soviet era, the water of these rivers was used heavily to support grandiose irrigation schemes for agriculture. But, consequently, the flow of the rivers was seriously reduced which in turn dramatically affected the water level. The Aral Sea was the world's fourth largest lake covering 25,476 square miles during the 1960's period. However, today the Aral Sea water level has dropped 62 miles. About 7.5 million hectares of farm land are currently irrigated within the five Central Asian states sharing the Aral Sea basin.

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75 Shirin, Akiner, op.cit., n.73, p.13.
77 Ibid., p.10.
78 Ibid., p.11.
Aral Sea which was the world’s fourth largest fresh water lake is now virtually non-existent. As stated by a renowned geographer, Professor Arun P. Elhance, the two main rivers Amu-Darya and Syr-Darya each flow through four of the five independent nations before they entering into the Aral Sea. Agriculture is still the main economic source of all these five countries, and water from the two rivers is responsible as much as 75 percent of their agriculture production. The rivers also provide most of the water for drinking and sanitation for a combined population of 52 million. Today, nearly 90 percent Central Asian population does not have piped water supply. The Aral Sea is likely to disappear completely by early next century. By early 1980s, water flows into the Aral Sea had fallen to zero due to prolonged over exploitation and withdrawal of the river waters upstream. Many environmentalists agree that there is no way to save this dying body of water other than by stopping all upstream water withdrawals from the two rivers for atleast the next 30 years. This may not be possible, because, all the Central Asian states are highly dependent on the river of the survival of their economies. To mitigate this problem, one solution lie that is by creating a new supra-national authority, backed by international financing, which can manage and allocate the scarce waters of the Syr-Darya and Amu-Darya in an efficient, equitable and environmentally sound manner.79

It is true that that damage done to the water resources of the Central Asian region as a result of past injudicious policies has caused tremendous

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hardship to the post-independent Central Asia but there is still time to manage the water shortage by proper planning followed by all the regional states, otherwise this problem will lead to political strife within Central Asia, and it will make confrontation over control of water between states, especially between upstream (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and those who are in downstream. Especially, there is a serious disagreement between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. A dispute developed shortly after both states became independent, initially over the prices of Uzbekistan's natural gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan. When Kyrgyzstan was unable to pay the higher price demanded, Uzbekistan discontinued the water supply. This issue continues to place a major strain on the relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The deterioration of the water situation has already had repercussions on relations between the Central Asian republics as is evidence by the conflicts between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan over use of water from the Amu Darya. It clearly seems that the forthcoming drafting of inter-state agreements regarding the distribution of water resources amongst the Central Asian states is sure to be the most difficult and troublesome problem that these states will have to face in their relations with each other. Only because due to the heavy demands, the water will become more valuable than Arabian petrodollars and more important than western capital investment and technology. No single ideology, whether it may be nationalism, Islamic

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80 "Central Asia: The Silk Road Catches Fire", The Economist, January 8, 1993, p.45.
82 Ibid., p.119.
fundamentalism, communism or liberalism – will be able to retain power in Central Asia if it does not supply the region with water.

Recently there have been conflicts about the amount of water released by Kyrgyzstan for downstream users Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has been facing with economic problems due to shortage of energy supply which previously used to come from Russia and their republics. In order to make up this shortfall, it has attempted to take advantage of its abundant water resources. This primacy of energy production over the needs of irrigation in the middle and lower courses of the river has created discord between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

This is reflective of a growing tension between upstream and downstream countries who are locked in relationships of mutual independence. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the upstream countries who possess more water than they need for domestic use and consume more power than they can produce themselves. The downstream states, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, lack water but have abundant supplies of natural gas and oil. This should have ideally produced mutually beneficial arrangements but has actually given rise to discord. 83

In March 1998, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has signed an agreement on the joint use of water resources as well as payment of

equivalent compensation for water generation losses by countries receiving the water.\textsuperscript{84}

An accord was reached in Tashkent between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the volume and parameters of water supply from Kyrgyzstan's Toktogul water reservoir and Shardara reservoir to the tune of 2.8 billion cubic meters during the year 2000 to the southern region of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan which is to clear a 17.8 million dollar debt to Kyrgyzstan for the water supplied earlier undertook to deliver Kyrgyzstan four lakhs tons of coal from Karaganda to clear 12 million dollar.\textsuperscript{85}

In March 2002, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement on joint distribution of water resources and power capacities. Recently Kazakhstan signed an agreement on joint exploitation of certain hydro activity in Kyrgyzstan. Now the text of a territorial agreement has been offered to Kazakhstan for consideration. It will put an end to arguments concerning water usage from Kyrgyz's neighbours will help to maintain hydro-technical equipment where all Central Asia water resources are consolidated. Kyrgyzstan uses only 7 percent of the volume, while the rest of the water goes to neighbours, who have increased planting areas halt a million hectares. Kyrgyzstan may use less water, but it pays to build and maintain the distribution channels and dams. This is a lot more than the price of delivering

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.

Uzbek gas, black oil, and coal from Kazakhstan. Now the Kazakh and Uzbek sides agree to compensate Kyrgyzstan for infrastructure maintenance.\textsuperscript{86}

A large part of the blame for environmental pollution in the region is to be borne by the chemical industry, which is the second largest sector of the economy after the cotton agro-industrial complex. The negative effects of the region's chemical productions are considerably magnified by specific geographical and climatic factors responsible for Central Asia's high population density, as well as by the shortage of water. The intensive development of the chemical industry under the Soviet rule was a result of the communist leadership's desire to provide work for as many as possible of the local unskilled labour force.

Pollution through chemical waste products and fertilisers is far in excess of all tolerable norms. Similarly alarming is the quantity of harmful organic substances in the water. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that the main cause of atmospheric pollution is not the chemical industry, but motor transport, the greater part of which is in poor mechanical condition.

Out of all the sources of environmental pollution in Central Asia, radioactive contamination occupies a special place. This, however, is localized in character. Radioactive has accumulated over many years in eastern Kazakhstan, in the region of the city of Semipalatinsk, the site of systematic nuclear weapons tests. Ground level and atmospheric test with atomic and hydrogen warheads continued right up to the signing of the agreement.

banning surface nuclear explosion frequently, as happened in the 1950’s. Such
tests were conducted without even elementary precautionary measures.87
Although nuclear testing has now ceased completely, background radiation
remains at an alarming level. A part from the above, the enriched uranium
stockpile in Central Asia is also becoming accessible to external buyers.
Kazakhstan and Tajikistan hold 30 percent of the total uranium reserves of the
former Soviet Union, but the recent Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) studies
show a wider significant distribution of uranium reserves in Turkmenistan,
Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Though all the newly emerged states are facing
sever economic problems, the possibility of sales of uranium to gain hard
currency is high and is causing serious concern for them and to the west.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan ahs decided to increase export of poppies for
hard currency. It represent another need for at least workable regional
cooperation among the Central Asian states.88 With this facts in mind one can
easily apprehend serious conflicts among the Central Asian states.

Regional Grouping as an Instability Factor for Regional Cooperation

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the newly born Central
Asian countries have been forming various political and economic associations
with an aim to shape their regional identity. In February 1992, the newly
independent Central Asian states were invited to become the members of the
Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) which was founded by Iran, Turkey
and Pakistan 25 years ago. Except Kazakhstan all four states opted for full

87 Ibid., p.1120.
88 Enayatullah Reza, “Obstacles to Development in Central Asia and the Caucasus”,
membership in the Islamic blocs but Kazakhstan preferred to be an observer. 89

Today, ECO consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. ECO promotes economic and political cooperation in Central Asia and Persian Gulf. 90

In the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the principal emphasis was given to create a powerful Islamic Common Market and elimination of all tariff and non-tariff barriers, including export subsides; it also talked about common faith, cultural affinities and shared experiences of history. Akhtar Adil Rizvi, a Pakistani analyst remarked that "cooperation of this kind envisaged in terms of need and feasibility may be limited to economic interaction for the time being. It can also blaze the trail to new perspective." 91

As far as integration efforts in Central Asia are concerned, the ECO has a very low probability of success. Considering ECO as a bonafide forum for integration, its three most important members, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey have been attempting to use this body to advance their individual interests in Central Asia: Admission of non-Islamic states such as Armenia in the ECO is also debated. Pakistani officials felt that Armenia's membership would be considered. Whenever Turkey and Pakistan aims to keep the ECO as an economic entity and not an Islamic group, Iran views the ECO as an Islamic


political-economic organisation which could develop into a world power. But at the movement, there are divergent interests of each country particularly Iran and Turkey have their own rival regional interest in forming economic institutions. For example, Tehran has spearheaded the Caspian Sea Cooperation Zone to include Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan. Turkey, however, decided to launch the rival Black-Sea Cooperation Council (BSCC) to include Turkey, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Russia. According to Heribert Dieter, the difference between the participating countries are too high which is creates hurdles for a regional integration projects.92 Even the religious practice among the member countries of the ECO vary greatly. A successful regional cooperation would be possible if the participating countries will posses a minimum of economic, cultural and political common ground.93

In April 1992, a regional meeting of the Central Asian heads was held in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. In that meeting a large package of documents was signed by the leaders. Most of the documents were connected with economic relations – creation of inter-state investment institutions, banking, and price policy and mechanisms for reciprocal payments under inter-state trade treaties. However, the summit documents did not meet with support on the part of the Turkmenistan delegation.94

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93 Ibid.

Turkmenistan decided not to sign some of the documents submitted at the Bishkek Summit arguing that the situation in Turkmenistan is somewhat special. Turkmenistan regards both Turkey and Iran as potential investors. Their participation in the Ashgabat meeting was seen as Turkmenistan's desire for a speedy construction of the Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey gas line, the linking of a railway line between Sarakhs (Turkmenistan) and Meshkhed (Iran), and the joint use of by the regional countries of ports on the Black and Caspian Sea. Turkey is seen as the window for modernization, up-to-date technologies and also as the gateway to the western countries, whereas, Pakistan's association is more in respect of regional political stability in terms of Islamabad's involvement in the Afghan problem, rather than as a potential participant for modernizing Central Asian economy.95

After the Asian Group of Seven meeting at Ashgabat in May 1992, there were indications that Iran, Pakistan and Turkey were aspiring to assume political responsibility from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China, by overlooking Russian presence in any form in the geographically vast cultural Islamic belt. However, it is clearly seems that on the one hand, Iran was trying to push Russian out of the region and on the other hand, Pakistan was trying to set up an anti-Indian alliance with the help of the Central Asian republics.96

By creating various regional groups, the newly independent Central Asian republics have done little progress due to their vast differences.

95 FBIS SOV.92-080, 24 April, 1992, p.7.
Drug Trafficking and Smuggling of Arms: Creates Hurdles in Central Asian Regional Cooperation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly with the opening of borders between the newly independent states, Central Asia has become an invaluable area for the global narcotics trade. The Central Asian republics are used as markets for the shipment of drugs. Afghanistan produces 75 per cent of the world’s heroin supply, over 65 per cent of which is now transported through Central Asia.\(^{97}\) Many Central Asian fear that this could become a major source of instability in their region. It is estimated that (by Russia) opium poppy is growing on an approximately 300,000 acres of land in Central Asia. This statistical figure would rank Central Asia with Myanmar as the two opium poppy graders in the world. Besides the locally produced prohibited drugs, a large quantity of drugs, namely opium, heroin, and hashish are trafficked into Central Asia from Afghanistan, mainly across the border in the barely controlled mountainous Gorno-Badakhshan province of Tajikistan and across the Afghanistan's border with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.\(^{98}\) The emergence of crime and terrorism in Central Asia shows that powerful criminal organisations are working together to destabilize those areas where most of the contraband trafficking is concentrated. An unstable Ferghana valley and Caucasus would guarantee the flow of drugs from Afghanistan to


The Western countries smoothly. The Central Asian are increasingly involved in the illicit production and transport of drugs especially, after the collapse of Soviet Union. The Central Asian republics have become the major routes of drug-supply to European countries and the United States. The government bodies are incapable of keeping the situation under control, and the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) is concerned about the rapid spread of illicit poppy cultivation and the trafficking in and abuse of drugs, especially heroin in the Central Asian republics.

The situation is still worse, by the fact that drug dealing is often used to achieve particular political aims: the money received is used to finance illegal political and military activities, first of all to purchase arms, funding armed groups or support extremist those who are working for the destabilization of society. According to Russian experts, 'drug dealing in the CIS countries has very close links with the criminal world and organized criminal groups on the one hand, and with separatist and extremist movements and their leaders on the other.'

Tajikistan is the best example of the tight connections between drug dealing and political struggle. It is one of the Central Asian's center for the production of drugs and for their transport from Afghanistan. Opium, poppy and Indian hemp grow in areas which are basically out of government control.

According to the Ministry of the Interior, nearly 200 tons of various narcotic substance were being transported annually in the mid 1990s through the territory of Tajikistan to Europe. But the law enforcement institutions are able to stop only a small portion of the traffic.

The authorities are unable to maintain control of the borders and transport routes of drugs flow from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan. In the Soviet period, some farms in Kyrgyzstan grew opium poppy for medical purposes. For many years about 16 per cent of the world's morphine was produced from poppies grown in Kyrgyzstan. From Kyrgyzstan, narcotic substances are sent as semi-processed or end-products to other countries of Central Asia as well as to Russia and Europe. Turkmenistan is another important link in the drug traffic from Asia to Europe. It also has a long standing tradition of drug consumption. The drugs used there are either indigenous or imported from Afghanistan and Iran. A worrying development is the dramatic increase in the area of opium poppy plantation on irrigated land in the Karakum area. Until recently, Turkmenistan was only a purveyor of semi-processed narcotics but local process increasing day by day.¹⁰²

Like all the other countries of Central Asia, Kazakhstan has large-scale drug production, processing and transport. The pharmaceutical factory in the city of Shimkent is the largest facility in the CIS countries producing narcotic substances. The territory of Kazakhstan, like that of the Russian for east, is used for drug traffic from China. According to the Russian Ministry of the

¹⁰² Ibid., pp.55-63
Interior, 93 per cent of marijuana arriving on the Russian drugs market comes from Kazakhstan, as does 85 per cent of the hashish and 73 per cent of the opium (either grown in Kazakhstan or delivered across its territory). The Kazak-Russian 7000 km long border remains almost totally transparent, so that the drug traffickers operating there having no serious difficulty.\textsuperscript{103}

The drug trade promotes political, social and economic instability. It is also true that the Central Asian countries for various reason have become prone to a flourishing drug business by allowing it to feed on the weakness prevalent within the existing socio-political structure of the state system.\textsuperscript{104}

The newly independent republics are facing enormous socio-economic difficulties, budgetary deficits, increasing inflation, negative industrial growth, rising unemployment, inter ethnic tensions and civil wars in Tajikistan, and neighbouring Afghanistan, contributed to a drastic increase in drug trafficking and crime in the region.

Besides illegal narcotics industry (business), the Central Asian states are the silent victim of security threats, arising out of small arms and light weapons proliferation. During the recent years it is those weapons that are vigorously (widely used) used in various conflict prone areas of the world. Due to easy availability, the smuggling of these weapons are taking place in a large-scale throughout the world. Being cheap and transportable from one country to another through trucks, boats and on animals, the weapons are widely used among insurgent groups. The London-based International

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., p.63.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates the illicit global market for arms at US$ 2-10 billion a year.\footnote{Peter Chalk, "Light Arms Trading in South East Asia", \textit{Jane's Intelligence Review}, March 2001, p.42.}

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Asia cannot be done by omitting the links with Afghanistan. In order to meet the challenges posed by local mujahedens, aided and abetted by the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) and the CIA, the Soviet government sent soldiers from the Central Asian region in large numbers because they had a good knowledge about the region geographically. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share borders with Afghanistan and also having a common religious and ethnic identity.\footnote{Tara Kartha "Light Weapon Proliferation and Regional Instability in Central Asia", \textit{Strategic Analysis}, Vol.19, No.9, December 1996, pp.1277-1282.} However, during the period of intervention, arms and ammunitions were needed on such a large scale that keeping their accounts detail became difficult. From this period, arms and ammunitions of the Soviet army were clandestinely transferred from military units to civilian population in different republics of the Soviet Central Asia. After the withdrawal of the Soviet army, the number of lost firearms grew. And these firearms passed into the hands of radical insurgent group, which has been the most obstacle factor for the regional cooperation in Central Asia.\footnote{Ibid., p.1281.} Besides intervention in Afghanistan by Soviet during the Cold War, in order to combat Soviet troops
and communist government China, the US and Egypt began covert aid to the mujahedeen well before 1979.\textsuperscript{108}

