CHAPTER IV

GEOPOLITICS: CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS CIS NEIGHBOUR'S
The geographical and historical background of the Central Asian region is certainly favourable for the establishment of close relations between Pakistan and the newly independent Central Asian states. At the same time it is necessary to take their contemporary situation, resulting from their prolonged association with the former Soviet Union and in particular from the special position with Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union. Furthermore their broad resource position, their problem and requirements also must be taken into consideration in any objectives evaluation of their altitudes and interests.

i. It has been customary to think of this region as a richly endowed area which was exploited by the Soviet Union in a colonial pattern. Though the local mineral and agricultural resources did provide raw materials for industry in the more developed parts of the Soviet Union, the fact remains that the Soviets made a considerable investment of capital and technology in this region as a part of the overall goal of promoting economic development in all parts of the former union.

ii. Another impression from the general picture of vast lands producing food and cash crops is that this is a rich agricultural region with a considerable potential
for the future. The reality is that the natural endowment of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states in water resources is so poor that the region is characterized by the drying up of the inland seas — Aral sea and Caspian sea partly due to large scale diversion of available water for irrigation. With population growing at the rate of 3.5% per year, one of the highest in the world, Central Asia, may well be viewed as a region that confronts Malthusian disaster.¹

iii. The degree of dependence of the republics on trade with the other republic of the former Soviet Union is much greater than that with European countries or trade with the European Community. The percentage of GNP arising out of inter republication trade was 78% for Turkmenistan 75% for Kyrgyzstan 72% for Tajikistan, 78% for Uzbekistan and 57% for Kazakhstan.²

iv. For purpose of determining the future economic agenda of the newly independent states it has to be kept in mind that most of their resources were utilised and processed in the developed parts of the former Soviet Union. For instance, Uzbekistan which is the third

¹. The Economist, London, December 26, 1992; and also January 8, 1993.
largest producer of cotton in the world, processes only 15% of it crop within its territory, remaining raw cotton was sent to European part of Soviet Union for processing and re-export to Central Asian republics. Whereas 14.5% of the total Soviet population lived below the poverty line in 1989, the figure for Tajikistan was 59%, for Uzbekistan was 45% and 37% for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.³

v. The region teems with ethnic tensions. Through traditionally considered as one entity-Turkistan, with Islam as the common denominator, the Soviet Union followed a policy of promoting ethnic consciousness, setting up the various republics on the basis of nationalities namely Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen, Tajik and Kirgiz. The boundaries were deliberately drawn in such a manner as to create ethnic minorities. For instance one million Tajiks find themselves in Uzbekistan while a similar number of Uzbeks are located in Tajikistan. Minority nationalities such as Meshkhetians, uprooted from distant regions, were also settled in the region. Predictably, this has produced violence and conflict. As a result, over the past few years, more than 2000

people have died in inter-ethnic warfare.\(^4\)

vi. Islamic-oriented political parties have also emerged and secured a considerable following. However, Russians with large communities settled in these states dominate the technical and professional cadres. The opposition role by the Islamic parties is likely to be a key factor in determining the orientation of these states, as evident from developments in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states.

vii. While the close links established with European republics of the former Soviet Union are likely to continue for some time, Central Asian region will undoubtedly receive a lower priority from Europe and other developed regions of the world. As such the Central Asian republics really have no alternative but to diversify their international contacts and thus give added attention to promoting economic and political links with countries to their south. They have to seek new partners under conditions of lack of experience of the market economy. Though the Central Asian republics have a higher level of per capita income than Pakistan, they are extremely backward in such crucial fields of free enterprise as banking and management, because such

institution never existed before as in other democratic countries like India. They had Centralised institutions which used to look after such funding activities.

vii. The large Muslim population of Central Asia has gone through a different experience from the Muslim communities in other regions. The Central Asians during seventy years of socialism raised their literacy level to almost 100% and also achieved a higher standard of living than people in other developing countries. As a consequence, after a period of readjustment these republics can play a very significant role in the process of synthesis between spirituality and science, i.e., between the East and West. In this context this region may have a special role to play in the Islamic world of tomorrow. In fact the Russian population settled in Central Asia has considerable influence and self-interest to keep the respective republics secular. 5

In the 19th century the rivalry between the expanding empires of Russia and Britain over Central and South Asia was called the "Great Game" in which soldiers and statesmen as well as intelligence agencies played an active role. The two empires compromised by delimiting their zones of

influence, Russia was to have a free hand in Central Asia but leave the British Indian empire alone. A century later, the vast steppes of Central Asia that lie at the centre of fabled old empires of Russia, China, Turkey, Persia and India, have again become a place for international rivalry. With the disintegration of Soviet Union this region has again become an area of international focus especially among Muslim countries and India, as also among western capitalist countries. 6

As a successor to Soviet Union, Russia treats this region as a legitimate area of its influence. The fact that Central Asia is still dependent of Russia's economic and technical assistance and also counts on its military muscle for internal and external security, gives Moscow the dominant voice in the capitals of these republics. In fact the presidents of all the Central Asia states while committed to defend the interests of their respective countries are "obliged to allow Russia's interests precedence over their own". Russia expects other countries that wish to develop cooperation with these republics to be not only mindful of its interests but to proceed towards any

