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AFGHANISTAN AND TADJIKISTAN: DESTABILISING FACTORS FOR SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

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The struggle for power in Tadjikistan and Afghanistan poses a threat to regional stability. Moreover, foreign interference in both states leads towards the destabilisation of the region. Though Tadjikistan has been stabilised due to foreign mediation, the ethnic minorities in Afghanistan want to get rid of Pashtoon domination (the largest 'ethnic group', comprising 45 per cent of the Afghan population) which gets support from external powers. Tadjikistan, which borders Afghanistan, directly influences the ongoing internal power rivalries on the Afghan political scene. Thus both states have become victims of internal and external power struggles. This paper is an attempt to analyse the destabilising factors and the possible implications for the South and Central Asian region if the Tadjik-Afghan problem is not resolved peacefully.

BACKGROUND

After the disunion of the Soviet Union, five Central Asian states got independence status. Among the five states, Tadjikistan is the most underdeveloped. On the one hand, a civil war broke out in 1992, causing the death of 50,000 persons, 500,000 were displaced and 70,000 left the country to take refuge in Afghanistan.¹ On the other hand, the exit of Mohammed Najibullah from the Afghan political scene in April 1992 raised the moral of the Islamic forces dominated by the Tadjik opposition at that time. There were four million Tadjiks in Afghanistan, the largest in any Central Asian state. The Tadjik opposition continuously received support from Afghanistan. The former Afghan Pashtoon Prime Minister, Gulbadin Hikmatyar, trained hundreds of opposition Tadjik militants, while the former Afghan Tadjik Defence Minister, Ahmad Shah Masood, armed his supporters in Tadjikistan's opposition Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). Furthermore, the President of Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabbani, also accused the governments of Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan of interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. He also alleged that Uzbekistan was fuelling civil war in Afghanistan by helping Uzbek leader Abdul Rasheed Dostum's forces with fuel, war planes and spares for aircraft. On the contrary, Dostum levels counter allegations against Masood that he received military and other assistance from Tadjikistan.² Thus Afghanistan is clearly divided on ethnic lines between Pashtoon and non-Pashtoon. The non-Pashtoon element supported by India, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Uzbekistan and Tadjikistan. The ruling establishment of Tadjikistan believes that turmoil in Afghanistan has directly affected Tadjikistan. The Tadjik Prime Minister, Abdul Jalil Samadov, during his visit to Britain, expressed concern about the civil strife in Afghanistan and maintained that if civil war in Afghanistan did not come to an end, it would eventually spread to other areas.³ There are blood ties and linguistic affinity between the two states, naturally the civil war in Afghanistan has a more direct impact on Tadjikistan than on any other republic of Central Asia.⁴

When the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan regime brought revolution in 1979 with the help of the Soviet government, the Soviet Union deployed 15,000-20,000 technical and administrative personnel, mostly of Uzbek and Tadjik origin, in order to establish cordial relations between the minorities of Central Asia and Afghanistan.⁵ The Soviet Union also delivered a message that the Soviet intervention was a friendly gesture of a neighbouring country.⁶

In Tadjikistan the Islamic opposition is sympathetic to the Islamic revolution in Iran. During the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union, there was a rise in Islamic militancy in Tadjikistan. The Soviets arrested the front rank leaders of the Islamic opposition; leaders like Abdullah Saidov and Immuddin Ahmedov, while the IRP leader, Himmatzade, hid in Afghanistan.

TADJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN: AFTER THE SOVIET DISINTEGRATION

As it has been mentioned that in 1992 a civil war started in Tadjikistan. This was after Tadjikistan's neo-communists took control of the country. The Tadjik opposition received strong support from Afghanistan. The Afghan government accused the Russian-backed Tadjik forces of violating Afghan airspace and borders. Thus the Tadjik-Afghan border became the centre of clashes between Afghan-based Tadjik rebels and Russian border guards.

The situation improved when the Afghan government sent conciliatory signals in May 1995 and got a positive response from the Tadjik government. Both sides showed mutual tolerance for two reasons: first, the emergence of the Pashtoon-dominated Talaban threatened the non-Pashtoon government in Kabul; and, second, a shift in the Russian attitude towards the Rabbani regime and its concern over the rising popularity of the Islamic fundamentalist Talaban. In Tadjikistan, Russia, Iran and Uzbekistan initiated a dialogue between the Tadjik opposition and government in order to accelerate the peace process in the region and indirectly consolidate the Rabbani government in Afghanistan. There have been five rounds of talks held between the Tadjik government and the Opposition, which provides a positive result.

However, a UN sponsored ceasefire was signed on 20 July 1996 between the government and the opposition in Ashkhabad. It called on the Tadjik government and the armed Islamic opposition to "Cease military and other hostile activities inside the country".⁷ The ceasefire was an extension of Tehran's accord, signed in 1994.

THE RISE OF THE TALABAN

In a significant development, the Talaban captured Kabul in October 1996. The forces of Rabbani took shelter in the Panjsher valley and vacated Kabul. The leadership of the Talaban emerged from amongst the disgruntled young Afghan refugees studying in the "Deni-Madrassas", around Quetta and Peshawar in Pakistan. They are mostly Sunni Pashtoons, ages vary from 15 to 50. They have been trained by semi-literate Maulvis of Madaris, therefore members of the Talaban are very hard-line orthodox Muslim believers. It has been said that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence has trained them. The success of the Talaban threatens the regional powers. Iranians have some strong reservations about it because of the orthodox belief of the Sunni Pashtoon Talaban. Iran supports Hazara Shiets. Russia fears growing religious extremism in the region will spill over into Tadjikistan. Moreover, it has been reported that the reactivation of training camps for Islamic militants in the Afghan provinces of Khost and Kunar provide easy recruits for sectarian organisations. According to an official, "These boys are battle-inoculated, have fought in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Tadjikistan and Chechnya ...".⁸

According to a US Department of State release, Patterns of Global Terrorism, Harkat-ul-Ansar, is described as a Kashmir militant group formed with the objective of continuing the armed struggle against non-believers and anti-Islamic forces. The US Department listed it for its links to "terrorist operations" in Kashmir, Burma, Tadjikistan, Bosnia and North America. In Tadjikistan, Hizbollah-Mujahidin members have served and trained Tadjik resistance elements.⁹ In this scenario, the rise of the Talaban emerged as a destabilising factor in the South and Central Asian region. In this grim situation, Russia and the Central Asian states held an emergency summit of the CIS in order to formulate a strategy. The summit took place in Almaty and steps were taken to reinforce the defence of the CIS's southern frontiers, especially Tadjikistan's, and tighten security along the

borders with Afghanistan. The presence of the Taliban in Kabul raised security concerns in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.¹⁰ Actually, the Central Asian Republics (CARS) concern was the possibility of Afghanistan being ruled by a group of religious extremists. The leaders of CARS have been facing numerous problems at home. Any new extremist trend or element in the power structure of Afghanistan would destabilise their governments. The pro-communist government in Tajikistan was involved in internal strife, trying to secure its southern border against Afghan infiltrations linked with the opposition. Uzbekistan has ethnic connections with Uzbeks living in northern Afghanistan. Dostum receives fuel and most of his requirements from Uzbekistan and he would not like to disturb his relationship with Uzbekistan.¹¹ Additionally, the Uzbek government joined Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation in dispatching a 25,000-member peacekeeping force to guard Tajikistan's borders with Afghanistan. Being the biggest non-Russian member of the CIS in terms of population, Uzbekistan contributed the largest number of forces.¹²

EXTERNAL RESPONSE TO TADJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

External powers are directly and indirectly involved in the Afghan-Tadjik imbroglio. These states are Russia, India, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and China.

RUSSIA

The Russian involvement in Tajikistan can be seen from different angles. First, the then Soviet Union was directly involved in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Second, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Russians formulated a 'near abroad' policy, meaning a policy to protect the borders of the CIS, which starts from Tajikistan. Third, Russia feels a rising fear that Islamic fundamentalism may spill over into Tajikistan. Fourth, out of 25 million ethnic Russians living in the new states of the former Soviet Union, nearly 10 million reside in the areas now comprising Central Asia.¹³

In May 1992, Russia and all the CIS members except Turkmenistan took a major step by signing the Collective Security treaty. It was further expanded in July 1992 when it was agreed to set up a force for rapid deployment in any area of conflict within the CIS. In January 1993, Russia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed an agreement whereby it was accepted that the external border of the CIS is also the border of Russia. Presently, Russia has deployed more than 15,000 troops and has stationed the 201st Motorised Rifle division in Tajikistan.¹⁴

Moreover, Russia feels the rising sentiments of pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Russians are of the view that Uzbekistan's interest in Central Asia is driven by pan-Turkic urges. If Uzbekistan wants to become the champion and serve the interest of Uzbek communities residing in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan then it will encourage Turkic nationalism which naturally galvanise Pashtoon and Tadjik nationalism. The Russian leadership is closely watching the ongoing fractional fighting in Afghanistan. Russia's ulterior motive is to keep Islamic fundamentalism away from the Central Asian states, as suits Russia's 'near abroad' policy. For this reason Russia actively participated in a two-day meeting in Almaty on 10 February 1996 along with Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Palestine and Azerbaijan. The meeting aimed to create an Asian version of the OSCE and solve conflicts like the civil war in Afghanistan, the India-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir and the Arab-Israel conflict in a peaceful atmosphere.¹⁵

Domestically, a military coup took place in Tajikistan aimed to topple President Imamali Rakhmanov's government.¹⁶ It was alleged that a mutinous army had close links with the Islamic opposition. However, Russia fully supported Rakhmanov's government in the crisis. Russia wants a democratic broad based national government in Afghanistan.

INDIA

Historically India had very cordial relations with the former Soviet Union. Since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India has developed relations with all Central Asian states. The leaders of the

Central Asian states have visited India and Indian delegations have visited Central Asia. The Tadjik Prime Minister, Abdullahjanov, visited India in February 1993 and the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs visited Dushanbe in June 1994, the first official visit by any high-ranking Indian official to Tadjikistan. The Russian strategy is to involve India in intra-Tadjik talks in order to limit Pakistan's role in the Tadjik conflict. It suits India because it has drawn a parallel between the situation in Kashmir and the border threat to Tadjikistan from Afghanistan—religious fundamentalism, violence and cross-border interventions.¹⁷ India also tried to marginalise Pakistan's role in Afghanistan's internal affairs by supporting the Rabbani government because that very government was supported by Iran, Russia and other Central Asian states. India wants to isolate Pakistan in the region. Moreover, by criticising religious extremist elements, India gets support from the West also. In this way, India's role in the Tadjik-Afghan crisis is very significant and based on a calculated strategy.

PAKISTAN

After the Central Asian states gained independence, Pakistan was desperate to develop friendly relations with them. Unfortunately, the civil war in Afghanistan and Tadjikistan would not permit Pakistan to play any constructive role in the region. The third round of inter-Tadjik talks between the opposition and the government held in Islamabad under UN mediation, did not give any substantial result. Pakistan's role is questionable. Russia and Tadjikistan allege that Pakistan has trained Islamist militants who are aiming to overthrow the neo-communist regime in Dushanbe. Moreover, it has been alleged that Pakistan has also trained the Talaban on Pakistani soil, which is an element of destabilisation in the region. Officially Pakistan has denied these charges and raised its voice for a broad-based government in Afghanistan and constructive dialogue between the Tadjik government and opposition.

IRAN

Iran's policy vis-à-vis the Central Asian states is to cultivate economic social, political and cultural links with them. Tadjikistan has no border with Iran, but has racial and linguistic affinities. Presently, Iran is following a policy of neutrality in the Tadjik conflict and fully supports UN efforts to solve the crisis. Iran hosted the second round of UN-sponsored talks in Tehran in June 1994. But in 1992, Iran was backing different political groups. The exit of Najibullah from the Afghan political scene provided an opportunity for the Mujahidin to establish an Islamic government. Iran welcomed the victory of the Mujahidin in Kabul and hoped the victory would boost the morale of the Islamic opposition in Tadjikistan. But, the political changes in the region have isolated Iran. The situation in Afghanistan changed after the Talaban took Kabul. Iran had supported the Rabbani loyalist Ismail Khan who controlled Heart against the Pashtoon Talaban. The bitter opposition of Iran towards the Talaban is due to the brutal killing of pro-Shiah Afghan leader Ali Mazari, the chief of the Hizb-i-Wahdat.¹⁸ Moreover, as a multi-ethnic state, Iran would not like to get involved in Tadjikistan because it will have far reaching implications for Iranian society. Iranian fundamentalism is dominated by "Marja-i-Taqalid", which was never effective in Sufi-dominated Sunni Tadjik society. Furthermore, Iran would not like to weaken relations with Russia, whose forces under the CIS are presently in Tadjikistan.

TURKEY

Secular, western-oriented Turkey is the best option for Central Asian states. The problem for the Central Asian states' ruling oligarchy is to find an ideology which suits the current trends in politics. The Central Asian states turn towards Turkey as a model of a modern state. They find Kemalist ideology appealing with its fundamental principles of secularism, nationalism and democracy, which fit well with traditional Central Asian society.¹⁹ Another significant factor is Turkey's ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious closeness to the Turkic states of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Central Asian states get international support from the US, Russia and the EU to develop relations with Turkey, rather than fundamentalist Shiite Iran. On the contrary, Farsi-speaking Tadjikistan endeavours not to show its preference for the Turkish

model because the Tadjik government wants to neutralise Iran, which is supporting the Tadjik opposition.²⁰

Moreover, an ancient rivalry exists in the Central Asian states between two ethno-cultural worlds: Turan and Iran. The former is Turkic-speaking and the latter Farsi-speaking people. The conflict has accelerated with the passage of time. The Farsi speaking world, represented by Iran, Tadjikistan and parts of Afghanistan feels threatened by the expansion of Turan, represented by Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. In this way, the real rivals are Russia, China, Iran and Turkey. The idea of a pan-Turkic state and Turkic commonwealth is also in the pipeline, but Russia, China and Iran have their reservations. However, in the post-Cold War era, when ideologies have been transformed, the Turkish secular model is valid for Central Asia only because Turkish idea of a secular, democratic nation state is in a position to control militant Islamic revivalism in the region.

CHINA

With the passage of time China has emerged as a powerful actor influencing the Central Asian region. China's main concern is to check the influence of Islamic fundamentalism in its Xinjiang province, where the Uyghur Muslims are demanding a separate state, Uyghuristan. Ethnic unrest in Xinjiang has increased since 1989 and the Chinese authorities have crushed demonstrations.²¹ The Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region of China occupies an important position in Asia, bordering Mongolia, Tadjikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan and Jammu Kashmir. Xinjiang is the only autonomous region where Muslims are in majority.²² China views Xinjiang as a bridge between China and Central Asia. Moreover, China uses Xinjiang as a site for nuclear testing. The region has vast unexplored petroleum and mineral reserves and immense agricultural potential. The Chinese authorities have been facing ethno-religious resurgence fuelled by a pan-Turkic and Islamic secessionist movement in Xinjiang.²³ It has been reported that the arms for the uprising came from the Afghan Mujahidin, routed through Pakistan via the Karakoram highway.²⁴ China noted with concern the activities of some 200 activists of Pakistani religious parties that are engaged in propagating their brand of religion in Xinjiang province. The Chinese authorities described this phenomenon as an interference in its internal affairs.²⁵

The ethnic-religious civil wars in Afghanistan and Tadjikistan have caused discomforts in China. Both the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and pan-Turkism affects Xinjiang region. Moreover, issues like cross-border infiltration of drugs, arms and subversives also bothers China.

In order to control these subversive activities, China has developed very cordial relations with the ruling neo-communist establishments of the Central Asian states. Both are confronting the same problem. Sensing the situation, Kazakhstan initiated the idea of an Asian version of the OSCE. The founding members are China, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Palestine, Russia, Tadjikistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan.²⁶ China welcomes the idea and the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister, Jian Degouan, said that the treaty for "strengthening confidence in military matters in frontier regions" was already drafted and ready for signing by heads of state at a summit that would be held in Shanghai.²⁷ It has been mentioned that Xinjiang region is the centre of Islamic fundamentalist forces, which is a common problem for China and Tadjikistan. The Tadjik president Rakhmanov paid a five-day visit to China. The two presidents signed a series of bilateral co-operation agreements. The two leaders signed agreements covering economic, political, technological, cultural, civil and criminal judicial co-operation.

Besides, they also signed accords on environmental protection and academic exchanges. China and Tadjikistan also have agreed a regional security treaty, signed in April 1996, creating an 8,000 km-long demilitarised zone along the borders between China and the Central Asian states. The other signatories are Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Tadjikistan has a 500 km common border with China's Xinjiang region, which is the trouble spot for the Chinese authorities. In this way, China feels secure by developing relations with the Central Asian states.

THE UNITED STATES

The major concerns of the United States towards Afghanistan and the Central Asian states are: first, to neutralise Islamic fundamentalist forces; second, to control small arms trafficking; third, to control drug trafficking. The State Department released Patterns of Global Terrorism, according to which there are several militant groups operating in the region and struggling against nonbelievers and anti-Islamic forces. Significantly, the Muzaffarabad-based militant Kashmiri group, Harkat-ul-Ansar, is listed by the US State Department for their links with “terrorist operations” in Kashmir, Burma, Tadjikistan and Bosnia. In Tadjikistan, the Hizbollah-Mujahidin has served in and trained Tadjik resistance elements. The first group of Harkat militants entered Bosnia in 1992. Moreover, the US wants to see stability in Afghanistan. The reason is that a US oil multinational is seeking to build two pipelines—one for natural gas, the other for oil—that would run from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. These pipelines would create a safer and more secure route for American oil companies, allowing them to avoid the dangers of the Persian Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz as well as the possible need to ship oil across Iran.²⁸

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL DYNAMICS OF AFGHANISTAN AND TADJIKISTAN

It has been proved that internal and external forces have been directly involved in the Afghan-Tadjik imbroglio. On the one hand, Tadjikistan’s government successfully maintains the status quo with the help of the Central Asian states, Russia and China, while the EU and the US indirectly help the ruling establishment. On the other hand, the Tadjik Islamic opposition is now isolated. In the past, Iran helped them but the changing scenario of the region does not permit Iran to support the Islamic opposition militarily. At present, Iran stresses an intra-Tadjik peace process with the help of Russia and the Central Asian states. Moreover, the Talaban factor in Afghanistan has changed the dynamics of the region. The Tadjik opposition is further isolated because of changing realities in Afghanistan, which is politically divided on ethnic lines. Previously, the Tadjik-led government of the Pashtoon Hikmatyar had supported the Tadjik opposition. However, the Tadjiks are now confined to their areas and Hikmatyar is nowhere in Afghan politics. Thus, the Islamic opposition has no other way open to it than to talk with the Tadjik government. As far as Afghanistan is concerned, the introduction of the Talaban has radicalised Afghan politics. Politically divided Afghanistan can be divided into three geographical areas: first, the Talaban-controlled area of 22 provinces (75 per cent of Afghanistan); second, the Tadjik areas controlled by Rabbani and Masood’s forces; third, the Uzbek area controlled by the Uzbek warlord General Dostum. It seems that inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts become more prominent in Afghanistan. Tadjiks, Uzbeks and Pashtoons have historically been locked in a power struggle within Afghanistan. As a result, civil war in Afghanistan has no end in the near future. Historically, the Pashtoons are the traditional rulers of Kabul. After the exit of Najibullah, non-Pashtoon elements ruled in Kabul. But it was not long lasting, they have been replaced by the Pashtoon Talaban. Interestingly, the circumstances of the region have changed. The Tadjiks and Uzbeks of Afghanistan have an ally in the north; not only does Iran support them, but also the Central Asian states and Russia. Whereas Pakistan covertly supports the Talaban due to its Pashtoon origin.

TRANSFORMATION OF SECULAR NATIONALISM TO RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, an ideological vacuum permeated the international and regional scene. The then Soviet Union helped the movements for the right of self-determination having a nationalistic colour and secular orientation in the world. These secular nationalist movements were against imperialism which had supported all those forces which fought with these nationalist radical movements. However, with the passage of time, these fundamentalist forces strengthened and become so strong that now they pose a threat to secular governments. In the post-Cold War era, when the priorities of the West have changed, these fundamentalist forces have no place in the eyes of the West. But religious forces gain ground and Afghanistan is a classical example. The rise of the religious fundamentalist Pashtoon-oriented Talaban has changed the internal and external dynamics of the region. The whole chemistry has changed because of the transformation of secular nationalism into religious nationalism. The former President of Afghanistan, Najibullah, a secular nationalist leader was brutally executed in public by the Talaban militia after they took over Kabul. The special UN envoy to Afghanistan, Norbert Hall, expressed his

“dismay” over the hanging and the violation of UN premises and stated that Najibullah made a “Considerable contribution to the peaceful transfer of power” to the Mujahidin.²⁹ Once Najibullah expressed his fear: in an interview with The New York Times he asked the US to help him to crush the “fundamentalist guerrillas” in his country and avert the spread of fundamentalism to the neighbouring former Soviet republics. He warned “If Afghanistan is lost and is turned into a centre of fundamentalism you will lose the Central Asian republics.”³⁰ Dr. Najibullah’s predication has proved to be right. