

ASIAN CULTURES AND MODERNITY

Research Report No. 1 March 2002

Afghanistan and Central Asian Security

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Department of Political Science*

Asian Cultures and Modernity

Research Reports

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A plethora of state- and nation-building programmes are being developed in present-day Asia, where governments have to consider the regionality of old ethno-cultural identities. While the cohesive power of traditions must be put into use within a particular nation, that same power challenges its national boundaries. To soften this contradiction, regionalism, in contrast to isolationism and globalism, becomes a solution, suggesting new and exciting routes to modernity. In studies conducted by the Asian Cultures and Modernity Research Group at Stockholm University, sociolinguistic and culture-relativistic perspectives are applied with the support of epistemological considerations from the field of political science.

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ISSN 1651-0666

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by Michael Fredholm

Editorial note

The first version of this paper was written within the framework of seminars on “Borders and Boundaries in Asia: A Sociocultural Perspective” organised at the Department of Oriental Languages in the fall semester of the year 2000. The present version has been revised with regard to events in and around Afghanistan during late 2001.

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Stockholm University

Afghanistan and Central Asian Security

A Great Game with New Rules

Central Asia is no longer the contested territory in a great geopolitical game fought among great powers. Few borders are seriously contested, unlike the situation in the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent. Despite regional problems involving the exploitation of water resources, inter-ethnic distrust, economic reform, and the development of democracy, the risk of open warfare erupting between the states of the region is small. However, a geopolitical as well as ideological game is still being played with regard to Afghanistan, the most dangerous powder keg in the region. The civil war in Afghanistan has served as a catalyst, creating new boundaries and dividing her neighbours according to how they have responded to the political, religious, social, and military turmoil there. The rise to power of extremist Islamic groups in Afghanistan was in recent years the major security threat to the region, inspiring for example some parts of Tajikistan, showing a potential to involve all Afghanistan's neighbours including nuclear weapons-armed Pakistan. The extremist groups suffered a setback when a coalition led by the United States in late 2001 destroyed the Afghan Taliban government. Yet, extremist Islamic thought remains widespread and Afghanistan remains dangerously unstable, despite the presence of a new Afghan government set up by the victors.

The game for domination of Afghanistan is not the same as the traditional Great Game played out in the nineteenth century between Great Britain and Russia for the buffer territories between the British South Asian and the Russian Siberian and Central Asian possessions.¹ Nor is it the same as the New Great Game – a term that understandably has excited public attention – over the oil and gas resources in the Caspian and in Central Asia, and the issue of optimal pipeline

¹ See, for instance, H. W. C. Davis, *The Great Game in Asia (1800-1844)* (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, The Raleigh Lecture on History, 10 November 1926); Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1992); Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 1999).

routes from an economic and geopolitical point of view.² The great game for domination of Afghanistan is more bloody than the first and financially more devastating than the second. More people, certainly more than one and a half million,³ have been killed in Afghanistan since civil war broke out in 1979 than in all the battles of the Great Game between the British, the Russians and their proxies more than a century ago. The huge investments of the New Great Game for oil and gas were at least made with the purpose of eventually turning a profit; even if the economic costs for neighbouring countries because of military expenditures, refugee problems, social disruption, and criminal activities such as narcotics trafficking caused by the long war in Afghanistan, are almost certainly far greater and furthermore appear very unlikely to pay any dividends.

Background to the Afghan Crisis

Due to the long civil war (commenced in early 1979, exacerbated by the Soviet intervention in the period 1979-1989, and not yet fully resolved) Afghanistan remains what can best be described as a failed state.⁴ The country is no longer characterised by any real sovereignty but instead by factual, if fluid, internal borders between mutually antagonistic groups. The internal borders were for some time considered as approximating ethnic borders, although these were always hard to define due to historical population movements. Since most ethnic groups in Afghanistan also maintained contacts with ethnic brethren beyond state borders, the civil war caused territorial ambiguity. It became increasingly hard to pinpoint where Afghan state power, such as it was, began and ended. The Pashtuns, for instance, had since 1979 received support from Pakistan, homeland of the other main population of Pashtuns, while the Tajiks in due time began to receive assistance from neighbouring Tajikistan.⁵ Even the identity of Afghan state power became unclear as warlords and political groups battled for power.

The picture appeared to change in 1994 when Pakistan switched her support to, indeed in all essentials created, the Taliban movement. This movement of Islamic extremists (the word *taliban* is the plural form of *talib*, “religious student” in a traditional Islamic seminary, *madrasah*), dominated by Pashtuns with massive Pakistani support, came to control most parts of the country.⁶ Despite some claims that the movement had already passed its zenith of power,⁷ the Taliban remained

² See, for instance, Ariel Cohen, “The New Great Game: Oil Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia,” Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 1065 (25 January 1996); Ahmed Rashid, “The New Great Game: The Battle for Central Asia’s Oil,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 April 1997. See also Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000).

³ Rashid, *Taliban*, vii.

⁴ See, for instance, Barnett R. Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan: State Formation and Collapse in the International System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), *passim*, in particular 265-80; Rashid, *Taliban*, 83, 207-8.

⁵ Rashid, *Taliban*, 53-4, 61, 78, 146; M. J. Gohari, *The Taliban: Ascent to Power* (Oxford: Oxford Logos Society, 1999), 122-3.

⁶ William Maley (ed.), *Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 43-89; Rashid, *Taliban*, 44-5, 72, 183-4; Gohari, *Taliban*, 32.

⁷ Peter Tomsen, “A Chance for Peace in Afghanistan: The Taliban’s Days Are Numbered”, *Foreign Affairs* 79: 1 (January/February 2000), 179-182.

in control of the major cities with surrounding lands until they were pushed out of power in a major late 2001 offensive by the predominantly non-Pashtun Northern Alliance, this time considerably better armed and equipped than previously by Iran and Russia, and with air support from the United States and several NATO countries.⁸ Following discussions at a location near the German city of Bonn, held under the aegis of the United Nations, in which most key Afghan leaders or their representatives as well as their foreign sponsors, primarily the United States, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran, participated, an interim Afghan government was formed on 4 Dec 2001, to assume power on 22 December. The United States and Pakistan nominated a Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, as leader of the interim government, while accepting the realities on the ground by awarding all key ministries (defence, internal affairs, and foreign affairs) to leaders from the Northern Alliance.⁹

Since all the kings of the 1747-1973 monarchy, except one, were ethnic Pashtuns, it is often argued that the Afghan national identity is based on Pashtun domination over other ethnic groups like Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and several others.¹⁰ United States President George Bush appears to have reached the same conclusion, a view also held by the fallen Taliban government's main sponsor, Pakistan. However, after more than two decades of civil war and a Soviet intervention that came to pitch Afghan government forces as well as Soviet troops against opposition *mujahidin* forces, very little appears to remain of Afghan national identity. The collapse of the Afghan state has devalued the national identity and instead reinforced ethnic identities. The defeat of the Taliban movement and its replacement by an interim government did little to change this situation.

A large portion of the surviving Afghan population no longer has the means to support itself, having been totally dependent on foreign aid for years.¹¹ As long as such aid is provided, the Afghan warlords (previously the Taliban, currently the leaders of the interim government as well as commanders who retain military forces but were not offered government positions) are relieved of the responsibility of actually providing for their supporters and their dependents, and are accordingly free, if they so wish, to spend all revenues on war. Without foreign aid, there would be far less opportunity for internecine strife.

The Pashtuns are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan (about 40 per cent of the population, which may have reached 26 million), followed by Tajiks (25 per cent), and Hazaras and Uzbeks (together roughly 25 per cent).¹² However, while most of Afghanistan's population is concentrated in the largely Pashtun south, 60 per cent of the country's agricultural resources and 80 per cent of her industrial, mineral, and gas wealth are in the chiefly Uzbek and Tajik north. This is a further incentive for the Pashtuns to recover their leading position, while the non-Pashtuns try to keep their natural resources beyond Pashtun control.¹³

⁸ See, for instance, *Economist*, 17 November 2001.

⁹ See, for instance, *Economist*, 8 December 2001.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, *Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 161-5.

¹¹ See, for instance, Peter Marsden, *The Taliban: War, Religion and the New Order in Afghanistan* (London: Zed Books, 1998), 108.

¹² Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2001*.

¹³ Rashid, *Taliban*, 55.

The Fragmentation of Afghanistan

Some feel that Afghanistan's territorial integrity is inviolable, and that the Pashtuns should form the backbone of any future government as they had done in the past. However, any policy to try to return Afghanistan to the situation in 1979 is bound to fail. Besides, a Pashtun-dominated Afghanistan would by no means ensure a period of peace in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns remain fragmented into different sub-groups. Many senior Taliban commanders enjoyed considerable autonomy, and their predominantly Pashtun troops were customarily kept in separate units based on region, district, or tribe to minimise friction.¹⁴ As the Taliban government fell, most of its Pashtun commanders and forces were not annihilated but merely switched allegiance, first to various local Pashtun leaders, then to the interim government of Hamid Karzai, regarded as a safe deal due to its sponsorship by the United States and Pakistan.¹⁵ Besides, considering the common practice in Afghanistan, also taken advantage of by the Taliban in their heyday, of buying over enemies instead of fighting them,¹⁶ it is likely that payments to local Taliban commanders played a part in the transferring of their allegiance to Hamid Karzai.

The Bonn agreement included the eventual convening of a *Loya Jirgah* (national council) to form a broadly based transitional government, elections, the disarmament of all groups, and the formation of a regular army.¹⁷ Unfortunately, current ethnic divisions and the history of mistrust will limit the authority of any such government, render disarmament impossible, and subject the formation of a regular army to those ethnic leaders who happen to gain control of its units. Minorities will want strong and credible guarantees before disarming and exposing themselves to a possibly vindictive Pashtun military. Such guarantees are unlikely to be forthcoming.

Instead, a viable case of autonomy or outright independence can be made for several ethnic and religious groups. These include the Tajiks and Uzbeks, as well as the Ismailis of the Wakhan corridor (due to their contacts with overseas Ismailis through their leader, the Agha Khan), the Shia Heratis, and probably the Shia Hazaras. Most of these groups have a tradition of co-operation with their ethnic brethren on the other side of the border. Besides, their territories probably have the natural or economic resources to create statelets that in due time could choose to re-unite, remain independent, or join their co-ethnics in the neighbouring countries. If autonomy is granted to the other groups, the Hazaras could probably achieve the same status, as they could then access the present international border through the territories of other groups.

To resolve the Afghan conflict, the international community is faced with a stark choice. One must accept the fact that Afghanistan is already (and under current conditions perhaps irreversibly) fragmented along ethnic lines, and divide the failed country into independent or at least fully autonomous territories, otherwise there will be a need for a long period of direct government by an outside administration, backed by foreign or United Nations forces. The alternative of

¹⁴ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment: Afghanistan, Jane's Information Group, 30 August 2000.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Tim Reid, "Mullah Omar's Troops Enlist in Afghan Army," *Times*, 17 January 2002.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Anthony Davis, "Afghanistan's Taliban," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7: 7 (July 1995), 315-321.

¹⁷ See, for instance, *Economist*, 8 December 2001.

installing an ostensibly broad-based government and pulling out all foreign forces will amount to mere abandonment of Afghanistan to further warfare. Unfortunately, to break up the country may well cause further but temporary regional instability, as neighbouring countries will attempt to influence or even assume control of the territories inhabited by their ethnic brethren in Afghanistan. The rule by foreign troops, however, despite the facade of respect for Afghanistan's territorial integrity, will only postpone the conflict between different ethnic groups. Such a policy will alienate existing military and tribal leaders, who would regard the foreign forces as competitors instead of a guarantee for disarmament. This policy, or the abandonment of Afghanistan to renewed warlordism, will cause further resentment against the West and will no doubt encourage the very extremism and terrorism that the international community wishes to eradicate.

The Non-Expansionist Tradition of Afghanistan

The Afghan civil war was, and to a considerable extent still is, a very real threat to the continued existence of the state of Afghanistan. Its Afghan participants do not, however, form a direct threat to Afghanistan's neighbours, even though as in any war some potential for spill-over fighting always remains. The Taliban leaders, for instance, often stated that they did not wish to interfere in the internal affairs of other states.¹⁸ With the exception of a few accidental bombings and artillery bombardments and the occasional gunfight between Afghan narcotics traffickers and the border troops of neighbouring states, the battles of the more than two decade long Afghan civil war never spilled over into neighbouring territories. The causes for this can probably be found in the historical legacies of the Afghan state.

The Taliban leaders were not highly educated men as regards both Islamic thought and, certainly, international affairs. The way of thinking within the Taliban movement, and to some extent among other Afghan leaders, can accordingly be understood, at least in some measure, by referring to the indigenous traditions of the Afghan state.

If we disregard ancient state constructions such as Bactria, the Afghan state such as we recognise it today was first formed around Kandahar in 1747 by Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747-1773), an ethnic Pashtun. The people embraced by his state were united by neither language nor religion, being both Turkic and Persian speakers as well as both Sunni and Shia believers, the latter a group that included the Hazaras, descendants of the Mongol armies. The population was pastoral rather than nomadic. It is significant although frequently forgotten that this early Afghan state from its beginning was associated with a religious organisation, the dervish order Rawshaniyya, a body that two centuries earlier had led the Afghan revolt against the Moghul emperor Akbar (the Rawshaniyya was eventually subsumed by the similar and better known Naqshbandiyya order). At first, the new Afghan monarchy, supported by the religious organisation, was military and expansionist. In 1760, the threat of an Islamic *jihad* (holy war) from the early Afghan state appears to have halted the Manchu advance into Central Asia after Manchu armies had already conquered the Muslim regions of the Tarim basin.

¹⁸ Gohari, *Taliban*, 117.

However, it is also significant that the Afghan rulers after early campaigns in India contented themselves with their kingdom and abstained from further expansion. The early Afghan state soon turned sedentary, in 1772 shifting its capital from pastoral, clerical Kandahar to mercantile, secular Kabul. This was also a means for its secular rulers to escape clerical domination. The Afghan monarchy, although frequently torn by succession disputes and threatened at times by British annexation, managed to survive until 1973, when it fell in a coup d'état.¹⁹ Today's Afghan leaders remain non-expansionist. Unlike contemporary warlords and politicians in the other, originally more nomadic Central Asian countries, not a single Afghan leader, not even the highly opportunistic Abdul Rashid Dostum, has attempted to interfere in the politics of a neighbouring state. The Afghans remain content within their own country. The religious extremes of the Taliban movement can possibly be seen as the descendant of the earlier Rawshaniyya. The fact that their true seat of government remained in Kandahar and never moved to Kabul serves as a further indication of the indigenous traditions of the movement.