US weapons aid to the mujahedeen went up from $30 million in 1960 to $250 million in 1985 with an additional allocation for anti-aircraft weapons. By 1987, it had reached $630 million, with Saudi Arabia matching the US contributions at every stage.\textsuperscript{109} The US, Britain and China supplied weapons, ranging from shoulder launched surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) to rifles. Prior to 1965, the US supplied Soviet made SA-7 and SAMs. After 1985, it supplied FIM-92 stinger SAMs and large quantities of rifles and Britain supplied blown pipe SAMs. Seeking to limit Soviet influence in the region, China supplied the mujahedeen a range of small arms.\textsuperscript{110}

It is not only the US, China, Britain which supplied weapons to the mujahedeen of Afghanistan but Pakistan also reportedly supplied 40,000 rocket and 700 trucks of ammunition to its favourite warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar after August 1990.\textsuperscript{111}

If one study the proliferation of small arms in Central Asia, Tajikistan is found to be the most affected of all Central Asian republics. The internal conflict which started in Tajikistan in 1992 led to a large-scale use of weapons,


\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{111} Bernett R. Rubin, op.cit., n.108, p.1280.
fuelled and supplied from Afghanistan. It has been reported that around 10,000 weapons distributed among government forces came from Moscow and Uzbekistan on the other hand, Afghanistan was the main source of weapons for the Tajikistan opposition forces. With prices ranging from about $400 for an Ak-47 to $600 for a machine-gun in 1994.112

The challenging problem for Tajikistan is how to disarm the militant groups after the signing of the peace accord between the government and United Tajiki Opposition (UTO). Both the parties to the conflict believe that the country faces danger from the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and it should be controlled. Despite the signing of the General Agreement on Peace and National Reconciliation in Moscow in June 1997 by the government of Tajikistan and UTO, the disarmament process has not been succeeded. For example teenagers who were brought up during the years of fighting have known nothing but conflict. Apart from that, weapons are so widely spread in that region, even if those who are working on farms in the countryside are engaged in “part time” fightings, this makes it impossible to register their arms.113

According to the United Nations Mission for Tajikistan (UNMOT), most of the UTO fighters were not gathered in the designated assembly areas, and were even dispersed from more than a year after the peace agreement was

signed.\textsuperscript{114} On July 20, 1998, militants killed four members of the UNMOT while they were on patrol.\textsuperscript{115} Besides that, a small car bombs planted in a vehicle belonging to the European Community Humanitarian Organisation (ECHO), exploded on July 16, 2000 in Dushanbe and injured several children. This shows that a large number of weapons is still in the hands of various groups and it many pose a great challenge to the security of Tajikistan in particular and Central Asia in general.\textsuperscript{116}

Steps to control drugs and small arms trading, though the illegal traffic of narcotics and small arms poses a danger to the (National Security) regional cooperation of the independent states of Central Asia, these states developed number of mechanisms to combat the problem. In Kazakhstan, the state Drug Enforcement Committee was formed under the Deputy Prime Minister in 1996. In Kyrgyzstan, the State Committee for Drug Control was established as the leading agency for drug control. In Uzbekistan, a Drug Control Committee was established in 1994 to lay down the policy to combat drug traffic and organized crime. In Tajikistan, the Security Ministry taking hard steps to control this drugs and small arms business. The Turkmenistan government has set up an agency to control the illegal business of drugs and small arms.

To combat drugs and small arms trade, the defence ministers signed a joint communiqué in the Kazakhstan capital, Astana, on March 30, 2000, where all sides agreed to study the feasibility of military confidence-building

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., U.S. Department of State, April 2000, p.16.
measures and steps to strengthen cooperation between the border defence departments of the five countries and crack down on trafficking of drugs, smuggling of arms and other cross border criminal activities.\textsuperscript{117}

The Central Asian states efforts to curb the proliferation of small arms and drugs have not achieved the desired results, which has been the main obstacle for regional cooperation in that region.