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concrete arrangements with its blessings. For example, Central Asian republics do not have diplomatic representation in many foreign capitals and depend upon the Russian embassies to provide consular services to other countries. Furthermore given the dominant Russian presence in the capitals of these republics and their virtual monopoly over local services facilities and equipment, foreign governments and enterprises have to perforce depend upon the good will and support of Russia. Another factor prominent in Russia's attitude is its desire to counter Islamic "Fundamentalism" which is also threatening several autonomous republics and regions within Russia.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 have brought many changes to Central Asia. The full implications of political independence are sinking in slowly. Russia remains crucial to all the former Soviet republics, with its economic leverage, political influence and military power spread throughout the region. However,

7. Prior to 1992 the only foreign consulates in Central Asia were located in Tashkent, the Uzbek capital. They included those of India. There is now a rapidly increasing number of embassies and trade missions in all five state capitals. Central Asian States also opened up embassies in major countries of the world including India and USA, South Africa, most European countries and most Middle Eastern Countries including Israel. Central Asia Newfile, London; School of Oriental and African Studies, No. 14, Dec. 1993.

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past Russian dominance is being steadily diluted by agreements with new economic partners, from neighbouring states such as Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India and China.8

There has been some slow, cautious progress towards regional co-operation, but the persistent rivalries within contemporary Central Asian states seem to make the ideal of achieving a United Central Asia or "Turkistan" no more than a dream. The key political issues of the area are closely linked to social and economic problems. The republics differ greatly in resources and potential. Uzbekistan is the most developed in the region, but it is Kazakhstan which is having maximum success in attracting international investment and badly needed western expertise.9 There are many difficulties and serious ecological problems, but the region as a whole has valuable natural resources to offer in gas, oil, gold, cotton and minerals.10

It is for economic as well as geo-strategic reasons that a contest for influence is going on now. The key questions are, what are the implications of independence of

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10. Ibid.
Central Asia for Europe, the middle East, the Indian subcontinent and the International community in general? What are the prospects for political stability in Central Asia? What are the potential flash points? And what significance has the relations between the six Muslim republics of the CIS and their four Muslim neighbours?\textsuperscript{11}

Gifts of money from countries like Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries for building, repairing mosques are not the same things as irresistible 'wahabi' or Iranian radical influence. The spectre of fundamentalist Islam looms large over Central Asia at present, helped by the ideological vacuum arising out of the demise of communism. But it has been exaggerated out of all proportion. The Islamic threat has been exploited by the various Central Asian regimes to justify their authoritarian style of rule.

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The Central Asian states face challenges on all sides. This caution and political rigidity of the ruling groups have kept the old order virtually intact, actually increasing pressure for uniformity in some republics. Independence is appearing as a fragile thing with Russia remaining very much the dominant power in the region. Each of the five republics faces serious socio-economic problems

\textsuperscript{11} James Critchlow, \textit{National in Uzbekistan, Boulder, 1991}. 
which urgently need outside help besides a well-conceived strategy to tackle them. They need to co-operate for mutual benefit, but rivalries and disputes between the republics have not been resolved.

The problem of facing the Central Asian Republics are mounting. The grim state of the economy, pressing ecological issues and unresolved political problems are all out in the open, after being long neglected or ignored. The pressures are mounting, with acute worries over the future.

Central Asian States' Border Disputes with CIS Neighbours

In moderate minded circles in Central Asia there are fears that independence will revive old disputes between the various republics and serve as a serious source of friction. Irredentist hopes were long frozen under Soviet rule but that does not mean they have been abandoned by those espousing nationalist causes. The governments of all the republics have so far resisted nationalist pressure for revision of borders in line with ethnic patterns of settlement or historical claims.

Moreover, the civil war in Tajikistan has put more strains. The upsurge in Dushanbe in early 1992 against president Nabiyev was countered in Tajikistan's northern province of Khojent (Leninabad), Where Uzbek speakers are
concentrated, by a threat to secede from the republic and join with Uzbekistan. Strong Pro-Iranian sympathies might eventually lead on to the creation of an Islamic republics on the model of Iran.

Pressures are mounting with acute worries over the future. But secular Influences as well as clan loyalties are also strong among Tajiks. Certainly Tajiks do feel the affinity with their larger Persian-speaking neighbour. There is something of parallel here to the popular, emotional response to Turkey in the Turkic republic of Central Asia. The only republic which has no pressing tensions in areas settled by its Uzbek or Russian minorities is Turkmenistan. The republic is undeveloped in many respects, although it has extensive mineral riches in oil and gas.

The potential for border disputes lies not only between the republics or with Russia but has other international aspects. China and Afghanistan have to be considered. Chinese claims on territories lost to Russia by the Petersburg treaty of 1881, could possibly be revived. As much as 350,000 sq. m of land of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan...

are involved.\textsuperscript{13} For the future, potential flash points could come for defective or disputed borders between the Central Asian states.

**Relations with Russia:**

There are over 10 millions ethnic Russians living in the newly independent Central Asian states or 40\% of the 25 million Russians living outside Russia in the so called near abroad. Their status has on an undeniable political and strategic significance for Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states. Many Russians fear they will become second class citizens or persecuted minorities. The ending of Russian dominance means they are having to think hard now about Russian "identity", something there always took for granted. For the Yeltsin government, the problem of the 25 million Russians outside Russia has grown steadily in importance since 1993. Even if it wanted to, Russia cannot simply shake off responsibility for their welfare. The nationalist backlash in Russia cannot be ignored. Claims that Moscow is abandoning the Russian minorities, or ready to do deals at their expense, have to be countered. In Russian nationalist circles there are calls to reassert

Russia's rights and power over states which are often described in Russia as newly independent but not entirely foreign powers.\textsuperscript{14}

At the time of Russia's general election at the end of 1993, a series of bellicose public statements by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, leader of the Liberal Democratic party of Russia provided furious criticism in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states. The ultra-nationalist politician had urged much more vigorous protection of the civil rights of Russian-speakers living outside Russia's borders, and urging the need for Russia to re-establish control over Central Asian affairs. The departure on a large scale of Europeans from Central Asia, especially educated Russians, is a noticeable trend, gradually reversing the long trend of Slav migration and settlement in these southern republics. The majority of the 800,000 people who emigrated from Central Asia over seven years from 1985 were Russians leaving for Russia, although Ukrainians, Byelorussians, Tatars, Germans, Jews and Greeks were also part of this reverse flow of migrants. Most left from Uzbekistan, from where 500,000 Europeans emigrated in the decade since 1979. The flow of Russian and Russian-speakers out of Central Asia continued in 1993, although at a far slower pace, than what most had

\textsuperscript{14}. \textit{Newspot 6}, June 1993.
predicted. The causes for this were certainly Russians' economic woes. Incidentally, posters appeared in Fergana with slogans like "Russians must answer for everything" "Uzbekistan for Uzbekks".15

In Kazakhskan, emigration of Russian-speakers has often been attributed to nationalist policies and zealous promotion of the Kazakh language. An organisation calling itself "Kazakhstan Congress of Russian communities" declared that Russians in northern Kazakhstan have become "outcasts as a result of Almaty's nationalist policies". A growing wave of refugees departing for Russia is a cause for concern in Russia.

Russia's residual power over all the smaller republics remains immense. This comes from their economic and military dependence upon Russia, compounded by certain internal weaknesses. The issue of Russian-speaking minorities living in Central Asia is certain to remain a major factor in their relations with Russia. President Boris Yeltsin's address quoted from Russian TV report to the

nation for the new year 1994 included a pledge to project "with more energy and decisiveness" the interests of Russians living in the "near abroad". As for 14 republics of the former Soviet Union and their future relations with Russia, President Yeltsin went on to make a declaration to effect that 'Independence was of a qualified type'. According to Boris Yeltsin, "we are inextricably linked by a common history, economy and single task that living separately is simply not for us. Our people will not allow it".

But in the two big Central Asian states, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, there was no mood for concessions. Both President Islam Karimov and President Nursultan Nazarbaev have rejected Russian demands to grant dual nationality, arguing this option would actually be harmful and even more problematic for the position of their large Russian minorities. A conciliating and reassuring word from Moscow on the sensitive issue is clearly seen as important. Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Russian President Boris Yeltsin pledged to guarantee rights of ethnic minorities in their


republics, along with other agreements, during Islam Karimov's visit to Moscow on 2 March 1994. Their talks resulted in a stated intention to co-ordinate more closely economic policies in tax, currencies and customs, as well as to move gradually towards free movement of goods, services, capital and labour between Uzbekistan and Russia, Karimov went on to declare, "Russia should be a guarantor of peace and stability in Central Asia. There will always be two poles in the world, and we in Uzbekistan are keeping closer to Russia's role". \(^{18}\)

To formulate an assertive foreign policy Russia will surely have to wait till its economic recovery. Nevertheless, amid all the uncertainty and chaos, a process of reassertion of Russia's power is going forward in the 'near abroad', in economic, military, educational and other fields. Russia still has enormous influence over the less developed republics in their present economic arrangements. It is as if an umbilical cord links them to Moscow. Even if Yeltsin government does not have expansionist designs, the residual power held by Russia over its former empire is immense. Russia also plays the big brother card aimed to help achieve political, socio-economic, socio-security

stability in the Central Asian states. Russia's 'near abroad' has many local and potential power struggles which leaves Central Asia open to influence and manipulation. Russia also has local allies drawn from the former Communist Party cadres and units of its armed forces in Central Asia. 19 These various sources of Russian power will undoubtedly make substantial independence for the southern republics harder to achieve. The absence of national armies, other than reformed units of the Russian armed forces, might be a factor greatly inhibiting hostile actions by rival governments. Uzbekistan has begun to form a National Guard, of token size, which is claimed to be the basis for its own future army of 35,000 men. The fact that Tashkent was the key administrative and training centre for the Turkistan military district of the Soviet era, there were greater numbers of Uzbek officers in army service, which has left Uzbekistan better equipped than Kazakhstan, let alone the three other republics, to begin the task of creating its own independent military forces. 20 Turkistan military district, composed of the four Central Asian states without Kazakhstan, was officially scrapped after

independence, but in military as in trading terms the new state borders still have little real significance. Russian military strength in this region remains decisive, with bilateral joint agreement made with Russia and Russian troops, thus disguising what is effectively Russian control. All the Central Asian republics remain highly dependent militarily on Russia with maintenance and repair contracts for equipment and weapons system made by enterprises in Russia.

However, training courses for new officer cadets offered in Turkey and various other foreign countries are beginning to diversify this historic dependence. The geo-political significance of the option chosen by this gas-rich-region was not lost to the Russians. Central Asian states chose to rely upon Russia and not any of its Muslim neighbours as the sole guarantor of their securities. In the estimate of Roy Allison, the dilemma of the Central Asian CIS states is how to benefit from continued military financial patronage from Russia without surrendering national control over their emerging fledgling military structures or their defence priorities.²¹ All the newly independent Central Asian states without any credible

military capacity claimed sovereignty and the right to control their frontiers. Soviet border forces remained at their former posts while civilian politicians debated their eventual disposition. The Russians responded to the new geopolitical situation by building a Russian-led alliance system. Russia began to recover its position as the dominant power in the northern band of the Islamic crescent. After 7 May 1992 the Soviet Military, with the exception of nuclear strategic forces, was placed under Russia 22. Russia's Ministry of Defence, which pledged to negotiate the distribution of military personnel and physical assets with the other 14 former Soviet republics ensured that Russia would decide what to give to each republic through a bargaining process.

On 15 May 1992 the heads of six states signed a collective security Treaty (Russia, Kazakhstan Uzbekistan, Kyrghizstan, Tajikistan and Armenia). The treaty was a modest victory of Russia's diplomacy. It required the allies to come to the defence of each member if attacked from outside. All signatories were prohibited from entering into

alliances or agreements aimed at any other members.\textsuperscript{23} The treaty made the Russia the guarantor of the traditional line between the northern and southern bands of the Islamic crescent. Russia also conducted bilateral agreements on military and security affairs with each signatory to cover a host of special issues ranging from the transfer of property and officer training to control and maintenance of space and nuclear programme facilities of Kazakhstan.

The existence of large oil and gas deposits in a broad band stretching from the Caspian sea basin into Siberia began to influence regional politics as foreign capital began to make multi billion dollar commitments. As international oil concerns invested Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, corporations and states began designing and evaluating options for the pipelines and transport routes to enter into new markets. In such situation if Russia failed to maintain its influence in the new oil regions, its relative importance in world affairs would decrease.\textsuperscript{24}

Russian objective is to remain the dominant factor in Central Asian states. Russia would be the primary supplier

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of weapons and the main source of military training and assistance. However, Russia's grip is not complete and the new sovereign states are able to engage in military exchanges and to receive developmental assistance from south Asian countries especially India on the military plain. Russia is still a major supplier of power in eastern sector. In the investment sphere, Russia is a weaker player because of it poor capital reserves in foreign currency. Russia is bearing the greater costs of policing Central Asian states, while foreign investors and local national elites enjoy the benefits. Yet there is no easy way out of the dilemma for Russia.

Therefore, in addition to urging the Russian people to support costly policies that protects Russia's security, Russian state is sensitive to charges that it is laying claim to a sphere of influence in Central Asia. Russia also claimed the right to protect the Russian diaspora in the 'near abroad'. Russia continues to have a vital interest in the cessation of all armed conflicts on the territory of the former USSR. Moreover, the world community is increasingly coming to realise Russia's special responsibility in this matter. It is believed that the time has come for authoritative international organisations, including the
United Nations, to grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability in the region. 25

Russia could neither withdraw support from nor ignore the wishes of its authoritarian allies in Central Asia. The new authoritarians were not simple pawns in the game for control over Central Asia. In February 1993 Kozyrev, former Foreign Minister of Russia, visited Turkey to discuss Russo-Turkish relations in the larger context of regional political change. Russia continues to trade with Iran and sold to the Islamic republic several submarines and nuclear reactors in 1993. Iran is the major proponent of Islamic fundamentalism and stands at the centre of the Islamic crescent, but it did not openly promote political destabilisation in the Russian sphere of influence. And even though the authoritarian restoration in Central Asian states has justified itself as a reliable bulwark against Islamic extremism, Iran responded guardedly and consulted with Russia about problems of regional stabilisation. But Iran has certain other interests that competes with Islamic, nationalist and ideological interests. For example, in terms of state relations with Russia, Iran shares a common interest in limiting pan-Turkism's influence, given the

large Turkic minorities in Iran and Russia's goal of maintaining its traditional sphere of influence in Central Asia. 26

Russia's state interest would not be well served by the victory of either pan-Turkism or Islamic fundamentalism. Russia needs to keep in the ex-Soviet republics, cultural nationalism under control especially when reacting to deliberate provocative acts of violence perpetrated by radical extremists in Central Asian states. To rebuild Russian influence in the Central Asian states, Moscow has to discourage these states from aligning themselves with either Turkey or Iran. 27 It also has to demonstrate effective power and sensitivity as it responds to regional conflicts within its sphere of influence. Consequently Russian foreign policy could neither be reduced to crusade against Islamic fundamentalism nor a blanket condemnation of ethnic nationalists. The touchstone would be any political movement's impact upon Russian national interests. President Boris Yeltsin put it bluntly in an address to the collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1992 where he said that the sole ideology for Russia's foreign policy must be

national interests, and these must be real authentic interest. 28

Whether in the past or in the present, Central Asia has always been crucial for Russia. It is the geostrategic location of this region, its proximity to Afghanistan, Iran and Middle East in the South, Turkey in the west, China in the East, that highlights the importance of this area for Russia. In the Tsarist period, Central Asia acted as a buffer between the expanding British Empire and the Russian heartland. During the Soviet Period its southern periphery was encircled by the Western sponsored military alliance, the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and thus Central Asia acquired crucial significance in the cold war. When the new cold war was launched in the eighties, Central Asia acquired even greater geopolitical significance because of its geographical proximity to the Middle East, an area of vital importance for the west. After the break up of the Soviet Union, the five new independent states of Central Asia, that is Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan do figure in Russian's strategic thinking. Central Asia can check the growth of divisive forces particularly Islamic fundamentalism originating from

28. President Boris Yeltsin's comments to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs senior staff were reported in Krasnaya Zvezda, 28 Oct. 1992.
the southern borders of Central Asia, and ensure the
stability of Russian heartland.29

With the disintegration of Soviet Union, the Russian
Federation was confronted with a totally different
geopolitical environment. The Cold war entered the pages of
history and a new democratic Russia trying to uphold the
ideals and values cherished by the West has come to
existence. Russian southern periphery is surrounded by the
newly emerged states of Central Asia. This poses for Russia
the immediate problem of dealing with a new and radically
altered geopolitical environment. In the Soviet period the
security of its southern periphery was ensured at a great
cost. But after the emergence of Central Asian states
Russian borders are suddenly open for penetration. Its
century old well-defined border is no longer there.30

Though accord on unrestricted right or porous internal
borders between the Commonwealth of Independent States has
been signed, agreement on uniform principles for protecting
external borders of the Commonwealth member states has not
yet been reached. In the absence of such an agreement the

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signing of an accord by Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on a visa-free visits to and from Turkey in the meantime has complicated Russian security problems. In Russian perception its territory is now open to outsiders.

Since gaining independence, the Central Asian states have exhibited a strong sense of affinity towards Turkey. The Central Asian states would like to establish their identity on Pan-Turkic basis. President Nursultan Nazarbaev admitted in early 1992 that he would contemplate joining some sort of Turkic multi-national organisation, should one be created. The southward orientation of the Central Asian states is causing deep anxiety in Russia. It fears that Islamic fundamentalism and other forms of extremism may spread to the whole of Central Asia. Such a development will have serious implications for Russia.\textsuperscript{31} It is estimated that 8 percent of Russian population are Muslims. They live in areas which are adjacent to Central Asia, and in the event of Islamic fundamentalism gaining ground in Central Asia these autonomous republics of Russia will be affected. This is certain to destabilize Russia.

Importantly it is in these region of Russia largely inhabited by Muslims that the demand for independence is most vociferous. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs

Georgy Kunadze in charge of Russia's relations with Central Asia candidly admitted such fears in an interview to Nezavisimaya Gazeta. According to Kunadze Russia has a specific geopolitical interest in Central Asia that is "to prevent the explosive charge of Islamic extremism from penetrating into Russia".32 Besides Islamic fundamentalism, Russia also perceives that forces of political extremism operating in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran are driving waves of instability whipping up religious conflicts in every quarter. Therefore Russians believe that their interests in the region are best served by maintaining internal stability in Central Asian countries. At the summit meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in Moscow in September 1993 President Boris Yeltsin expressed hopes of closer CIS cooperation in guarding borders with other countries, above all Central Asian states.33

Russia's serious concern over the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia is also due to the fact that Kazakhstan is a nuclear power. The President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev has repeatedly stressed his commitment


on handing over the nuclear arsenal to Russia, and to honour all international non-proliferation conventions. But, in reality Kazakhstan has been vacillating on the issue on the plea of insecurity.\textsuperscript{34} It wants assurances from the United States to come to its help in case of a nuclear threat including that from Russia. Until Kazakhstan hands over its nuclear arsenal to Russia the spectre of an "Islamic bomb" will continue to haunt Russia as well as the west.

Russian interest in the Central Asian region is further strengthened by the presence of large numbers of Russian population spread out in all the states of Central Asia. Ever since the break up of the Soviet Union a large number of Russian people have already migrated to Russia. The Russians are professionally skilled and are usually employed in important industrial sectors in these states. Despite the governmental assurances to protect and help them in every possible way, many of these Russians want to return to Russia because of increasing feeling of social harassment and discomfiture. If the Central Asian states are destabilised by religious extremism or by any other political force then the Russian outmigration from Central Asia is sure to become an exodus. This could create difficult problems for the Russian government in terms of

\textsuperscript{34.} The Financial Times London, 28th September 1993.
employment and housing situation in Russia and also for Central Asian states that have to find a trained man power to fill the vacant positions created by the Russian work force which was brought to here six decades ago at the time of socialist construction etc. In the present depressing economic situation, the retention of Russians in Central Asia is viewed as essential for the Russian government both in the immediate context as well as in the long run. Hence the Russian interest demands that stable conditions are maintained in Central Asia to enable Russians to continue to stay in the region.\textsuperscript{35}

Russia has also significant economic interests in Central Asia. The region is an important market for the Russian industrial products in the immediate as well as in the medium term. It is also an important source of supply of raw materials such as raw cotton. Indeed, at present, the Russian textile industry is at a standstill due to disruption of supply of raw cotton from Central Asia. Even in the long run, after Russia completes its transition to free market, it need Central Asia for its exports, both civilian and military goods.

\textsuperscript{35} International Herald Tribune, Singapore, 29 September 1992.
The Central Asian Response:

When the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus met in Belovezhskaya Forest and took the fateful decision to abolish the Soviet Union, the leaders of Central Asia were neither consulted nor invited to the conclave. The news of independence was just thrust upon Central Asia. It was interpreted as an expression of Slavic superiority. The semi official newspaper of Turkmenistan, the Turkemenskaya Iskra in its issue of 25 August 1991 rightly summed up the feelings prevailing in Central Asia. It said "such a separation [if not confrontation] has noting in common with the civilized norms of international relations." 36

The Central Asian states in reaction to Belovezhskaya development started thinking to form some sort of a confederation either among themselves or with Turkey. However, ideas about a confederation or the formation of a regional grouping were soon given up. The meeting in Ashkabad in May 1992 of the Central Asian leaders along with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan exploded the myth of solidarity among the Central Asian countries when Turkmenistan expressed itself against any coordinated effort. Moreover, Central Asian states have territorial

claims on one another. There is no historically recognized border between Russia and Kazakhstan. A sizable chunk of the population in these countries consist of Russians and in Kyrgyzstan they are about a quarter of the population. Besides there are language, ethnic and other differences.

Besides the lack of solidarity among themselves, two other factors must have weighed on the minds of Central Asian leaders in determining their attitudes towards Russia. One was that they had to exist in the shadow of their powerful neighbour. Their geopolitical interests demanded that they could not afford to alienate their neighbour, at least not in the present stage of their development. They have to first consolidate their independence and build up their Armed Forces. At the moment, whatever armed formations they have are based on arms produced in Russia. Importantly the present leadership in Central Asia were communists prior to the breakup of the Union. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union they have all turned nationalists. But what they have in common with Russia is the fear of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. This makes them think that "Russia must act as the guarantor of peace in Central Asia", in the words of Uzbek president Islam Karimov.37

However, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism has not made them agree on the method of tackling this problem. Central Asian leaders are uneasy at the military presence of Russia. At the summit of Central Asian leaders in Moscow in August 1993 Uzbekistan was reluctant to send forces to the Joint Armed Forces. Uzbekistan also has a border with Afghanistan, and so far its border has been peaceful. But Yeltsin forced all of them into compliance. While agreeing reluctantly, the Central Asian leaders stressed the need to strengthen political dialogue. They were unspARING in their criticism of Rakhmanov (the Tajik President) for alienating his people and urged him to strive for the widest possible national reconciliation. Another important factor that limits the independence of Central Asian states is that these are land locked countries. Their access to the outside world is through Russia. Plans are afoot to build alternate land routes. One plan is to link Central Asia with Iran and the second is an ambitious project which will connect Kazakhstan to Turkey. The Central Asian countries are richly endowed with natural resources especially oil, natural gas, one of the finest cotton fibres etc. Efforts to construct pipelines to send the gas and oil are going on. Till then Central Asia is heavily dependent on Russia.
Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 Central Asia has suddenly been thrown into the vortex of international politics. After a lapse of more than a century, five Central Asian states have become independent actors on the international scene. For the present the newly independent Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are concerned and busy with the task of consolidation of their independence. As a result, their moves, actions and postures are cautious, ambivalent and vague. This has given rise to speculations on the possible course and orientation which the states of Central Asia are likely to adopt for restructuring their societies with liberal outlook. 38

Given the geographical location, historical, cultural and religious background and traditions of Central Asia and the nature of politico-ideological movements in the neighbouring countries, various ideas and theories about probable geopolitical scenarios in the region and the world have been put forward by western scholars and think-tanks. According to one school of thought the future world politics will be influenced by civilisational conflict and in this civilisational syndrome Central Asia will have no option but

to be overwhelmed by the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism posing threat to the Judaeo-Christian western civilisation, the Sinic civilisation, and the Indian civilisation. Another theory projecting a little less grandiose geopolitical scenario forecasts the emergence of a Greater Central Asia which will be facilitated by new technologies, particularly by improvements in transport and communication systems. The key political issues of the area are closely linked to social and economic problems. The republics differ greatly in resources and potential, and there are many difficulties and serious ecological problems, but the region as a whole have valuable natural resources to offer in gas, oil, gold, cotton and minerals. It is for economic as well as geostrategic reasons that a contest for influence has been going on. The persistent rivalries within contemporary Central Asia seem to make the ideal of achieving a United Central Asia or 'Turkistan' no more than a dream. Robert L. Cranfield thinks that as new ties are formed between Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Central Asian states, Central Asia will become strategic to the formation of a huge economic trading region. More or less similar views were expressed by US Senator Pressler

when he visited India and Pakistan in 1992. The Pakistani leaders and generals are hoping to forge closer security links with Central Asia which, they believe would provide a "strategic depth" to Pakistan. On the other hand if the close ties with traditional relation with India are cut off, Islamic countries could be the hegemonic block in Asia and Pacific regions.

On the other extreme are the ideas of reintegration of majority, if not all, of the former Soviet republics into a union or loose confederation under the umbrella of Commonwealth of Independent States. The increasing destabilized situation in Central Asia is opening a new phase of geopolitical position. Russia will be replaced by states of South, south west and Central Asia. This opens the prospect for external, Muslim states to raise their standing in the region. The way external states will gain influence will depend on economic, socio cultural and religious factors. Numerous statements of the leaders of constituent members of the CIS, the communiques issued at its summit meetings and the agreements concluded among them are cited in support of the process of reintegration. A careful analysis of these agreements, communiques and statements

reveals that either these are concerned with bilateral/multilateral economic cooperation similar to those the former Soviet republics are concluding with other countries of the world or they relate to amicably overcoming the problems- political, economic trade and security which have been created due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Most Central Asian states have shown disinclination to join any Economic Union with Russia. All the Central Asian states, except Tajikistan, have introduced their own currencies. The fate of Collective Security Treaty conclude in May 1992 is uncertain. Though none of the Central Asian states has repudiated it, they are raising their own National Guards and developing security/military relations with Turkey, Iran and other Muslims countries in the region.

Then there is another school of thought which believes that in the absence of an overarching ideological umbrella of Marxism-Leninism, Islam or Pan-Turkism, the Central Asian states face the grim prospect of fragmentation on account of deep-seated tribal-ethnic loyalties. The ethnic violence in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian states, witnessed on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the conflict now raging in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and the widening divide between the emerging islamicists point to further fragmentation of the Central Asian states, which the
Russian population in these states may not welcome. Secularist setup would satisfy them. Given decades of religious persecution and forced Russification, there is also a possibility of strong backlash from Islamic forces directed against the Russian and other Slavic minorities. There are around 19 million Russian and Slavic origin people living in the former Soviet Central Asian Republics. The outbreak of anti-Russian sentiments will plunge the entire Central Asia into anarchy and chaos. But elites and ruling section in Central Asia also believe that large scale Russian exodus from the newly independent Central Asian states will make it highly difficult for these states to function without the trained expertise of local Russians. Such an exodus will accentuate the vulnerability of this states vis-a-vis ethnic violence and possible breakdown of their state apparatuses. It is as much in the interest of the Central Asian states as that of Moscow to establish a mutually beneficial relationship.41 Lastly there is an empiricist school of thought which argues that these grand theories or predictions of the impending tribalisation of Central Asia conveniently ignore the basic geopolitical fact.

of modern day world, that is the nation-state system. Neither Islam nor Christianity nor Marxism-Leninism has in any significant manner diluted the spirit of nationalism.

The Central Asian republics were formed during the twenties on the basis of nationality. Though the present day boundaries of Central Asian republics were artificially drawn without any consideration to their wishes or to the composition of population of the respective republic or their historical claims, yet over the years these borders have acquired legitimacy. After the collapse of the Soviet Union these titular Central Asian states are steadily acquiring the symbols of nation-states. Such terms as Central Asia, the Central Asian Republics, or Turkistan are merely geographical expressions comparable to expressions like Indian sub-continent, Western etc. The geopolitical units of Central Asia are the independent states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and three more Central Asian states. They have commonalities, yet these are not so strong as will enable them to shade their specific national consciousness. The future course of their development policies and relations with the rest of the world as well as with each other will be influenced by the specificities of each state including their geographical location, composition of their population, problems relating to restructuring their
society, economies, external trade and immediate threat perception by the ruling elites.

For example, the fate of Kazakhstan which is the largest territorial state having a relatively developed industrial base is closely linked with that of the Russian federation. Both geostrategic location of Kazakhstan and the composition of its population will gravitate it towards Moscow. Its northern and western regions lie beyond the defensible geographical border of Central Asia, that is across the Ural mountains. A large majority of the population of these districts consists of Russians. Even otherwise, the total population of Kazakhstan is more or less evenly balanced between the Central Asian and the Slavic peoples.

Therefore, any attempt to whip up Islamic or Turkic nationalist fervour in Kazakhstan will strengthen the separatist feelings among the Slavic/European population. This in turn will reopen the question of border dispute between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. Whereas Russia lays claim to the northern districts of Kazakhstan, the Kazakhs believe that Orenburg, Kazan and Samara in to-day's Russia rightfully belong to them. Moreover, the pan-Turkic fervour in Kazakhstan will also bring it into conflict with the People's Republic of China by reopening
the border dispute. Some 800,000 Kazakhs and 5.5 million Uighurs live in Xingjiang province of China. All these ground realities compel Kazakhstan to pursue a policy of close friendly relations with Russia and secularist states like India in South Asia. Therefore of all the Central Asian leaders, President Nursultan Nazarbayev is the most ardent supporter of maintaining harmonious relations with Moscow. There is no other way by which Kazakhstan and Russia can maintain and preserve their territorial integrity. Geopolitics of Kazakhstan for decades to come will continue to gravitate it towards Russia. 42

On the other spectrum is Tajikistan which is the smallest and poorest state in Central Asia. Situated in the south eastern Central Asia, Tajikistan is surrounded by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the west and north, by China on the east and Afghanistan in the south.

The civil war raging in Tajikistan is being viewed differently by different analysts and observers. On the one hand it is interpreted as a struggle between the Islamic fundamentalists and secular-nationalists and on the other hand it is termed as a conflict between the remnants of old guard communists and their supporters and a coalition of

42. James Rupert, "Dateline Tashkent: Post-Soviet Central Asia", Foreign Policy, No 89, Summer 1993, pp.185-187.
Islamic fundamentalists, liberal intellectuals, fledgling businessmen and representatives of Kurgan-Tiube faction from southern Tajikistan along Afghanistan border which during the Soviet period generally remained unrepresented in the power-structures. The Turkic republics of Central Asia, to be more precise, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, perceive the struggle in Tajikistan as a conflict between modern secular forces and the Islamic fundamentalists, supported by certain Afghan Mujahideen groups operating in northern Afghanistan. Consequently the Uzbeks, the Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz with the support of the Russians are determined to suppress the Islamic fundamentalists in Tajikistan itself lest it opens the flood-gates of political Islam in the rest of Central Asian states. However any durable solution to the Tajikistan conflict will remain a distant dream until political stability dawns on Afghanistan. The geopolitics of Tajikistan is closely intertwined with that of Afghanistan and any hope of a geopolitical community of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan taking shape, amounts to building castles in the air. The century old ambitious project of building a railroad linking Pakistan with Afghanistan and Central Asian states must wait for a distant future. Any such projects will reduce the importance of the Iranian project linking Central Asia through Turkmenistan with its own railway system. In December 1992 Iran and
Turkmenistan signed an agreement for the construction of railway line linking Mashhad-Seraphs-Tedzhen. The successful completion of this railway link would provide the Central Asia's growing commerce and industry a direct access to Iranian port of Bander Abbas. Since then close cooperation between the two countries in political, economic, scientific fields, transport and communication facilities, foreign policy consultations, technical field and cultural exchange have been concluded.43

The Uzbek scholars generally view and project their country Uzbekistan as the heartland of Central Asia. It has been the cradle of ancient Central Asian civilization. In the ancient and medieval periods Samarkand, Nara and Khorezm radiated political, spiritual and cultural influence over the entire Islamic world. Most probably the battle for the minds and hearts of Central Asians in the coming decades will be influenced and

43. The first pact was signed is Istanbul on 26th June 1992 by eleven nations. This list of areas of cooperation included: transport, communication, exchange of economic and commercial information, energy, mining and processing of raw materials, tourism, agriculture and agricultural industry, public health and veterinary, science, pharmaceuticals, science and technology and a Black sea regional bank of international trade and investment which came to be known as a 'Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact 1993'.

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determined by the pattern of developments taking shape in Uzbekistan. 44

An analysis of speeches and statements made by the Uzbek leadership clearly shows that of all the Turkic-speaking Central Asian Republics including Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan shows a marked tilt towards Turkey. President Islam Karimov frequently expresses such Pan-Turkic sentiment. 45 He portrays Turkey as the closest friendly country and describes Uzbek-Turkish relations as "eternal". 46 In May 1992 Uzbekistan requested Turkey to represent it in foreign states and at international organisations. This evoked sharp criticism in the Russian newspaper "Izvestiya". Later the Foreign Ministry of Uzbekistan clarified that Turkish embassy will represent and protect the rights and interest of Uzbekistan on foreign soil for a mutually agreed period. The two countries have also concluded agreement for printing the Uzbek banknotes in

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44. Middle East Economic Digest, 5 June 1993, p.22.


Turkey. 47

Such pan-Turkic sentiments as are being openly expressed by the Uzbek leaders are not shared by Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen or Azeri leaders though they are all enamoured and influenced to varying degree by the Turkish model of development. For instance, president Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan once said that Turkey and Kazakhstan have: "many common points and historical ties". However he hastened to add that "this does not mean we will give precedence to Turkey; we are open to all countries". He further elaborated that his country wishes to take advantage of the experiences of all countries in its transition to a free market economy. 48

Unlike these two trends - one represented by Uzbekistan and the other by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has adopted a neutral, ambivalent middle path. Though willing to give Turkey special preference, President Askar Akayev says that he is determined to maintain relations with all countries on the basis of mutual respect. He thinks that success or


48. Foreign Affairs Record vol.xxxix, no.9, Nov, 1993; also Turkish Daily News 16 August 1993.
failure of Pan-Turkism depends on an economic upturn in Kyrgyzia. He does not for the present see the danger of pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism. If restructuring fails then the emergence of these movements "may become a real threat". The ambivalent attitude of Kyrgyzstan is a manifestation of its geography and demography.

It does not feel the encumbrance of the presence of Russians as strongly as is the case with Kazakhstan, though the percentage of Russian population is not as low as that of states like Uzbekistan or Tajikistan or Turkmenistan. The Russians in Kyrgyzstan constitute 21 percent of its total population of about 4.6 million. Moreover, Kyrgyzstan has never been a strong centre of pan-Turkic or pan-Islamic movement. The Kyrgyz are racially Mongoloid and speak a north-west Turkic dialect (Kipchak) of the Altaic Languages. Their customary occupation has been pastoral nomadism. Though like other Central Asians, the Kyrgyz too profess Islam, its influence is very weak. The Kyrgyz Islam is richly mixed with pre-Islamic totemism and other beliefs. Moreover, even after more than seventy years of Soviet social

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engineering Kyrgyzstan has a very weak urban sector both social as well as economic and pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism are urban phenomena.

The meanings and importance of geopolitics has always been, and will always be, different for different nations. Thus, both in time and space, the concept of geopolitics is a dynamic concept and how so ever loosely or rigorously we may define its meaning, it will be different for different nations depending on the purpose and objectives of their immediate and long term national interests.51

The basic determinants of the civilizational model of geopolitics are the growing role of world cultures in international politics, a gradual decline of the relevance of nation-state system and the emergence of a unipolar world dominated by the Western Christianity.

The CIS model of reintegration is based, instead, on the assumption that the disintegration of the former Soviet Union has not/nor will bring down the economic and strategic - security linkages among the various constituents of the CIS.

All these models of geopolitics, it seems are reflection of the actual or existing social, political and military situation obtaining in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore all of them portray in various degrees, the present day geopolitical reality. But this reality is in the process of change and whether this change would be in the directions which some of these geopolitical models point out is difficult to predict.