However, the Taliban's direct religious roots lay not in Afghanistan but in the Deoband school of the Hanafi (*Hanafiyah*) movement, the most prominent Islamic movement in South Asia. This theological centre has always been strongly influenced by Wahhabism (*Wahhabiyah*), in itself a variant of Salafi Islam, named after *as-salaf as-salih*, "the righteous predecessors" of early Islam. This interpretation of Islam emerged by the late twentieth century as the dominant form of Sunni Islamic radicalism. Islamic scholars from the Deoband school eventually established local branches in what currently is Pakistan, where many of today's Afghan religious leaders have studied. The goal of the Wahhabi movement is to turn society back to an essentially imagined model of seventh-century Arabia, the time of the Prophet, but this time on a global scale. Wahhabism is a highly proselytising creed, which explains the policy of the Taliban rulers to support and promote like-minded extremist groups abroad.²⁰

The Afghan Factions

The various parties in the Afghan civil war can best be summarised into two main forces: The Pashtuns (until late 2001 represented by the Taliban) and their chief opponent, the Northern Alliance (also known as the United Front) primarily made up of ethnic Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek forces under leaders such as the late Ahmad Shah Masud and Abdul Rashid Dostum. A third force, although allied and ideologically sympathetic to the Taliban, was until late 2001 made up of a loose network of Arab Afghan Islamic extremists.

¹⁹ Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 24-47; S. A. M. Adsheed, *Central Asia in World History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 197-8.

²⁰ Michael Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism and Terrorism as a Regional Security Threat in Central Asia*, unpublished paper, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, 2001; Gohari, *Taliban*, 31-2, 39-41, 54-6; Rashid, *Taliban*, 43.

THE PASHTUNS

Objective: Reassumption of power and the promotion of traditional Pashtun domination over the Afghan state.

Allies: Until late 2001, the Arab Afghan movement.

Sponsor: The United States and Pakistan.

Proxies: None.

Population: Pashtuns are estimated to comprise around 40 per cent of the total population of Afghanistan (which may be as high as 26.8 million).²¹

Armed forces: Currently unknown, although probably in the range of at most 35,000 (the Taliban fielded perhaps 45,000, including an estimated 9,000 to 10,000 part-time Pakistani volunteers who served for short periods before being replaced by other Pakistanis and at least 500 to 600, perhaps as many as 1,000 to 1,500 Arabs²²).

Since a major part of the military forces of the loose Pashtun coalition under Hamid Karzai originally served as soldiers within the Taliban movement, a brief history of the Taliban is in order to fully understand the motivation of the Pashtun troops. The Taliban was a military force created in 1994, in all essentials by and for Pakistani interests although few, if any, Taliban leaders were much concerned about following Pakistani orders.²³ The movement's leaders seemed to regard themselves as the world's only true Islamic government, on the lines of the righteous caliphate of the early years of Islam,²⁴ and the Taliban government accordingly styled itself the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.²⁵

The Taliban were also reinforced by large numbers of Pakistanis, religious volunteers as well as regular Pakistani military units. The volunteers were at first mostly Pashtuns of Afghan or Pakistani origin but from 1999, Pakistani Punjabis arrived in increasing numbers and eventually formed the majority of the Pakistani volunteers.²⁶

The regular Pakistani soldiers served as units in combat roles, or were detached from their units for the provision of special skills such as those of tank drivers and aircraft pilots, in technical and rear support, maintenance, and administrative functions. Pakistani military officers also appeared to take a considerable responsibility for the planning and execution of major operations. This was shown by the impressive use of mobility, speed, logistics support, as well as efficient contemporary command, control, communications, and intelligence procedures displayed by the Taliban, on a level hitherto never seen among Afghan troops and certainly not to be expected from such a comparatively new military formation, even considering the fact that they also recruited numerous officers and men of the pre-1992 Afghan army, many from the hard-line, Pashtun nationalist

²¹ Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 10, 93; Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 2001*.

²² Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000; Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," 22-35; Davis, "Struggle for Recognition," 21; Rashid, *Taliban*, 100.

²³ Rashid, *Taliban*, 26-30, 125.

²⁴ Gohari, *Taliban*, 118.

²⁵ Taliban web sites, www.taliban.com; www.afghan-ie.com.

²⁶ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000; Ahmed Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1999, 22-35; Rashid, *Taliban*, 100; Anthony Davis, "Struggle for Recognition," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 4 October 2000, 21.

Khalq (“Masses” or “People”) wing of the Communist Party.²⁷

The Taliban depended on Pakistan for supply of ammunition, particularly for tanks and artillery, some small arms, pick-up trucks, and petroleum, oil, and lubricants. They also received financial payments.²⁸ Some of these supplies may well have been paid for through financial assistance to the Taliban from private or state supporters in the Arabian peninsula. The Taliban were funded partly from contributions from supporters abroad, typically within the Arab Afghan movement (see below), partly from taxes, in particular deriving from narcotics production in Afghanistan.²⁹

In the early years of the movement, the Taliban received considerable material and financial support also from Saudi Arabia. By then, every major Taliban offensive seemed to have been preceded by a visit from Prince Turki ibn Faisal al-Saud, head of the Saudi intelligence service Istakhbarat, and his staff. Prince Turki also played a major role in organising the *mujahidin* front against the Soviets during their war. However, in the opinion of some analysts, Saudi intelligence appears to have depended too much on the Pakistani Inter-services Intelligence agency (ISI) for information on what happened in Afghanistan. In September 1998, the Taliban leader Mullah Omar insulted Prince Turki and the Saudi royal family. Saudi Arabia then ceased her support for the Taliban, although the diplomatic recognition pushed through by Pakistan in 1997 was not withdrawn. Significantly enough, from October 1998 the Taliban, who previously had generally been able to seize the initiative in any military offensive, began to lose ground to a Northern Alliance offensive that managed to maintain its momentum until the summer of 1999.³⁰

The Taliban movement was hostile to what it regarded as the “wicked and corrupt” religious beliefs of Shia Iran, in the same way that it was opposed to Shia beliefs among Afghanistan’s minorities.³¹ The movement was also known to provide bases for members of various small Iranian Sunni opposition groups (such as the Ahl-e Sunnah Wal Jamaat) at Herat.³² However, for all their indignant rhetoric, the Taliban leaders no doubt realised that their military strength was insufficient to confront Iranian military forces directly.

As the Taliban government collapsed under the combined onslaught of the Northern Alliance and the United States as well as several NATO countries, the victors imposed a new interim government on Afghanistan. The United States and Pakistan pushed through the demand that a Pashtun had to head the new government. Eventually, Hamid Karzai was chosen, in a process not dissimilar to that when the Soviet Union in 1986 appointed Muhammad Najibullah, another ethnic Pashtun, president of Afghanistan, then in 1989 left him on his own as the Soviet troops moved out of the country. Najibullah had to seek shelter in a United

²⁷ Anthony Davis, “How the Taliban Became a Military Force”, Maley, *Fundamentalism Reborn*, 43-71, in particular on 69-71. Jane’s Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000; Davis, “Struggle for Recognition,” 21; Rashid, *Taliban*, 49.

²⁸ Support from Pakistan: Jane’s Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; 30 August 2000; Jane’s Sentinel: Afghanistan, 28 May 1999; Rashid, *Taliban*, 44-5, 72, 183-4; Ahmed Rashid, “Heart of Darkness,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 5 August 1999, 8-12; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 190.

²⁹ Rashid, *Taliban*, 35, 120, 123-4; Rashid, “Heart of Darkness,” 8-12.

³⁰ Rashid, *Taliban*, 48, 72, 131, 138-9, 201-202, 227-233, 264 n.16.

³¹ Gohari, *Taliban*, 109-110, 134-5.

³² Ahmed Rashid, “Heart of Darkness,” 8-12; Rashid, “The Taliban: Exporting Extremism,” 22-35; Rashid, *Taliban*, 203.

Nations diplomatic compound in Kabul in 1992, where he remained until he was dragged out to be killed in 1996.³³ Whether Hamid Karzai can survive the planned pull-out of American and other Western forces remains to be seen.

It should be noted that despite rhetoric to the contrary, the Taliban forces were not annihilated by American air attacks, nor by the advancing forces of the Northern Alliance. The Taliban had ample time to move out of the cities before the air raids began. Besides, persistent rumours at the time suggested that the American air campaign was initially designed neither to destroy the Taliban forces, nor to dislodge them from their positions between the Northern Alliance and Kabul, but rather to intimidate them into surrender.³⁴ Later events give some credibility to these rumours, as it does appear that the United States wished to preserve an organised Pashtun military force as a counterweight to the Iranian and Russian supported Northern Alliance, as well as to prevent the latter from occupying Kabul. When the Northern Alliance did take Kabul on 13 November 2001, perhaps advised to do so by their Iranian or possibly Russian backers, it humiliated American President Bush who had earlier promised Pakistani leader Musharraf that he would not permit that to happen.³⁵ While the Taliban certainly took some losses early on in the war, the Taliban collapse was rather the effect of the sudden switching of allegiance of most Taliban commanders and units from the Taliban government, first to various Pashtun local leaders, then to the interim government of Hamid Karzai, who due to support from the United States and Pakistan is widely regarded as the guarantee for continued Pashtun dominance. Although the exact number of former Taliban troops who currently support Hamid Karzai is unclear, reports indicate that at the very minimum several thousands are being recruited into the new Afghan army, where they are being armed with Russian weapons and uniforms provided by the United States. In Kandahar alone, it is estimated that as many as 6,000 former Taliban will form part of the new army.³⁶ It seems reasonable to assume that most former Taliban soldiers will eventually enlist in Hamid Karzai's new army. This is worrying for two reasons. First, these men will not have transformed themselves overnight into a pro-Western and pro-democracy force for secular government. Second, it seems likely that rivalry, possibly of a violent kind, will continue to characterise the situation between the Pashtun and non-Pashtun components of the new army.

³³ Rashid, *Taliban*, 49-50.

³⁴ See, for instance, *Economist*, 13 October 2001; 20 October 2001.

³⁵ See, for instance, *Economist*, 17 November 2001; *Guardian*; Interfax, 15 November 2001.

³⁶ Reid, "Mullah Omar's Troops."

THE NORTHERN ALLIANCE

Objective: Resistance to the now defunct, Pashtun dominated Taliban movement and, eventually, introduction of a non-Pashtun dominated government.

Allies: None.

Sponsors: Iran, Russia, to some extent Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and India.

Proxies: None.

Population: Tajiks are estimated to comprise about 25 per cent of the total population of Afghanistan (which may be as high as 26.8 million) while Hazaras and Uzbeks together may form roughly another 25 per cent.³⁷

Armed forces: Estimated 12,000 to 15,000 mainly Tajiks from Jamiat-e Islami, 5,000 chiefly Shia Hazaras belonging to Hezb-e Wahdat, and 2,000 Uzbeks under Dostum and Malik.³⁸

The Northern Alliance, also known as the United Front (short for the United Islamic and National Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan), set up on 13 June 1997 and formally led by Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani but under the military control of its then defence minister, the late Ahmad Shah Masud,³⁹ succeeded the Supreme Council for the Defence of the Motherland set up on 10 October 1996.⁴⁰ Since 1998, the Alliance effectively consisted of Rabbani's Jamiat-e Islami Afghanistan ("Islamic Society of Afghanistan") movement. The other two main factions of the Northern alliance, Abdul Rashid Dostum's Jombesh-e Milli Islami ("National Islamic Movement") and the Shia umbrella organisation Hezb-e Wahdat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan ("Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan"), created in June 1990 by the Iran-based Shia groups, suffered significant losses and were at least for the time being shattered by the Taliban advances in the summer and autumn of 1998. The far smaller Shia faction, the Harakat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan ("Islamic Movement of Afghanistan"), was by then based in Quetta, Pakistan. The Hezb-e Wahdat eventually regrouped to conduct guerrilla operations in and near the central provinces of Bamiyan and Samangan, as did the Harakat-e Islami-ye Afghanistan. Jombesh-e Milli leaders Abdul Rashid Dostum and Abdul Malik returned to the region in December 1999, and Dostum met Masud on 19 March 2000 to discuss renewed co-operation; however, for a long while, it remained unclear to what extent the two Uzbeks subsequently reorganised their forces.⁴¹

The Northern Alliance was primarily united by its resistance to the Taliban. By late 2001, all signs of long-term strategies or objectives beyond mere survival had disappeared, if such had ever existed. An Afghan state formation under the Northern Alliance leaders looked increasingly unlikely, despite the fact that the

³⁷ Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 10, 93; Central Intelligence Agency, *World Factbook 2001*.

³⁸ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000; 2 May 2000; Rashid, *Taliban*, 100.

³⁹ Rashid, *Taliban*, 61.

⁴⁰ Rashid, *Taliban*, 52-53.

⁴¹ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000; 17 October 2000; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 149-157, 229. See also Viktor Korgun, "Afghan Factor in Regional Geopolitics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 5, 2000, 138-146. The Hezb-e Wahdat can be e-mailed at Wahdat_news@yahoo.com and occasionally displays press releases on the web site www.hazaraonline.f2s.com. Other Hazara web sites include www.hazara.net and www.hazara.com. The Jamiat-e Islami maintains the web sites www.jamiat.com and www.afghangovernment.org.

Rabbani government was still recognised by the United Nations as the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The reason for this international recognition was no doubt the realisation by the international community (except Pakistan and perhaps a couple of Middle Eastern states) that the Rabbani government, despite its apparent lack of power, would make a more business-like long-term partner in the region than the extremist Taliban movement.

The Northern Alliance receives military support from Iran, Russia, and to some extent Tajikistan (which in addition provides a supply route for the military support from Iran and Russia), including, apparently, the use of the Kulob air base and a helicopter base close to Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe. This support chiefly consists of fuel, anti-personnel mines, machine guns, small arms and artillery ammunition, and some armoured fighting vehicles. Some support also derives apparently from India, in the form of aircraft parts, ground radar, and financial assistance if nothing else. Uzbekistan, too, provides supplies and sanctuary, at least to Dostum's Uzbeks. Dostum is also known to have received financial support from Turkey. Rumours of military support from Israel have never been verified.⁴² There is no evidence to suggest that any foreign support ceased following the fall of the Taliban government.

While Rabbani was excluded from the new interim government formed on 4 December 2001, all key ministries went to leaders from the Northern Alliance. Muhammad Fahim Khan was confirmed as minister of defence, Yunus Qanuni as interior minister, and Abdullah Abdullah as foreign minister.⁴³

Although the Northern Alliance *per se*, since the fall of the Taliban government, no longer plays an active role in Afghan politics, the term remains useful as it still delimits those Afghan forces primarily made up of minorities opposed to Pashtun domination.

⁴² Support from Iran: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; 28 May 1999; Korgun, "Afghan Factor," 138-146; Rashid, *Taliban*, 44-5, 53, 70, 72, 76, 200, 203; Gohari, *Taliban*, 154; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 190. Support from Russia: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; 28 May 1999; Korgun, "Afghan Factor," 138-146; Rashid, *Taliban*, 44, 53-4, 61, 72, 76, 78; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 69. Support from Tajikistan: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; Korgun, "Afghan Factor," 138-146; Rashid, *Taliban*, 53-4, 61, 78, 146. Support from Uzbekistan: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; Rashid, *Taliban*, 53-4, 72; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 69, 166, 189. Support from India: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; Rashid, *Taliban*, 45. Support from Turkey: Rashid, *Taliban*, 154. Support from Israel: Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; Ahmed Rashid, "Epicentre of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 May 2000, 16-18.

⁴³ *Economist*, 8 December 2001.

THE ARAB AFGHAN MOVEMENT

Objective: Opposition on a global scale to perceived threats to the movement's interpretation of Islam, which among its rank and file expresses itself as a wish to fight "apostates and infidels" as a way of life.

Means: Guerrilla warfare and terrorism, financed by narcotics trafficking and donations from supporters.

Allies: The Taliban movement (until its fall in late 2001).

Sponsors: Like-minded religious groups in various countries.

Proxies: United Tajik Opposition (UTO) warlords such as Mirzo Zioev and his erstwhile subordinate, the late Juma-boi Namangani Khojiev, an ethnic Uzbek and a leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Armed forces: Currently unknown. Before the late 2001 war against terrorism, at the very most an estimated 2,000 armed followers in Afghanistan and another 2,000 (some claim 5,000) in Tajikistan (probably far less on both accounts), and some Pakistanis, many of whom have since been killed or captured.

The loosely connected groups of Islamic extremists who due to their rise to prominence during the Afghan wars are commonly known as Arab "Afghan veterans" or merely "Afghans" – radical Islamic extremists from several Islamic countries so named because they forged ties while in Afghanistan as volunteers to fight the Soviet occupation forces during the 1980s – may still form the chief threat to security and stability in Central Asia.⁴⁴ As they typically form part of a complex network of relatively autonomous, loosely organised groups rather than hierarchical organisations, joined by their common ideology of Salafi Islamic principles translated into politics rather than a shared organisational structure, very little was until recently known about these groups outside their immediate circles. Important evidence in the form of computers and documents was captured in Afghanistan at the time of the fall of the Taliban, although the vast amounts of abandoned documents and other evidence seem to have overwhelmed the few available Western intelligence personnel there at the time, and much was dispersed among locals and journalists before they could be secured and analysed⁴⁵. The extremist groups are for the same reason also difficult to influence through their leaders, even if such leaders are known. They are, as far as is known, generally financed by private sources rather than by state sponsors. Most extremist groups of this kind appear to be funded partly by donations from like-minded religious groups in various countries, and partly from involvement in narcotics trafficking. The chief objective of the Arab Afghan movement is opposition on a global scale to perceived threats to its interpretation of Islam.⁴⁶

Most or all of these extremists are to some extent influenced by Salafi Islam,

⁴⁴ Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism*; John K. Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism* (London: Pluto Press, 1999); James Bruce, "Arab Veterans of the Afghan War," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 7: 4 (April 1995), 175-9.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, *Economist*, 24th November 2001; Anthony Davis, "The Afghan Files: Al-Qaeda Documents from Kabul," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 14: 2 (February 2002), 14-19.

⁴⁶ Michele Zanini, "Middle Eastern Terrorism and Netwar," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 22: 3 (1999): 250; Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism*.

and in particular the Wahhabbi Islamic movement of Saudi Arabia.⁴⁷ One of the chief leaders within this loosely formed movement is generally regarded to be Usamah bin Ladin (or, as the name currently appears in most newspapers, Osama bin Laden), a Saudi-born former entrepreneur who was last based in Afghanistan and whose subsequent whereabouts remain unknown. Usamah bin Ladin was believed to support, finance, and co-ordinate much of what went on within the Arab Afghan movement. Through his own inner core group, Al-Qaida (“The Base”), which allegedly forms the centre of the movement, Usamah bin Ladin was believed to sponsor many of the activities of the Islamic extremist movement. Be that as it may, Usamah bin Ladin has not functioned as a traditional leader in control of these various activities.⁴⁸ Often he appears to be the inspiration rather than organiser or financier of extremist activities.

Few if any of the movement’s rank-and-file members in Afghanistan had any but the most basic education, and whatever education they may have received was typically exclusively religious. The main recruitment ground for the movement has so far been among poor, uneducated young men, often orphans or refugees, who have literally nothing to lose and view membership in a well-funded international, extremist Islamic organisation with pretensions of equality and brotherhood, as well as good political connections in certain Arab countries, as a sound career move. However, the movement also has a core of extremists with higher education, typically attracted to the movement by feelings of resentment because of high unemployment in their native countries, among them Algeria and, in recent years, Uzbekistan. Such men typically entered Afghanistan from Pakistan.⁴⁹

A characteristic of the Arab Afghan movement is its ability to quickly relocate members and operations from one geographic area to another in response to changing circumstances and needs. Many of the fighting members of the movement appear constantly to move from one war zone to another, or one Islamic group to another, turning up in places as diverse as Algeria, Egypt, Chechnya, and Tajikistan. Such men have participated in operations conducted by Algeria’s GIA (“Armed Islamic Group”) and Egypt’s al-Jama’a al-Islamiyya (“Islamic Group”) and received training in Afghanistan and Somalia.⁵⁰ The Arab Afghan movement can be said to operate on a truly global scale, recruiting, training, profiting, and striking wherever opportunities present themselves or the defences of the movement’s enemies are down.

The actual fighting strength of the Arab Afghan movement was always very difficult to estimate, and is especially so after the American-led war on terrorism drove the movement underground. Within Central Asia, the strength of the movement was, at the very most, an estimated 2,000 armed followers in Afghanistan (based around Kabul and Jalalabad⁵¹) and another 2,000 (some claim 5,000) in Tajikistan.⁵² Others suggested far lower numbers (1,200 in Afghanistan and 600 in Tajikistan, respectively⁵³). The number of fighters was probably far less

⁴⁷ Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism*.

⁴⁸ Zanini, “Middle Eastern Terrorism,” 250.

⁴⁹ Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism*.

⁵⁰ Zanini, “Middle Eastern Terrorism,” 250.

⁵¹ Rashid, “Heart of Darkness,” 8-12.

⁵² See, for instance, Jane’s Sentinel: Kyrgyzstan, 31 October 2000.

⁵³ Rashid, “Epicentre of Terror,” 16-18.

on both accounts, since the stated numbers, even if correct, probably included dependents as well. In actual combat, the number of fighters was at times augmented by Pakistani recruits to the Taliban. The ethnic composition of the movement is also hard to determine. The majority of the fighters within the region apparently belonged to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), although the movement also included many Arabs (an estimated 500 to 600 formed part of Usamah bin Ladin's "055 Brigade" which was deployed as part of the Taliban forces in Afghanistan⁵⁴) and a handful of Chechens. One analysis suggests that of 1,200 IMU fighters, about 600 to 700 were Uzbeks from the Ferghana valley and about 500 were Tajiks who earlier had formed part of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) during the civil war in Tajikistan but who never accepted the peace process. The rest included several dozens of Arabs sent by Usamah bin Ladin, several dozens of Pakistanis, and a handful of Chechens.⁵⁵ By early 2002, most of the surviving Arab Afghans had probably fled Afghanistan. Those who wish to continue the struggle may well have gone to Kashmir, while many no doubt went into hiding in Pakistan or the Middle East, perhaps aided by disaffected elements within the Pakistani Inter-services Intelligence agency (ISI), a long-time sponsor of the Arab Afghan movement.

The Arab Afghan movement and its associated organisations in Central Asia had shown a capacity, and may yet retain the will, to ignite armed conflicts and terrorism in most Central Asian states. They may still constitute the chief threat to security and stability in the region. Yet, they have no united foreign policy objectives except a will to fight anybody who does not follow their own interpretation of what constitutes a good Muslim's life.

The Regional Context

At the heart of the Great Game for Afghanistan lie territory and ideology, often shrouded in religious terms, but what has been at stake has been nothing less than Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. The danger that this would come under the control of extremists appears to have been averted for the moment by the belated but decisive action of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf to curb the most determined of the many groups of Pakistani Islamic extremists.⁵⁶

With few exceptions, most notably the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States in which almost four thousand people died,⁵⁷ the consequences of the war in Afghanistan have so far been regional rather than global. Nonetheless, the Afghan civil war had for a long time had the potential to affect even countries not directly bordering the contested territory, and the Taliban government's recognition of Chechnya did connect the Caucasus to the war. As long as Afghanistan is in turmoil, this potential remains. In order to perceive their long-term effects, it is necessary to examine the divergent responses to the situation in Afghanistan among her six immediate neighbours (Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China) as well as Russia and the United

⁵⁴ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 30 August 2000.

⁵⁵ Ahmed Rashid, "From Deobandism to Batken: Adventures of an Islamic Heritage," CACI Forum Transcription, 13 April 2000.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, Reuters, 31 October 2001.

⁵⁷ See, for instance, *Economist*, 15 September 2001; *Daily Yomiuri*, 11 December 2001.

States – a selection of states that conveniently also constitutes the Group of Concerned Countries, nicknamed “Six plus Two,” formed in October 1997 under the aegis of the United Nations.⁵⁸

PAKISTAN

Objective: The creation of a friendly, Pashtun-dominated government in Afghanistan as strategic depth against India, as well as the prevention of Pashtun separatism in Pakistan.

Means: Support of first the predominantly Pashtun Taliban movement, then Pashtun leader Hamid Karzai.

Allies: None.

Sponsor: China (although unlikely to have supported Pakistan’s former policy of sponsoring the Taliban), currently also the United States.

Proxies: Formerly the Taliban, now probably Hamid Karzai; possibly also the ethnic Pashtun Afghan warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Population: 148.2 million (1998).⁵⁹

Armed forces: 612,000 as well as about 250,000 in paramilitary units, with large forces tied up along the eastern border. Nuclear weapons.⁶⁰ Currently a few thousand American troops in at least four minor air bases in or near Baluchistan.⁶¹

Until late 2001, Pakistan, due to her successes in creating and sustaining proxy extremist movements on two fronts, in Afghanistan as well as Indian Kashmir, had become branded a nuclear-armed rogue state but was also looking increasingly like a failing state. Despite a deliberate attempt (following American pressure since the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States) to move away from this path, Pakistan still suffers from political and social turmoil, Islamic extremism, sectarian violence, and a growing drug problem.⁶² Considering the large numbers of the Taliban’s co-religionists (the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam) in Pakistan and the fact that many religious and political groups there share the Taliban world view, the very example of sustained Taliban rule put the legitimacy of Pakistan’s secular government at risk. This danger has not yet been fully averted. It should be remembered that the first *fatwa* (formal legal opinion or decision of traditional religious scholars on a matter of Islamic law) concerning the *jihad* in Afghanistan was given in Pakistan.⁶³ Moreover, Pakistan’s policy towards the Taliban appeared to a large extent to have been under the control of ethnic Pashtun officers within the armed forces and the intelligence organs, in particular the Inter-services Intelligence agency (ISI). Many thousands of these men fought for their Afghan Pashtun brethren within Afghanistan (together with volunteers from Pakistani

⁵⁸ Rashid, *Taliban*, 66.

⁵⁹ Jane’s Sentinel: Pakistan, 14 November 2000.

⁶⁰ Jane’s Sentinel: Pakistan, 14 November 2000.

⁶¹ RIA Novosti, 22 October 2001.

⁶² Rashid, *Taliban*, 210.

⁶³ Gohari, *Taliban*, xi, 123-4.

Islamic parties),⁶⁴ and appear to identify themselves increasingly with the Taliban and similar Islamic extremist movements within Pakistan (such as the Jamaat-e-Islami movement) rather than with the artificial state construction known as Pakistan.

Paradoxically, Pakistan's very determination and success in supporting extremist groups have allowed these to impose their will on key Pakistani institutions and large segments of Pakistan's population. The fact that Pakistan's political leadership tends to be weak and corrupt only serves to reinforce extremist feelings. In Pakistan, Islamic extremists already have all the ingredients for success, including the convenience of language, a considerable population of Pashtuns inspired by their brethren in Afghanistan, Hanafi Islam, numerous sympathisers, and well-established financial and educational institutions. Since 1998, neo-Taliban groups have banned TV and videos and imposed other outer trappings of Taliban rule in several locations along the Pashtun belt of Pakistan.⁶⁵ Until the Pakistani policy shift following the American decision to intervene in Afghanistan, it appeared probable for these reasons that Pakistan too would collapse. At present, it seems that Pakistan has survived this danger. The possibility still remains, however, and if it were to occur, a key question for Pakistan's neighbours will be whether or not a religious fanatic will gain control over her nuclear weapons programme.

Although Pakistan's strategic planners originally saw a need to ensure the continued rule of a friendly, Pashtun dominated government in Kabul, it can be argued that this policy, as yet not abandoned, today forms a greater threat to Pakistan than to her chief opponent, India. The policy is generally regarded as having originated from two perceived strategic needs: (1) to allow Pakistan the use of Afghanistan's territory for strategic depth in a conventional war against India; and (2) to ensure friendly Pashtun hegemony in Afghanistan so that the ethnic Pashtuns on either side of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border would drop any plans to unite in a single Pashtun nation, and thereby compromise Pakistani territorial integrity.⁶⁶ While the first strategic need may have been valid during the early decades of Pakistan-India enmity (all Pakistan's major cities were located within range of the Indian air force, and Pakistan (unlike the mountainous regions of Afghanistan) was liable to be overrun by Indian mechanised forces, her army having indeed taken heavy losses in tanks during both the 1965 and 1971 wars with India), current developments in air and missile power make this assumption less tenable. As for the second need, it should be remembered that the Afghan government supported a movement among Pashtun tribesmen to establish an independent state, Pashtunistan, in the early years following Pakistan's independence in 1947, leading to sporadic clashes between tribesmen and Pakistani troops.⁶⁷ Despite this, the Pashtuns today are in a better position to compromise Pakistani territorial integrity than they were in the past. Pakistan has certainly helped to arm them to the teeth.

As a further objective, Pakistan – or at least powerful commercial interests within the country – needs to assure safe passage for direct trade and transit routes

⁶⁴ Gohari, *Taliban*, 122-3.

⁶⁵ Gohari, *Taliban*, 127; Rashid, *Taliban*, 93, 187, 194-5; Fredholm, *Islamic Extremism*.

⁶⁶ Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," 22-35; Rashid, *Taliban*, 186-7.

⁶⁷ Gohari, *Taliban*, 126.

to Central Asia.⁶⁸

Before the Taliban movement emerged in 1994, Pakistan supported a number of other Pashtun leaders, first and foremost Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. In fact, the Taliban's initial victories, whether by chance or according to plan, would have been more difficult to achieve had not Hekmatyar's frequent military conflicts with Rabbani's Kabul government (of which Hekmatyar himself from time to time was a member) seriously weakened the governing coalition and its forces.⁶⁹ Hekmatyar lost his last military base in August 1998 and lived in exile in Iran until 26 February 2002, when he was forced to leave due to his outspoken support for the Taliban.⁷⁰ There still remains the possibility that Hekmatyar and commanders remaining loyal to him of the once powerful ethnically Pashtun Hezb-e Islami ("Islamic Party") may again be employed as Pakistan's proxy, if Pakistan finds the current Afghan leaders too independent, or if Afghanistan breaks up.

On the international arena, Pakistan has long relied on support from the United States and, since the early 1960s (against India in particular), also China. However, Pakistan's nuclear policy and her failure to persuade the Taliban to hand over the Arab extremist Usamah bin Ladin gradually eroded the relationship with the United States. China, too, was antagonised by Pakistan's inability to persuade the Taliban to cease the support extended to Uighur separatists in the western Chinese province of Xinjiang.⁷¹ Pakistan was indeed not even successful in preventing her own Islamic extremists from assisting separatists in Xinjiang.⁷² By 11 September 2001, Pakistan stood increasingly isolated and thereby vulnerable to ethnic fragmentation and Islamic extremist takeover.

Since then, General Musharraf, Pakistan's leader after the military coup of 12 October 1999, has dramatically reversed Pakistan's policy of supporting Islamic extremists. Although at first no doubt hesitant due to the strong position of the extremists within the country, Musharraf nonetheless declared his and Pakistan's support for the United States against the Taliban and Al-Qaida. However, by late September 2001 resentment against the policy change was growing in the ISI and armed forces. Musharraf, having worked out a mutually favourable understanding with the United States (which soon came to include substantial aid payments to Pakistan as well as rescheduled or written-off debt, reduced tariff barriers, soft loans, and the removal of sanctions⁷³) and apparently fearful that the agency was plotting his assassination, on 7 October moved against Lieutenant General Mahmood Ahmad, the director of the ISI, as well as Taliban sympathisers within the army, including the deputy chief of staff of the army, General Muzzafar Usmani, just hours before the American and British air strikes against Afghanistan

⁶⁸ Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 190; Rashid, *Taliban*, 189-191.

⁶⁹ Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 180; Gohari, *Taliban*, 19-20.

⁷⁰ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; IRNA, 26 February 2002. His political party, Hezb-e Islami Afghanistan ("Islamic Party of Afghanistan") maintains a web site at www.hezb-e-islami.org.

⁷¹ Jane's Sentinel: Pakistan, 14 November 2000.

⁷² See, for instance, Mark Burles, *Chinese Policy Toward Russia and the Central Asian Republics* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1999), 18, based on "Unwelcome Traffic," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (7 December 1995), 40.

⁷³ BBC, 11 November 2001; Reuters, 15 November 2001; and for a useful summary, *Economist*, 9 March 2002.

began.⁷⁴ Pakistani authorities also detained three influential pro-Taliban extremist leaders, Fazl-ur-Rehman Khalil, Sami-ul-Haq, and Azam Tariq.⁷⁵ As new ISI director, Musharraf appointed General Ehsan-ul-Haq, known as a moderate. Haq immediately replaced the agency's director for covert operations.⁷⁶ On 22 November 2001, when it was clear that the Taliban were losing the war, Pakistan ordered the Taliban Islamabad embassy closed.⁷⁷ Pakistan has since closely aligned herself with the United States. Pakistan's main advantage in the war on terrorism is the fact that only a comparatively minor part of her population seems to favour Islamic extremism. The Islamic parties have never done well in elections, even though their followers were a force to be reckoned with on the streets.⁷⁸ Yet, as many as between 80,000 and 100,000 Pakistanis trained and fought in Taliban units between 1994 and 1999, not counting regular Pakistani troops reported to be serving with the Taliban. Moreover, Pakistan has an estimated five to six thousand religious seminaries that espouse extremist beliefs and continuously teach and inspire the spiritual obligation to engage in *jihad* against the enemies of Islam. They are not likely to meekly abide the government's reaction against them.⁷⁹ For Musharraf, the struggle against Islamic extremism can be said to have just begun.

IRAN

Objective: (1) Prevention of Sunni domination in any future Afghan government; and (2) continued influence in Dari-speaking parts of Afghanistan as well as some level of influence in Iranic-speaking Tajikistan.

Means: Support to Shia forces in Afghanistan.

Allies: Russia, to some extent Tajikistan and (against Pakistan) possibly India.

Sponsor: None.

Proxies: Shia Afghans, including some elements of the Northern Alliance.

Population: 65.8 million (1998).⁸⁰

Armed forces: 538,000 including Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran), with large forces tied up against external threats along the southern and western borders.⁸¹

Iran's foreign and security policy objectives in Central Asia might appear highly ambiguous to the casual observer but are in fact very straightforward, which does

⁷⁴ Arif Azad, "Musharraf Feared Rebellion," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 79 (30 October 2001; www.iwpr.net); *Economist*, 9 March 2002. For a more unfavourable analysis of Musharraf's policy, see International Crisis Group (ICG), *Pakistan: The Dangers of Conventional Wisdom* (Islamabad/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 12 March 2002).

⁷⁵ RFE/RL, 9 October 2001.

⁷⁶ Ahmed Rashid, "US Support for Northern Alliance Rankles Pakistan," *Eurasia Insight*, 22 October 2001 (www.eurasianet.org).

⁷⁷ Reuters, 22 November 2001. See also, for instance, RIA Novosti, 8 November 2001; Dawn.com, 20 November 2001.

⁷⁸ *Economist*, 29 September 2001. See also ICG, *Pakistan*, 5-6.

⁷⁹ Michael Fredholm, "Osama bin Laden and Salafi Islam: More Than a Mere Terrorist Threat," *Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst Biweekly Briefing* 24 October 2001 (www.cacianalyst.org).

⁸⁰ Jane's Sentinel: Iran, 25 August 2000.

⁸¹ Jane's Sentinel: Iran, 17 October 2000.

not, however, provide for simplistic explanations, due to the fact that different state actors – primarily the reformist, essentially secular movement around president Muhammad Khatami and the revolutionary-conservative clerical party of supreme leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei – have different agendas. The former could be said to represent the interests of the state, while the latter represents the ideology of the Islamic revolution. Iran as a whole accordingly suffers from a fundamental dilemma of her foreign relations, clearly visible in the divergent policies towards the non-neighbouring countries of the Middle East and Africa, where Iran has felt compelled to support Islamic radicalism, and Iran's actual neighbours, of far greater importance to the Iranian state because of immediate security concerns. Policy towards the latter appears to be invariably guided by national interests, and especially considerations of national security, should a conflict between the interests of the state and those of the Islamic revolution. Overall policy has been pragmatic since at least the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union, if not before, with Iran acting according to her national interests. Iran's leaders have been careful to maintain good relations with her neighbours, above all with Russia.⁸²

Russia appears, in fact, increasingly as a strong regional ally of Iran. This has been obvious in the growing trade between the two countries since the early 1990s,⁸³ and also in the agreements to expand military co-operation in December 2000 and March 2001.⁸⁴ Russia is also Iran's main foreign supplier of conventional weapons.⁸⁵ Although Russia was initially concerned about the possible spread of Islamic fundamentalism from Iran, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, headed by Yevgenyi Primakov, in 1994 stressed the distinction between "Islamic fundamentalism" and "Islamic extremism" and pointed out that only the latter was a threat to Russia. This paved the way for a more sophisticated policy towards Iran, especially from January 1996 when Primakov became foreign minister.⁸⁶

Until the fall of the Taliban government, Iran's strategy with regard to Afghanistan was apparently to support opposition to the Pakistan-sponsored Pashtun forces to such an extent that a final Taliban military victory would be impossible. This policy was probably expected to force a diplomatic settlement without the need for a direct military confrontation between Iranian and Afghan or Pakistani military forces.⁸⁷ In this policy, Iran also seemed to enjoy the support of Tajikistan, India and Russia.⁸⁸ No doubt Iran retains the option of supporting at least the Afghan Shia forces close to the Iranian-Afghan border. There have been reports of Iranian contacts with these groups,⁸⁹ and such support can be expected

⁸² See, for instance, Edmund Herzig, *Iran and the Former Soviet South* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 19; David Menashri, "Iran and Central Asia: Radical Regime, Pragmatic Politics," David Menashri (ed.), *Central Asia Meets the Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), 73-97.

⁸³ See, for instance, Herzig, *Iran and the Former Soviet South*, 33-4.

⁸⁴ Ed Blanche, "Iranian, Russian Links Ring US Alarm Bells," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 24 January 2001, 21; Igor Korotchenko and Ed Blanche, "Iran Goes Shopping," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 21 March 2001, 18-19.

⁸⁵ Jane's Sentinel: Iran, 17 October 2000.

⁸⁶ Lena Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia: A New Web of Relations* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 30. See also, for instance, Rashid, *Taliban*, 177.

⁸⁷ Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000.

⁸⁸ Jane's Sentinel: Iran, 17 October 2000; Rashid, *Taliban*, 44-5.

⁸⁹ Bidar, "US Set For Long Stay."

to last as long as Pakistan and the United States continue to operate Pashtun forces as proxies in Afghanistan.

The fact that Iran's foreign policy objectives in Central Asia do not appear to include any Islamic revolution does not, of course, rule out clandestine contacts with radical Islamic movements in the region. Little is known about any such contacts,⁹⁰ and Iran appears to have very limited, if any, influence over Islamic groups in Central Asia outside some Shia groups in Afghanistan. One reason may be the difference in faith, since the most active extremist Islamic groups there are Sunni rather than Shia, and in any case until late 2001, they were already supported by Pakistan and like-minded groups in Saudi Arabia.⁹¹ However, the fact that Iran appears to put her relations with Russia first, the governments of the Central Asian states second, and the Islamic movements only third and last indicates that Iran does not attempt to gain influence among extremist groups to destabilise the region but rather as a means of intelligence collection, to keep herself (and perhaps Iran's regional allies) informed about what goes on among radical Muslims. To show sympathy for and augment one's influence among radical movements is not the same as spreading one's ideology.

While it seems clear that Iran is eager to achieve some level of influence in Iranic-speaking Tajikistan and the Iranic Dari-speaking parts of Afghanistan, this appears primarily to be regarded as a cultural rather than religious objective. An interesting example of Iranian pragmatism rather than revolutionary zeal is her educational and media activities in Central Asia. These include regular Persian-language radio and television broadcasts since 1992 for Tajikistan as well as broadcasts in Uzbek to Uzbekistan. However, the television programmes aimed at Tajikistan consists of soap operas rather than the religious broadcasting that dominates Iran's domestic television. Iran has also promised to assist Tajikistan and Turkmenistan with new satellite-based communications systems.⁹²

Iran's pragmatic foreign policy continued unchanged after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks that drove the United States to war in Afghanistan. First, Iran publicly pledged to assist in the rescue of any downed American airmen. Second, reports indicate that direct talks between Iranian and American representatives played a crucial role in promoting the United Nations-sponsored Bonn agreement that led to the creation of the interim Afghan government on 4 December 2001. Iran, for instance, forced Burhanuddin Rabbani to step down, so that the United States could nominate a Pashtun, Hamid Karzai, as leader of the interim government, and Iran accepted the proposition of a broad-based government that includes Pashtun leaders in addition to those of the Northern Alliance.⁹³

The United States has persistently alleged, and in particular since President Bush's 29 January 2002 declaration that an "axis of evil" consisting of the three disparate countries of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea threatened world peace, that Iran has actively aided Usamah bin Ladin's Al-Qaida network, and in particular

⁹⁰ Menashri, "Iran and Central Asia," 93.

⁹¹ Farhad Kazemi and Zohreh Ajdari, "Ethnicity, Identity and Politics: Central Asia and Azerbaijan between Iran and Turkey," Menashri, *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, 66.

⁹² Kazemi and Ajdari, "Ethnicity, Identity and Politics," 61; Menashri, "Iran and Central Asia," 87; Jane's Sentinel: Iran, 17 October 2000.

⁹³ Camelia Entekhabi-Fard, "Afghan Leader's Visit to Iran Hands Political Victory to Reformists in Tehran," *Eurasia Insight*, 27 February 2002 (www.eurasianet.org).

assisted large numbers of Al-Qaida members to escape into Iran where they are said to be protected by Iranian authorities.⁹⁴ These allegations disregard the fact that the followers of Usamah bin Ladin generally hate Shia Iran no less than they hate the United States and have a history of terrorist attacks also against Iranian targets, for instance the bomb at the shrine of Reza, one of the holiest Shia sites, in Mashhad on 20 June 1994, in which at least 26 pilgrims died.⁹⁵ Although a certain number of surviving Al-Qaida members, and in particular their dependents, did escape across the Iranian-Afghan border, many probably by using the services of local smuggling networks, the Iranian authorities appear quietly to have rounded them up, then had them extradited to their native countries.⁹⁶ For this reason, the American allegations of Iran aiding and abetting terrorism by assisting fleeing terrorists to escape are, in most cases, unfounded, and all the more rhetorical as the United States herself has hinted the wish to extradite her Al-Qaida prisoners to their native countries as soon as they have been satisfactorily interrogated.⁹⁷

The same can be said about the recurring American reports that Iran is sending agents into Afghanistan to destabilise the situation, undermine the interim government, and “lure locals away from Karzai’s ruling coalition.”⁹⁸ While Iran no doubt strives to keep herself informed about ongoing events in neighbouring Afghanistan, especially among her co-religionists, this is neither more nor less surprising than the fact that the United States as well as the other neighbours of Afghanistan are doing likewise. Besides, judging from Iran’s long-standing support of the Northern Alliance, the country can be expected to maintain especially good relations with the key ministers in the interim government, who all come from the Northern Alliance. It is accordingly hard to see what Iran could possibly stand to gain by undermining that government. Besides, Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai visited Iran on 24 February 2002 and during a meeting with Ayatollah Khamenei won public endorsement for the interim government.⁹⁹ However, the American policy to single out Iran as the culprit in this kind of activity has led to a large variety of rumours, particularly among the Pashtuns, as well as speculation that the United States will team up with a 20,000-strong ex-Taliban Pashtun tribal army “keen to put a stop to Iran’s interference in the country.”¹⁰⁰ As such rumours only serve to further destabilise the region, and in particular Afghanistan, it is hard to see any other reason for the American allegations than as a rather ill-chosen way to apply political pressure on Iran, presumably in the hope that she will abandon her influence in Afghanistan without a struggle. After all, a Pashtun army, even if beefed up with a few American units and air support, would be unlikely to make any significant impact on Iran’s numerically far superior military forces. A full-scale American military attack on Iran, except by proxy, can almost certainly be ruled out.

⁹⁴ See, for instance, *Economist*, 2 February 2002, 23 February 2002; Ariel Cohen, “The Bush Administration Casts a Wary Eye on Iran,” *Eurasia Insight*, 16 March 2002 (www.eurasianet.org).

⁹⁵ See, for instance, Simon Reeve, *The New Jackals: Ramzi Yousef, Osama bin Laden and the Future of Terrorism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1999), 65-67.

⁹⁶ *Economist*, 23 February 2002.

⁹⁷ See, for instance, *Economist*, 26 January 2001.

⁹⁸ Bidar, “US Set For Long Stay;” Artie McConnell, “Iranian Conservatives Seek to Influence Developments in Afghanistan,” *Eurasia Insight*, 26 February 2002 (www.eurasianet.org); Cohen, “Bush Administration Casts a Wary Eye on Iran.”

⁹⁹ Entekhabi-Fard, “Afghan Leader’s Visit to Iran.”

¹⁰⁰ Bidar, “US Set For Long Stay.”

Despite what can thus only be termed a propaganda war against Iran, and a certain amount of anger engendered within Iran against President Bush because of his “axis of evil” remark, America’s war on terrorism has not caused any apparent change in Iranian policy. It remains pragmatic, which is fortunate for the prospects of the region. It should be noted that so far, the United Nations, the European Union, and the interim government of Hamid Karzai have chosen not to join the United States in her criticism of Iran.

A prominent problem in the world’s understanding of Iranian policies appears to be the exaggerated influence of traditional Middle East experts in the analysis of the meaning and impact of Iranian foreign and security policy. The sudden independence of the former Soviet Central Asian republics changed the ethnic character of the Middle East. The addition of over 50 million people, most of them Muslims but almost none of Arab descent, has irrevocably changed the region.¹⁰¹ As its political focus (if not yet the attention of the world media) shifts eastwards, events on a narrow strip of Middle Eastern land facing the Mediterranean no longer decide every political issue in the Islamic world. Iran has realised this, but quite a few analysts and policy experts in the West still have to catch on.

TURKMENISTAN

Objective: The construction of pipelines through Afghanistan, paid for by a third party and with protection provided by any Afghan government, as a way to revive Turkmenistan’s economy.

Means: Tacit support of Pakistan (and in extension Pakistan’s Afghan allies) and attempts to procure foreign investment.

Allies: None.

Sponsor: None.

Proxies: None.

Population: 4.4 million (1999).¹⁰²

Armed forces: 17-19,000 as well as 12,000 border guards.¹⁰³

Turkmenistan’s chief foreign policy concerns appear to be (1) how to remain neutral while surrounded not only by much larger and militarily more powerful neighbours, such as Iran and Uzbekistan, but also very turbulent neighbours, primarily Afghanistan; and (2) to revive Turkmenistan’s stagnant economy by exporting her natural resources of oil and natural gas.¹⁰⁴ Although the first objective may be achieved by adhering to a policy of neutrality (Turkmenistan

¹⁰¹ Menashri, “Iran and Central Asia,” 78; Paul Goble, “The 50 Million Muslim Misunderstanding: The West and Central Asia Today,” Anoushiravan Ehteshami (ed.), *From the Gulf to Central Asia: Players in the New Great Game* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994).

¹⁰² Jane’s Sentinel, Turkmenistan, 31 October 2000.

¹⁰³ Jane’s Sentinel, Turkmenistan, 26 September 2000; 31 October 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 9-10. See also Murad Esenov, “Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy and Its Impact on the Regional Security System,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 1, 2001, 50-57. For a more detailed study on Turkmenistani policy and its implications, see Michael Fredholm, *The Prospects for Internal Unrest in Turkmenistan*, unpublished paper, Forum for Central Asia Studies, Stockholm University, 2001.

declared herself a “neutral” country in 1993, the United Nations General Assembly recognised Turkmenistan’s status of “permanent neutrality” in December 1995, and Turkmenistan’s military doctrine was amended to underline the neutral status in September 1996¹⁰⁵), the second may be impossible without risking involvement in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan is surrounded by countries with oil and natural gas resources of their own, among them Iran, Russia, Kazakstan, and Uzbekistan. These neighbours have accordingly little interest in supporting Turkmenistan’s exports as long as they can sustain the export of their own resources.¹⁰⁶

This predicament leaves Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov, the state’s increasingly autocratic ruler, only one choice: to promote an export pipeline corridor through Afghanistan to Pakistan, from which oil and gas can be shipped onwards to South Asia and the Far East.

The idea of building a trans-Afghan pipeline from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean was apparently born in Pakistan. In December 1991, a Pakistani delegation visiting Ashgabat expressed its interest in building a gas pipeline across Iran and Afghanistan to Pakistan.¹⁰⁷ In 1992, Turkmenistan and Pakistan agreed jointly to develop their energy sources and build a gas pipeline and a highway connecting the two countries across Afghanistan.¹⁰⁸ The Argentinian oil company Bidas finalised plans for such a venture in 1994. In 1995, the American oil company Unocal also announced plans for a pipeline in response to what it regarded as a threat from Bidas to corner the market.¹⁰⁹ Afghan troops of the Taliban movement recently formed by Pakistan were expected to secure the highways and routes for oil and gas pipelines. An important objective of the plan was that the energy routes would exit through Pakistan, the ally of the United States, rather than through Iran. For this reason, Turkmenistan has continuously maintained friendly relations with Pakistan as well as Pakistan’s Afghan allies.¹¹⁰ The latter include Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai, who during his first state visit to Pakistan’s capital Islamabad on 8 February 2002 declared that the construction of a pipeline carrying natural gas from Turkmenistan across his country to Pakistan was “very essential.”¹¹¹ It is fair to conclude that American and Pakistani interest in Turkmenistani natural gas has survived the war on terrorism and that Turkmenistan’s policy may yet pay off.

Despite Turkmenistan’s preoccupation with Pakistan, her geographical position means that she cannot ignore maintaining good relations also with Iran. In May 1996, a new railway link connecting Turkmenistan and Iran was inaugurated, joining Tejen in Turkmenistan to the Iranian city of Mashhad through the twin towns of Serakhs in Turkmenistan and Sarakhs in Iran. The project was expected to eventually form part of a larger transport and energy corridor connecting Kazakstan and the whole of the former Soviet railway system with the Persian Gulf and, equally ambitiously, China with Turkey and the Middle East,

¹⁰⁵ Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 9-10, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Ochs, “Turkmenistan: Pipeline Dream II,” *Caspian Crossroads Magazine* 1 (Winter 1995), Internet edition; *Economist*, 8 January 2000; Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 63-4, 72.

¹⁰⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Zed Books, 1994), 203.

¹⁰⁸ Esenov, “Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy,” 51-2. See also Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 146.

¹⁰⁹ Rashid, *Taliban*, 151.

¹¹⁰ Rashid, *Taliban*, 152; Marsden, *Taliban*, 131, 136.

¹¹¹ RFE/RL *Central Asia Report* 2: 6 (14 February 2002), Internet edition.

thus also forming a second entry point into Europe bypassing Russia.¹¹² Turkmenistan's railway network also includes a branch from Mary to Turgundi in Afghanistan by way of Gushgy (Kushka) in Turkmenistan, which since winter 1994, when Taliban units first appeared on the Turkmenistani border, has seen significant amounts of traffic bound for Afghanistan.¹¹³

Turkmenistan is increasingly being used as a transshipment point for illegal drugs from Afghanistan.¹¹⁴ This means that Turkmenistan is directly affected by further instability there.

The highly personalised nature of Turkmenistan's foreign policy makes it hard to predict her responses to different initiatives or security threats. However, it should be noted that the numbers and state of Turkmenistan's armed forces offer little hope of an efficient defence against any real, external threat. It is possible that Turkmenistan considers Uzbekistan to be a greater threat than Afghanistan.¹¹⁵ If so, a neutral position in great power politics can be regarded as an eminently suitable strategy. Besides, the essentially opportunist neutrality of Turkmenistan allows her to play Uzbekistan, Turkey, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and indeed, before its fall, the Taliban movement of Afghanistan against each other.

¹¹² Anette Bohr, *Uzbekistan: Politics and Foreign Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 48; Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 13-14, 49-50; Jane's Sentinel: Turkmenistan, 31 October 2000.

¹¹³ Esenov, "Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy," 52. See also Jane's Sentinel: Turkmenistan, 31 October 2000.

¹¹⁴ Jane's Sentinel, Turkmenistan, 26 September 2000.

¹¹⁵ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central Asia: Fault Lines in the New Security Map* (Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, Asia Report 20, 4 July 2001), 17.

UZBEKISTAN

Objective: Survival as a secular state, nation-building, and the assumption of a prominent regional role.

Means: Military action; encouragement of ethnic Uzbek guerrillas in Afghanistan and (at least until 1998) Tajikistan.

Allies: Currently co-operating with the United States; good although hardly cordial relations with Russia, China, Turkey, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, and (while under US influence) Tajikistan.

Sponsor: To some extent the United States, at least for the duration of her involvement in Afghanistan.¹¹⁶ Russia earlier offered unconditional support in terms of security and counter-terrorism, but excepting emergencies, Uzbekistan remains unwilling to accept a senior partner and prefers to distance herself from Russia.¹¹⁷

Proxies: Ethnic Uzbek warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum and Mahmud Khudoibordiev (the latter reported, not necessarily correctly, to have been murdered in September 2001).

Population: 23.9 million (1999).¹¹⁸

Armed forces: 135,000 in addition to 19-21,000 internal security troops and border guards; apparently 3,000 Russian troops primarily concerned with air defence;¹¹⁹ 1,500 American troops stationed at Khanabad air base in support of US operations in Afghanistan.¹²⁰

Uzbekistan, a comparatively populous and militarily strong state in the region, seems determined not only to ride out the storms of various forms of potential trouble but also to carve out a leading role within the region under her increasingly autocratic president, Islam Karimov. Although Russia has offered unconditional support in terms of security and counter-terrorism,¹²¹ President Karimov earlier than any of the other former Soviet Central Asian leaders showed a determination to reduce his dependence on Russia and since has determinedly avoided returning his country into the rank of Russian clients. Instead Uzbekistan has embarked upon an ambitious project of nation-building, attempting to create an Uzbek national identity by promoting the Uzbek language and Uzbek culture.¹²² Uzbekistan is also distancing herself from Russia militarily, for instance by replacing obsolete military equipment with imports from the West rather than Russia. She has also achieved self-sufficiency in energy, another important means of reducing Russia's influence. In the process, Uzbekistan has grown increasingly authoritarian, suppressing all potential sources of opposition to presidential rule.¹²³

¹¹⁶ Bidar, "US Set For Long Stay."

¹¹⁷ Jane's Sentinel: Uzbekistan, 31 October 2000.

¹¹⁸ Jane's Sentinel: Uzbekistan, 15 August 2000.

¹¹⁹ Jane's Sentinel: Uzbekistan, 15 August 2000; 31 October 2000.

¹²⁰ Bidar, "US Set For Long Stay."

¹²¹ Jane's Sentinel: Uzbekistan, 31 October 2000.

¹²² Birgit N. Schlyter, *Language Policy in Independent Uzbekistan*, Stockholm: Forum for Central Asian Studies, Stockholm University, 1997.

¹²³ Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 9, 34-5, 62; Neil J. Melvin, *Uzbekistan: Transition to Authoritarianism on the Silk Road* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), 29-30, 43, 45-7, 91, 100-103.

Uzbekistan appears adamant in charting her own course, outside the pale of Moscow. Karimov is a pragmatic ruler who is unlikely to bow either to Russian or Western demands as long as he can find a third way. An example was the clouded relationship with the West during the early years of Uzbek independence because of Karimov's suppression of all opposition. From 1995, Karimov began to improve his relations with the United States by such pro-American means as seeking good relations with NATO, avoiding links with Iran, and declaring some support for Israel in the United Nations. Karimov's policy paid off, and the United States for a while began to see Uzbekistan as a strategic partner.¹²⁴ As American interest in the region from 1998 seemed to wane, Uzbekistan found herself increasingly on her own. In June 2001, Uzbekistan accordingly joined the Shanghai Organization for co-operation (SOC, the descendant of an organisation established on 26 April 1996 by an agreement signed in Shanghai, at first known as the Shanghai Five after its five members China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), apparently in search of allies to help her deal with the armed opposition group known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Yet, when the SOC on 10 and 11 October 2001 held an emergency meeting in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek to discuss the American-led air strikes on Afghanistan, Uzbekistan declined to participate.¹²⁵ Since Uzbekistan had just a few days earlier concluded an agreement with the United States on American use of an Uzbekistani air base,¹²⁶ it seems fair to assume that Uzbekistan hence regarded herself as an American ally and no longer felt the need to belong to the SOC. Another important consideration for Uzbekistan was no doubt the fact that in return for the use of the base, the United States proposed to triple aid to Uzbekistan.¹²⁷

This pragmatism as well as the highly personalised nature of Uzbekistan's foreign policy make it hard to predict Uzbekistan's responses to different initiatives or threats. Moreover, since the United States and Uzbekistan began to co-operate in the war on terrorism, the Uzbekistani government has been able to use this co-operation as an excuse for curbing its remaining domestic opposition, whether of secular or clerical origin. Karimov, probably correctly, perceived that the West would play down its earlier emphasis on human rights issues as long as the war against extremists and terrorists lasted.¹²⁸

Despite much rhetoric about the danger posed by Islamic fundamentalists, Karimov is not likely to hesitate in establishing advantageous contacts with anyone ("If it is beneficial for us, we will enhance relations even with the devil himself," he is reported as saying, although in an admittedly different context¹²⁹). In April 1995, for instance, he surprised the international community by meeting Tajik opposition leader Akbar Turajonzoda, the highest Islamic authority in Tajikistan until his dismissal by the government in 1993 (Turajonzoda is since March 1998 a

¹²⁴ Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 108-9.

¹²⁵ Sultan Jumagulov, "Uzbekistan 'Rebuffs' Shanghai Pact," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* (19 October 2001; www.iwpr.net).

¹²⁶ RFE/RL, 12 October 2001.

¹²⁷ See, for instance, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 February 2002.

¹²⁸ See, for instance, Chinara Jakypova and Vladimir Davlatov, "US Campaign Poses Threat to Central Asia," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 103 (8 February 2002; www.iwpr.net).

¹²⁹ Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 54.

loyal first deputy prime minister to Tajikistani president Rahmonov¹³⁰). Karimov's intention was no doubt to forge an alliance between Tajikistan's northern Khojandi elite, traditionally well connected to Uzbekistan, and the Tajik opposition as a move to thwart the influence that Moscow had begun to wield with the current Kulobi-based Tajikistani government.¹³¹ Occasional, direct contacts with the Taliban were also regarded as necessary, beginning with the joint visit of the Uzbekistani and Turkmenistani foreign ministers to the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, in Kandahar in spring 1999.¹³²

Uzbekistan is the only country in the region which appears to seriously entertain thoughts about claiming territory from her neighbours, in particular Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The internal borders established between the Soviet Central Asian republics between 1924 (when the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was established) and 1936 (when Karakalpakstan, formerly part of Kazakhstan, passed to Uzbekistan) resulted in the division of major population groups of the same ethnic background among the new republics (which for the first time in the region's history were ethnically defined, each with a dialect chosen and elevated to national language, and with a largely invented national history and new national identity). A related problem is the fertile Ferghana valley, a backward as well as the most densely populated area in all of Central Asia (home to more than ten million people) and a centre for Islamic traditionalism, since 1929 (when Tajikistan was taken out of Uzbekistan and established as a Soviet republic) divided among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.¹³³

This Uzbek ambition has shown itself in a number of attempts to interfere in the local politics of the neighbouring states as well as in an attempt on 25 January 2000 to unilaterally move the border markers separating Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan five kilometres into Kazak territory along a sixty-kilometre stretch of border.¹³⁴ Undoubtedly, President Karimov wanted to live up to the old reputation of the Uzbeks as "famed for bad nature, swiftness, audacity, and boldness," mentioned by the seventeenth-century historian Mahmud ibn Wali.¹³⁵

The apparent failure of Tajikistan as a viable state due to the civil war after independence in 1991 may have strengthened Uzbekistan's interest in acquiring northern Tajikistan with its large population of ethnic Uzbeks. Despite this possibility, any border adjustments of this dignity would be likely to bring out a host of similar disputes elsewhere. Besides, it is unlikely that Uzbekistan will raise this question as long as both countries regard themselves as American allies.

A large Uzbek population also inhabits the Osh area of Kyrgyzstan, and some of them have agitated for the area to be transferred to Uzbekistan.¹³⁶ Uzbekistan possesses enclaves inside Kyrgyzstan unconnected by land corridors to Uzbekistan proper but has published official maps according to which a land corridor exists, which may indicate that Uzbekistan seeks a unilateral solution to

¹³⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Tajikistan: An Uncertain Peace* (Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, Asia Report 30, 24 December 2001), 5 n.22.

¹³¹ Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 52.

¹³² Korgun, "Afghan Factor," 138-146.

¹³³ Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 22-3; "The Fergana Valley: A Magnet for Conflict in Central Asia," *IISS Strategic Comments* 6: 6 (July 2000).

¹³⁴ See, for instance, Reuters, 26 January 2000; RFE/RL *Newsline*, 27 January 2000.

¹³⁵ Edward A. Allworth, *The Modern Uzbeks: From the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1990), 10.

¹³⁶ Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 23; Jane's Sentinel: Kyrgyzstan, 31 October 2000.

this territorial dispute too.¹³⁷ The incursions of armed Uzbek Islamic extremists into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan's assistance in repulsing the extremists have served to highlight the Uzbek influence in this part of Kyrgyzstan. It is clear that Kyrgyzstan does not possess the armed strength to repulse such incursions without outside help, nor is she likely to be able to do so in the near future (as of late 2000, the Kyrgyz armed forces consisted of no more than at most 12,200 men and approximately 5,000 border guards, as well as some recently formed self-defence militia units¹³⁸) despite some attempts at military reform and recruitment. Nonetheless, and despite tensions because of trade and the division of water supplies (Kyrgyzstan is upstream), talks between the two countries on border demarcation have proceeded successfully.¹³⁹ Besides, Kyrgyzstan too is currently an American ally.¹⁴⁰

Uzbekistan has not hesitated to send security forces into neighbouring states to arrest political leaders opposed to President Karimov, sometimes without notifying the authorities of the neighbouring country or only doing so after the event. In January 1998, for instance, Uzbek opposition leader Zakirjan Normatov was arrested in Osh in Kyrgyzstan and taken to Uzbekistan.¹⁴¹ Already in June 1994, two dissidents, Murod Zhoraev and Erkin Ashurov, were seized in Almaty, Kazakhstan, by Uzbek security forces.¹⁴²

Uzbekistan controls or at least wields a strong influence over a number of ethnic Uzbek warlords from neighbouring countries. The Afghan Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, once a plumber, was used as a force against the Afghan Taliban movement, but also against extremist groups of the Uzbek Islamic opposition then (and probably still¹⁴³) based in Afghanistan and Tajikistan.¹⁴⁴ While Dostum no doubt regarded those as his enemies no less than his Afghan adversaries, and Uzbekistan appears to have paid handsomely for the favour in the form of military aid, supplies, and hard cash,¹⁴⁵ the chief beneficiary was Uzbek President Karimov.

A similar warlord although of lesser stature was the Tajikistani, ethnically half-Uzbek, Colonel Mahmud Khudoiberdiev. He was reported to have been murdered in September 2001, although no evidence has been presented to prove his death. In February 1996, August 1997, October 1997, and again on 4

¹³⁷ Arslan Koichiev, "Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan Map Out Their Differences," *Eurasia Insight*, 13 March 2001 (www.eurasianet.org).

¹³⁸ Jane's Sentinel: Kyrgyzstan, 31 October 2000.

¹³⁹ Nancy Lubin and Barnett R. Rubin, *Calming the Fergana Valley: Development and Dialogue in the Heart of Central Asia* (New York: Century Foundation Press, 1999), 64-5; Jane's Sentinel: Kyrgyzstan, 31 October 2000.

¹⁴⁰ See, for instance, Asel Sagynbaeva, "Kyrgyzstan: Mixed Reactions to US Base," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 100 (25 January 2002; www.iwpr.net).

¹⁴¹ Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 38.

¹⁴² Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 36.

¹⁴³ Galima Bukharbaeva, "US Fails to Curb IMU Threat," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 103 (8 February 2002; www.iwpr.net).

¹⁴⁴ Rashid, *Taliban*, 149. See also Barnett R. Rubin, "Tajikistan: From Soviet Republic to Russian-Uzbek Protectorate," Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994), 217; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 180, 189, 191; ICG, *Tajikistan*, 26.

¹⁴⁵ Lena Jonson, *The Tajik War: A Challenge to Russian Policy* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), 54 n.41; Jane's Sentinel: Afghanistan, 17 October 2000; Rashid, *Taliban*, 53-4, 56, 72; Magnus and Naby, *Afghanistan*, 69, 166, 189; Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 99.

November 1998, Khudoiberdiev staged armed uprisings in western Tajikistan, close to the Uzbekistani border, from his main bases of support in the Kurgan-Tyube and Khojand regions. Each time, he was said to have invaded Tajikistan from camps located inside Uzbekistan, with military support and no doubt encouragement from Uzbekistan. The reason for Uzbekistan's support may have been the exclusion since the peace agreement of 1997 from Tajikistan's new coalition government of Khojand-based political elites who traditionally used to dominate Tajikistani politics and supplied all the republic's top leaders from 1937 to the civil war of 1992-1997. The strong Uzbek minority in Khojand has ensured that this elite retains the political support of Uzbekistan.¹⁴⁶

The greatest threat to the government of president Karimov appears to be the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which from bases in Afghanistan and Tajikistan during 1999 and 2000 launched major raids into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹⁴⁷ Skirmishes, although perhaps geographically limited to Kyrgyzstan, continued in 2001.¹⁴⁸ To counter this threat, Karimov has not only supported Dostum but also had the state borders mined in the districts believed to be at greatest risk.¹⁴⁹ This includes the borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Other measures to limit cross-border movement include the blasting of mountain passes, construction of fortifications at exposed points, and intensified surveillance of borders. The population of several border villages has also been permanently relocated and the villages destroyed, ostensibly for the safety of the villagers but possibly to deny the extremists a support base.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 23, 53-4; Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 96-7; Jonson, *Tajik War*, 35-6. See also ICG, *Tajikistan*, 12. For some further information on Khudoibordiev, see, for instance, Charles Fairbanks et al., *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council of the United States and the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2001), 49.

¹⁴⁷ Bakhrom Tursunov and Marina Pikulina, *Severe Lessons of Batken* (Sandhurst: Conflict Studies Research Centre, November 1999), Internet edition; Ahmed Rashid, "Namangani's Foray Causes Concern Among Central Asian Governments," *Eurasia Insight*, 5 February 2001 (www.eurasianet.org).

¹⁴⁸ Arslan Koichiev, "Skirmishes Suggest IMU is Changing Tactics," *Eurasia Insight*, 16 August 2001 (www.eurasianet.org); Bukharbaeva, "US Fails to Curb IMU Threat." See also International Crisis Group (ICG), *The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign* (Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, Central Asia Briefing, 30 January 2002); ICG, *Tajikistan*, 26.

¹⁴⁹ See, for instance, RFE/RL *Newsline*, 7 February 2001; *Times of Central Asia*, 6 October 2000.

¹⁵⁰ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central Asia: Islamist Mobilisation and Regional Security* (Osh/Brussels: International Crisis Group, Asia Report 14, 1 March 2001), 22, 24.

TAJIKISTAN

Objective: Presidential faction: National survival and, perhaps, nation and state-building. United Tajik Opposition (UTO) faction: Fundamentally the same, although some former UTO leaders (including Mirzo Zioev) appear to be far more interested in narcotics trafficking and maintain links with Islamic extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Means: Attempts to procure foreign support together with carefully selected patronage within the country.

Allies: Russia, Iran, and (at least at present) the United States.

Sponsor: Russia.

Proxies: Presidential faction: Elements within Afghanistan's Northern Alliance (including until his death in 2001 its military commander Ahmad Shah Masud). Zioev faction: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).

Population: 6.1 million (1999).¹⁵¹

Armed forces: 7,000, in addition to about 2,500 former UTO fighters more or less integrated into the armed forces; perhaps as many as 25,000 paramilitary soldiers of local, very dubious allegiance; 14,500 Russian border guards, the rank-and-file often locally recruited Tajiks; about 8,500 Russian regular troops;¹⁵² an undisclosed number (perhaps a thousand) of troops from the United States and NATO countries.

In 1991, the Communist Party leaders in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe suddenly found themselves the rulers of an independent country, despite the fact that it is questionable whether a state by then could be said to have formed in the territory nominally under their control. Due to the 1992-1997 Tajikistani civil war, the government never succeeded in achieving complete control over Tajikistan's territory, large parts of which remain under the personal control of various local warlords. Most of these have a background as local leaders within the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), the opposition umbrella organisation dominated by Islamic groups that since the Peace Accord in June 1997 has transformed itself into part of the coalition government of Tajikistan. The other part of the coalition, under President Emomali Rahmonov, represents the old Soviet *nomenklatura*.¹⁵³

The Tajikistani civil war reinforced existing regional differences so that politics, ideologies and even religion, none of which in fact appears to be particularly important in the power structure of the country, currently mean far less than regional loyalty. The war was fundamentally a war among local groups such as northern Khojandis, southern Kulobis, Garmis, Pamiris, and so on who struggled for supremacy. Since the war began, if not even before, there exists only a weak conception of Tajikistan as a unified national identity. The Rahmonov government includes several former UTO leaders, among them not a few field commanders who, relying on their personal forces, continue to control their local bases of power.¹⁵⁴ Yet, Rahmonov since 2000 has enhanced his position,

¹⁵¹ Jane's Sentinel: Tajikistan, 26 September 2000.

¹⁵² Jane's Sentinel: Russia, 2 January 2001; Jane's Sentinel: Tajikistan, 31 October 2000.

¹⁵³ Jonson, *Tajik War*, 1; Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 51-4.

¹⁵⁴ Bohr, *Uzbekistan*, 51-4.

consolidated presidential power, and succeeded in increasing his control over important areas of the country by carefully selected patronage. The only possible contender for Rahmonov's power may currently be Mamadsaid Ubaidulloev, the chairman of the upper chamber of the parliament and mayor of the capital Dushanbe, who is reputed to enjoy the support of the Ministry of National Security.¹⁵⁵

Among former UTO field commanders who retain sizeable personal forces is the Minister for Emergencies and Civil Defence, Mirzo Zioev. Widely suspected of narcotics trafficking and ties to extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Zioev was involved in the latter's armed incursion into neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in 1999.¹⁵⁶ The fact that a leading government member was able to use what ostensibly were government troops (in Zioev's case, 400 men recruited by him personally among the 800 fighters of his UTO command¹⁵⁷) for involvement in armed aggression against a neighbouring country does not bode well for Tajikistan's future. Although Tajikistan as a state never failed as completely as Afghanistan, prospects for building a national identity remain poor.

The Tajikistani government is dependent on Russia. There is also a considerable Iranian influence, but since Russia and Iran share the same foreign policy objectives in Tajikistan, the two states complement each other rather than compete for Tajikistani favours. Nonetheless, Russia appears to wield the most influence with the Tajikistani government, which due to the civil war appears to have little choice but to follow Russia's dictates.¹⁵⁸

Russian and Iranian influence ensured that at least the Tajikistani presidential faction offered support to Afghanistan's Northern Alliance and opposed the Taliban. It should be noted that UTO forces were allowed bases on Afghan territory controlled by the Afghan Tajik warlord Masud during the civil war. The Zioev faction, on the other hand, appears to have had (and may still have) close ties with some of the Arab Afghan extremist groups based in Afghanistan, among them the IMU. Such groups in their turn maintained links with the Taliban. Besides, in 1996, a few UTO leaders who became government members, such as Davlat Usmon, established personal contacts with the Taliban, even as most UTO groups turned to Masud (Davlat Usmon in March 2000 lost his position as finance minister).¹⁵⁹

America's war on terrorism has brought some changes to Tajikistan, although, so far, it remains unclear whether the American presence will have a lasting impact on the frail state. The Americans arrived early, probably due to their, and especially Britain's, long relationship with leaders of the Afghan Northern Alliance (many of whom were once trained by members of Britain's Special Air Service regiment) who operated an embassy in Dushanbe, rather than through Tajikistani government channels.¹⁶⁰ An understanding between the United States

¹⁵⁵ ICG, *Tajikistan*, 4-5.

¹⁵⁶ Tursunov and Pikulina, *Severe Lessons of Batken*. See also Rashid, "Namangani's Foray."

¹⁵⁷ Anthony Davis, "Tensions in Central Asia," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 1 September 1999, 20.

¹⁵⁸ Jonson, *Tajik War*, 9-12, 37-8; Herzig, *Iran and the Former Soviet South*, 31.

¹⁵⁹ Tursunov and Pikulina, *Severe Lessons of Batken*; Rashid, "Namangani's Foray;" Alexander Kniazev, "Afghanistan: Religious Extremism and Terrorism, the Year 2000," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 5, 2000, 82; for more information on Davlat Usmon, see ICG, *Tajikistan*, 6.

¹⁶⁰ *Economist*, 29 September 2001. See also, for instance, Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 80; David C. Isby, *War in a Distant Country: Afghanistan-Invasion and Resistance* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1989); Reeve, *New Jackals*, 167-8; regarding the embassy, see ICG, *Tajikistan*, 24.

and Tajikistan was apparently reached in late September 2001, as the first small groups of troops from the United States and NATO countries seem to have arrived on 24 September and by early November, at the latest, were allowed the use of three air bases in Tajikistan, including the one at Kulob already being used by the Northern Alliance (the other two bases were probably Qurghonteppa (Kurgan-Tyube) and either Dushanbe or Ayni).¹⁶¹ The United States finally appears to have negotiated a mutually profitable deal with Rahmonov by the end of November, as he on 4 December 2001 publicly announced Tajikistan's readiness to admit foreign access to her air bases.¹⁶² The apparent unwillingness of the Tajikistani government to acknowledge the American presence may indicate a desire not to antagonise Islamic groups within the country. The American presence must have been known to Russia and Iran, which during the war against the Taliban continued to supply the major share of the aid to the Northern Alliance. The United States, on the other hand, may possibly regard the bases as a means to decrease the level of Russian and Iranian influence in Tajikistan. Their success in this, if there has been any, remains unknown.

The Tajikistani government appears to have taken advantage of its co-operation with the United States to suppress the domestic opposition, whether secular or clerical. As in Uzbekistan, the Tajikistani government has, probably correctly, perceived that the West would play down its earlier emphasis on human rights issues as long as the war lasted.¹⁶³

CHINA

Objective: Eradication or at least containment of separatism within China; access to energy sources and transportation routes; retention of influence over Pakistan.

Means: Increased security in Xinjiang and political pressure on foreign states on whose territory Xinjiang separatists are active.

Allies: None.

Sponsor: None.

Proxies: Pakistan; possibly groups in Afghanistan.

Population: 16.9 million in sparsely populated Xinjiang, total population 1.3 billion.¹⁶⁴

Armed forces: 288,400 (in Lanzhou military region of which Xinjiang forms one of five military districts), out of a total of 2,480,000 as well as some 12 million paramilitary personnel. Nuclear weapons.¹⁶⁵

China is unlikely to regard her relationship with Afghanistan and the Central Asian states as of primary importance. A far greater Chinese concern is her relative position in the post-Cold War strategic environment, and in particular her relation to the only remaining superpower, the United States. This obviously means that

¹⁶¹ ICG, *Tajikistan*, 25; RIA Novosti, RFE/RL, 24 September 2001.

¹⁶² RFE/RL, 5 December 2001.

¹⁶³ See, for instance, Jakyпова and Davlatov, "US Campaign."

¹⁶⁴ Jane's Sentinel: China, 20th September 2000.

¹⁶⁵ Jane's Sentinel: China, 12 January 2001; 4 December 2000.

China sees the build-up of new American military bases in the region as a source of some alarm. However, Central Asia holds a place in China's view of global strategy also for other reasons, primarily (1) the region's oil and natural gas resources, which are likely to become vital for China's growing energy needs; (2) its potential as a market for Chinese goods as this would enhance the economic development of China's inland regions; and (3) its likely support for Turkestani separatism, Islamic or otherwise, in China's westernmost province, Xinjiang, since 1955 the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region (XUAR).¹⁶⁶

Since at least 1997, China has repeatedly emphasised that she has no choice but to augment domestic energy sources through imports from abroad, in particular Central Asia and Russia. Yet another Chinese interest in Central Asia, although perhaps not of immediate concern, is the creation of a regional rail network which, unlike the sea routes, would be beyond the control of the United States. Such a land transportation route, if fully functional, could in case of future conflict with the United States be used to move vital natural resources, consumer goods, and in particular war materials into and out of China. It is accordingly unlikely that China would support any move to increase the influence of the United States in the region, or the coming to power of a pro-American government in any country bordering China. The Chinese leaders would also no doubt prefer to retain influence over Pakistan, due to the continuing strategic objective of containing India and, in case of war, the hope to force her into a two-front war, a strategy that also includes Tibet and Burma.¹⁶⁷

However, the strategic importance of Pakistan weighs lightly compared to the possibility of growing ethnic unrest in Xinjiang. The Taliban leaders were known to support Islamic extremist movements among the local Uighurs and other Turkic peoples,¹⁶⁸ as did members of the Arab Afghan movement.¹⁶⁹ It is significant that China chose to abstain from voting rather than veto the decision of the Security Council of the United Nations to impose economic sanctions on the Taliban regime of Afghanistan on 15 October 1999, and the imposition of new sanctions including an arms embargo on 19 December 2000, despite the fact that her proxy Pakistan was opposed to sanctions.¹⁷⁰ The imposition of sanctions on the Taliban leadership appeared indeed to be as much aimed at Pakistan as the Taliban, pushing Pakistan further down the path of being labelled a rogue state. Moreover, China in 1997 reportedly erected a fence along her 750-km border with Pakistan to deny Islamic extremists in Pakistan easy access to militant Uighurs in Xinjiang.¹⁷¹

To maintain stability in Xinjiang and to fight separatism, China has emphasised the need for economic development of Xinjiang. One way to achieve this is through increased trade with the Central Asian republics. However, this policy is a double-edged sword, as it also brings the risk of increased religious

¹⁶⁶ See, for instance, Burles, *Chinese Policy*, 5.

¹⁶⁷ Burles, *Chinese Policy*, 23, 39. See also, for instance, Michael Fredholm, "The Tatmadaw: Burma's Armed Forces and Prospects for the Future," *The Democracy Movement in Burma since 1962* (conference on 25-26 September 1999 organised by the Center for Pacific Asia Studies at Stockholm University).

¹⁶⁸ Anthony Davis, "Xinjiang Learns to Live with Resurgent Islam," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 1996, 417-21.

¹⁶⁹ Burles, *Chinese Policy*, 18.

¹⁷⁰ Thalif Deen, "New UN Sanctions on Taliban," *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 3 January 2001, 4.

¹⁷¹ Burles, *Chinese Policy*, 18.

activity by Islamic groups based in those countries. Cross-border trade may also be used by extremists to bring financial or material support to like-minded groups within China. If separatist activity in Xinjiang or political instability in Central Asia were to increase, the Chinese leaders may decide to restrict activity along the border, regardless of the consequences for economic development.¹⁷²

As a final note, one may speculate on whether China maintains her own clandestine contacts and proxies within Afghanistan, and if so, how strong her influence is in the region.¹⁷³ China supported various Afghan factions during the period of war against the Soviet Union in much the same way as the West did, but little if any information on the Chinese involvement leaked out to the public until years after the war ended.¹⁷⁴ A first Chinese delegation went to Kabul to meet the Taliban on 31 January 1999.¹⁷⁵ It would be in China's interest to keep herself informed about, if not be a participant in, future developments in Afghanistan.

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Objective: Eradication or at least containment of separatism within Russia; retention of influence over Central Asia.

Means: Military bases in Tajikistan and political pressure on foreign states on whose territory separatists originating in the Russian Federation are active; the ability to supply selected Afghan commanders with arms and financial assistance should Russia wish to reassert her regional influence.

Allies: To some extent Iran and India.

Sponsor: None.

Proxies: The presidential faction within Tajikistan's government; key leaders within Afghanistan's Northern Alliance (at least until the fall of the Taliban in late 2001; no doubt some Russian influence remains).

Population: 147.2 million, although irrelevant for the purposes of this study.¹⁷⁶

Armed forces: About 8,500 regular troops and 14,500 border guards (in Tajikistan), out of a total of 1,180,000. Nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁷

Like China, Russia has problems of higher priority and more pressing engagements elsewhere. For Russia, the primary priority is and will no doubt remain in the foreseeable future her relations with the United States and Europe. However, the existence of Russian military bases in Tajikistan as well as the ongoing war against separatists as well as Islamic extremists in Chechnya¹⁷⁸ means that Russia cannot stay quite as aloof as China. In addition, the unstable situation in Afghanistan and the rise of Islamic extremism since the emergence of the Taliban in 1994 prompted several former Soviet Central Asian states to seek renewed relationships with Russia as they realised the continuing importance of Russia as a regional

¹⁷² Burles, *Chinese Policy*, 14, 57.

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Gohari, *Taliban*, 139.

¹⁷⁴ See, for instance, Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 65-79.

¹⁷⁵ Rashid, *Taliban*, 232.

¹⁷⁶ Jane's Sentinel: Russia, 31 October 2000.

¹⁷⁷ Jane's Sentinel: Russia, 2 January 2001.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Fredholm, "The Prospects for Genocide in Chechnya and Extremist Retaliation against the West," *Central Asian Survey* 19: 3/4 (September-December 2000).

guarantor of stability.¹⁷⁹ This development, in particular since Vladimir Putin rose to power in 1999, again increased Russia's influence in the region, apparently without her actively seeking it. The last point cannot be over-emphasised. Post-Soviet Russia has far greater problems, and other priorities, than any contemplation on whether it would be worthwhile to return to Central Asia, a region that by the end of the Soviet era was regarded as an economic burden rather than an asset.¹⁸⁰ It has been noted that Western analyses of the foreign policy objectives of Russia and of the other former Soviet republics has for a long time been narrowly focused on whether Russia will reassert herself as the main power in Central Asia. The dominance of scholars specialising in the Russian field of the currently widely despised discipline of Area Studies has often been mentioned as the cause of this apparent problem.¹⁸¹ However, such speculations are beside the point, as Russia remains a far more important part of Eurasia than the new Central Asian republics for reasons of geography, size and military potential if nothing else.

Besides, by late 2001 the whole framework for Russia's continued regional influence appeared to have collapsed overnight, as the United States in her war against the Taliban established military bases in several countries close to Afghanistan, and American aid in unprecedented amounts began to pour into the region.¹⁸² Despite the outcry of some domestic hawks, Russia did not object to the establishment of new American military bases, chose not to send troops to fight the Taliban nor, after their fall, to keep the peace, and apparently played no significant role in the United Nations-sponsored Bonn agreement of 4 December 2001. While these decisions caused some domestic criticism,¹⁸³ they only confirmed the continuity of Russia's policy of regarding relations with the United States and Europe as her first priority. Yet, Russia was not without influence in Afghanistan. Although Russia may perhaps have preferred to see Burhanuddin Rabbani as head of the interim government, the chief ministries of this government are controlled by members of the Russian-supported Northern Alliance. While the United States through sheer military and political power prevailed in picking Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun, as head of the new government, Russia has long financed and armed the Northern Alliance and can be expected to retain a certain level of influence with its Tajik and Uzbek leaders. Besides, Hamid Karzai might well have been acceptable to Russia and Northern Alliance alike, for the very reason that his personal power base among the Pashtuns was comparatively weak.¹⁸⁴ Russia and Iran also supported the Northern Alliance, against the wishes of the United States, in its rapid advance that led to the fall of

¹⁷⁹ Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 91, 102.

¹⁸⁰ Melvin, *Uzbekistan*, 100.

¹⁸¹ See, for instance, John Schoeberlein, "Marginal Centrality: Central Asian Studies on the Eve of a New Millennium," Mirja Juntunen and Birgit N. Schlyter, *Return to the Silk Routes: Current Scandinavian Research on Central Asia* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1999), 23-44.

¹⁸² See, for instance, Reuters, 15 November 2001 (on Pakistan); AP, 19 November 2001; *International Herald Tribune*, 19 February 2002 (on Uzbekistan); RIA Novosti, 11 December 2001; RFE/RL *Central Asia Report*, 7 March 2002 (on Kyrgyzstan); and RFE/RL *Newsline*, 10 January 2002 (US restrictions on the transfer of military equipment to Tajikistan lifted).

¹⁸³ *Economist*, 15 December 2001; Igor Torbakov, "Putin Faces Domestic Criticism over Russia's Central Asia Policy," *Eurasia Insight*, 26 February 2002 (www.eurasianet.org).

¹⁸⁴ See, for instance, Ahmed Rashid, "Hamid Karzai Moves From Lightweight to Heavyweight in Afghan Politics," *Eurasia Insight*, 10 December 2001 (www.eurasianet.org).

Taliban power in Kabul on 13 November 2001.¹⁸⁵

Afghanistan remains a concern for Russia because of her potential to cause instability in the region,¹⁸⁶ but the country forms no direct threat to Russian territory. Russian policy towards Afghanistan will no doubt remain pragmatic, as was exemplified by the fact that Russia provided support to Masud and his followers, those very Afghan warlords who fought Russia in the 1979-1989 Afghan war.¹⁸⁷ For this reason, Russia can be expected to continue supporting at least some commanders within the Northern Alliance as long as this seems necessary to contain any Islamic extremism coming out of Afghanistan. If Russia in the future sees the need to meddle in Afghan politics, she can certainly do so by supplying favoured, probably Tajik or Uzbek commanders with weapons, supplies, and financial support. These were also the means available to Russia before the American intervention. In other words, despite appearances Russia has not yet surrendered her regional influence.

While Pakistan still protected the Taliban, Russia applied pressure on Pakistan to encourage the Taliban to root out, or at least keep passive, those Islamic extremists that Russia considered a threat.¹⁸⁸ Russia's good relations with Pakistan's arch-enemy India no doubt emphasised the impact of this message on the Pakistani leadership, since any further development in Russo-Indian military co-operation would be a direct threat against Pakistan. Indeed, Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, and to some extent India appeared to form a nascent alliance based on a common interest in countering Pakistan's ambitions and local proxies in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁹ Although presumably dormant since the American involvement in Afghanistan began in late 2001, this alliance can easily be revived as the Americans pull out, if the participants continue to regard Pakistan as a security threat.

Yet, it was Islamic extremism, not Pakistani ambitions in a geopolitical sense, that Russia saw as a threat to herself and to regional stability. For a while, it looked as if Russia would be sufficiently pragmatic to establish direct contacts with the Taliban leadership in exchange for the Taliban curbing the activities of foreign Islamic extremists in Afghanistan and in particular the Arab Afghans. Such a policy would have served Russian interests better than a direct confrontation with Pakistan. Political pressure and diplomacy were also with some success brought to bear on various Muslim states, especially Azerbaijan, before Russia's 1999 invasion of Chechnya.¹⁹⁰ Although it is hard to single out any immediate Russian gains due to this policy, its long-term impact could have been considerable, had not the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks persuaded the United States to intervene.

Russia remains unlikely in the near future to involve herself directly in substantial military operations in Central Asia. She is far more likely to assist the Central Asian rulers, and probably favoured Afghan commanders, with military support, intelligence, advisors, and international diplomacy. As long as Russian forces remain in Tajikistan, Russia will remain a key player in the region.

¹⁸⁵ See, for instance, *Economist*, 17 November 2001; *Guardian*; Interfax, 15 November 2001.

¹⁸⁶ Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 30-31.

¹⁸⁷ See, for instance, Isby, *War in a Distant Country*.

¹⁸⁸ See, for instance, Reuters, 29 September 2000; RFE/RL *Newsline*, 2 October 2000.

¹⁸⁹ See, for instance, Rashid, *Taliban*, 177.

¹⁹⁰ RFE/RL *Newsline*, 29 September 1999 and 1 October 1999. See also, for instance, Saudi Press Agency, 20 September 1999.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Objective: Until 11 September 2001, no geopolitical objective except the extradition of Usamah bin Ladin; since then, the removal of the Taliban government and the destruction of the Al-Qaida. In the long term, possibly geopolitical gains in connection with Caspian oil and gas resources.

Means: Financial aid, international recognition, air strikes, and as a final resort, direct military action.

Allies: NATO, the European Union, Pakistan (since 22 November 2001, when Pakistan ordered the Taliban Islamabad embassy closed), to some extent Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and especially Kyrgyzstan.

Sponsor: None needed.

Proxies: Apparently Hamid Karzai.

Population: 274.6 million (2000), although irrelevant for the purposes of this study.¹⁹¹

Armed forces: Until September 2001, none in the region although some ability to strike a limited number of targets from the air. An undisclosed number (certainly several thousands) of troops from the United States and NATO countries has since been deployed to bases in Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan. Total military forces include about 1,482,000 (1996/1997). Nuclear weapons.¹⁹²

In the short term, the United States until recently saw only limited, if any, geopolitical objectives in Central Asia (despite some claims to the contrary¹⁹³) but remained concerned about a number of potential developments such as civil war, the breakup of states, nuclear proliferation, and anti-Western forms of political Islam. The United States was (and is) also interested in the oil resources of some countries in the wider vicinity of Central Asia, notably Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, and the means to move the oil out from the region along routes that are safe and, equally important, do not offer strategic or trade benefits to any rivals of the United States.

After the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States did express an interest in the region that culminated in 1997. Rhetorical public statements, for instance by United States Secretary of State Strobe Talbott in 1997, claimed that

¹⁹¹ Barry Turner (ed.), *The Statesman's Yearbook: The Politics, Cultures and Economies of the World* (London: Macmillan, 2000).

¹⁹² *Statesman's Yearbook*.

¹⁹³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 148-150. See, however, Gregory Gleason, *The Central Asian States: Discovering Independence* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 155; Fairbanks et al., *Strategic Assessment*, 96-100. Compare also the early enthusiasm of Ariel Cohen, "U. S. Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Building a New 'Silk Road' to Economic Prosperity," *Heritage Foundation Background* 1132, 24 July 1997, with the more subdued Ariel Cohen, "U. S. Interests in Central Asia: Testimony before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific/House International Relations Committee, 17 March 1999" (Washington, DC: United States House of Representatives, 1999), and Ariel Cohen, "U. S. Interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus: The Challenges Ahead," *Central Asia and the Caucasus 2*, 2000, 12-25. Cohen's frequently changing views on Central Asia often reflect, and thereby serve as a reliable guide to, the changing realities of current US policy.

the whole of the Caucasus and Central Asia was of strategic interest to the United States. American soldiers in September the same year participated in a highly publicised military exercise with the newly created joint Kazak-Kyrgyz-Uzbek peace-keeping battalion within the framework of the Partnership for Peace programme.¹⁹⁴ However, American interest had by the following year shifted to Islamic extremist leader Usamah bin Ladin, an issue that since 1998 totally overshadows American relations with the region.

Although the United States naturally wishes to play a role in the economic growth of Central Asia, her chief interests and highest priorities are – and are likely to remain despite some signs to the contrary – China (especially as a Pacific power) and Russia.¹⁹⁵ As long as Russia stays relatively stable, democratic, and above all, friendly, the small countries surrounding Afghanistan are of comparatively minor importance. One should also note that the United States and Russia share a concern about Islamic extremism. The United States is likely to tacitly support, or at least not oppose, steps taken by Russia to reduce the threat from such groups in Central Asia as well as on her own territory, even if this increases Russian influence within the region. Likewise, Russia has shown that she is not opposed to the deployment of American troops to the region, as long as their purpose is to fight Islamic extremism.

In light of these American concerns, it is curious to see how easily purely domestic American politics create absurd twists in her foreign policy. A relevant case concerning Afghanistan was the single-issue policy of forcing the extradition of Islamic extremist leader Usamah bin Ladin. During the years 1998-2000, it seemed that the one United States policy for Afghanistan was the extradition or extermination of a single individual of foreign origin who currently happened to live in Afghanistan. Compared to this objective, everything else including energy resources, conflict resolution, support of democracy, human rights questions, and indeed the presence of other Islamic extremists beside Usamah bin Ladin appear to have paled in importance.¹⁹⁶ The United States only seemed able to move on in 2000, probably due to more pressing events at home, such as the presidential election. A new policy towards Afghanistan and Central Asia was only developed after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States.

At first, the new policy objectives appeared to have been limited to the removal of the Taliban government and the destruction of the Al-Qaida. For this purpose, the United States first established working relationships with a number of states within physical reach of Afghanistan. One important question was the establishment of American military bases. An understanding between the United States and Tajikistan was apparently reached in late September 2001, as the first small groups of troops from the United States and NATO countries seemed to have arrived on 24 September and by early November, at the latest, were allowed the use of three air bases in Tajikistan, including the one at Kulob.¹⁹⁷ In early October 2001, an agreement was also reached with Uzbekistan.¹⁹⁸ The United States currently has 1,500 American troops stationed at Uzbekistan's Khanabad air

¹⁹⁴ See, for instance, Jonson, *Russia and Central Asia*, 14-15.

¹⁹⁵ Menashri, *Central Asia Meets the Middle East*, 9-10.

¹⁹⁶ Rashid, *Taliban*, 176-7, 182.

¹⁹⁷ ICG, *Tajikistan*, 25; RIA Novosti, RFE/RL, 24 September 2001.

¹⁹⁸ RFE/RL, 12 October 2001.

base where runways are in the process of being upgraded.¹⁹⁹ By January 2002, American troops were also preparing the ground for a military base at Manas airport, close to Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek, expected to house some three thousand soldiers from NATO countries.²⁰⁰ Soon after, an agreement was signed with provisions for the deployment of American and French troops there.²⁰¹

Bases were also established by 11 October, at the latest, in Pakistan, where military airports in the towns of Pasni, Panjgur, and Dalbandin (all in Baluchistan), as well as Jacobabad (in Sind, close to the Baluchistan border) were soon used by troops from the United States and perhaps NATO countries.²⁰² It should be noted that none of these is a major Pakistani air base, which suggests that Pakistan remained wary about the American presence. Besides, some of these bases soon came under threat from local Islamic extremist groups, which seems to have made the American forces move a number of times.²⁰³ By 29 October, a first base was also established at Dara-e Sut in northern Afghanistan, on territory controlled by the Northern Alliance.²⁰⁴ There are currently several thousand troops from the United States and NATO countries in Afghanistan, the latter chiefly but not exclusively British and French, apparently mainly operating out of Bagram air base near Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif.²⁰⁵

The American long-term plans for Central Asia remain unclear, and may not yet have been finalised. Yet, it is possible that in particular the build-up of a strong American military presence in Kyrgyzstan at a time when the American operations against the Taliban are already concluded, is intended to serve as the means to acquire lasting strategic leverage in the region. If so, the American military presence may achieve two political goals: diminishing Russia's ability to influence the region through Russian support of individuals, perhaps local political leaders, and establishing a new, major surveillance post on China's activities in the region.²⁰⁶

It should be noted that according to an agreement between the United States and Kyrgyzstan signed in December 2001, the United States received very favourable conditions for her military deployment, including not only extensive use of the country's only international airport and a 37-acre military base but also the provision that American military personnel are immune to prosecution by Kyrgyzstani authorities and are free to enter and leave the country without hindrance, and to wear uniforms and carry arms.²⁰⁷ These are fundamentally the same terms that the United States acquired in Japan and South Korea (after the Second World War), two countries where the United States established a lasting

¹⁹⁹ Bidar, "US Set For Long Stay."

²⁰⁰ Sagynbaeva, "Kyrgyzstan."

²⁰¹ RFE/RL, 13 February 2002.

²⁰² See, for instance, VOA News, 11 October 2001; RIA Novosti, 19 October 2001, 22 October 2001.

²⁰³ See, for instance, RIA Novosti, 19 October 2001.

²⁰⁴ Reuters, 30 October 2001.

²⁰⁵ See, for instance, Bidar, "US Set For Long Stay;" RIA Novosti, 2 December 2001; *Daily Yomiuri*, 11 December 2001.

²⁰⁶ Chinara Jakypova, "Kyrgyzstan: US Bolsters Strategic Plans For Region," *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 98 (11 January 2002; www.iwpr.net).

²⁰⁷ Jakypova, "Kyrgyzstan."

military presence.²⁰⁸

In the long term, there is also the possibility that groups within the United States, governmental or commercial, desire geopolitical gains in connection with Caspian oil and gas resources, and in particular the opportunity to build pipelines across Central Asia.²⁰⁹

Conclusion

The failure of Afghanistan as a state, and its hijacking by extremist Islamic groups who may well have coveted the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme, formed the greatest threat to Central Asia as a region for several years. All neighbouring states including Pakistan desire a stable Afghanistan at peace rather than in violent anarchy. However, their responses to the Afghan turmoil have been widely divergent, which despite public appearances to the contrary continues to cause enmity among them and encourage the support of different factions within Afghanistan. So far, Russia, Iran, Tajikistan, and to some extent India appear to have formed a nascent alliance based on a common interest in countering Pakistan and her erstwhile proxy in Afghanistan, the Taliban movement. Uzbekistan, meanwhile, follows a very active but pointedly independent security policy aimed almost as much against Russia as it was aimed at the Taliban. Turkmenistan, on the other hand, has realised her weakness and has chosen to stay neutral although fundamentally friendly towards Pakistan and whoever is in charge in Afghanistan. China is more concerned about separatist tendencies on her own territory. The United States entered the picture only recently, and did so by first playing a major part in the destruction of the chiefly Pashtun Taliban government, then reasserting her support to another Pashtun leader, Hamid Karzai.

Although the desire of these countries to combat extremism and terrorism is, for the most part, genuine, they remain competitors in the game for domination of Afghanistan. The prize fought over is not so much Afghanistan's territory – or even the opportunity to build one's own, favoured pipeline across this territory – but the means to secure an outcome favourable to each country's particular national interests. Nonetheless, the territories of Afghanistan are the tangible object at stake, and the struggle for lasting domination over them may well in time result in the partition if not outright fragmentation of what since 1747 has been the Afghan state. Despite the efforts of the United States and Pakistan in installing and supporting the interim government headed by Hamid Karzai, it is by no means certain that his leadership will ensure the survival of Afghanistan as a unified country. None of the tensions between the various ethnic groups of the country, exacerbated by more than two decades of civil war, has been satisfactorily resolved.

Any attempts at conflict resolution in Afghanistan must take this possible

²⁰⁸ See, for instance, Ralph A. Cossa, *The Major Powers in Northeast Asian Security* (Washington, DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, McNair Paper 51, August 1996). Although the US occupation force was withdrawn from Korea in 1949, a small group of military advisors remained in place, and in the following year, US forces returned on the side of the United Nations in the Korean War. Sohn Pow-key, Kim Chol-choon, and Hong Yi-sup, *The History of Korea* (Seoul: Korean National Commission for Unesco, 1970), 332.

²⁰⁹ See, for instance, Rashid, *Taliban*, 160-182.

fragmentation into account. The Afghan civil war was to a large extent sustained by foreign aid agencies. The provision of humanitarian aid has weakened rather than strengthened the stability of the state by allowing warlords the means to prolong the war. Rather than arguing about who has the right to form a legitimate government of Afghanistan and, if an undemocratic regime assumes power, whether to impose sanctions or not, the West needs to realise that Afghanistan has failed as a state and there is currently very little point in pretending otherwise. This situation was not rectified by the mere fall from power of the Taliban or the instatement by foreign powers of a more amenable government.

To resolve the Afghan conflict, the international community must either accept the fact that Afghanistan has already (and under current conditions perhaps irreversibly) fragmented along ethnic lines, and divide the failed country into independent or at least fully autonomous territories, or prepare for a long period of direct government of Afghanistan by an outside administration, backed up by foreign or United Nations forces. The alternative of instating an ostensibly broad-based government and then pull out all foreign forces, would merely be to abandon Afghanistan to continued warfare. Unfortunately, to break up the country may well cause further but perhaps temporary regional instability, as neighbouring countries will attempt to influence or even assume control of territories inhabited by their ethnic brethren in Afghanistan. Rule by foreign troops, however, despite the facade of respect for Afghanistan's territorial integrity, will only postpone the conflict between different ethnic groups. This policy, or the abandonment of Afghanistan to renewed warlordism, will cause further resentment against the West and will no doubt encourage the very extremism and terrorism that the international community wishes to eradicate.

The failure of Afghanistan as a state is not without its regional consequences. The continued viability of Tajikistan in her present form may end if Russia releases her hold over the country. Nuclear-armed Pakistan has also for a number of years shown all too familiar signs of a failing state, although there, at least, the Musharraf government may yet be able to stem the tide.

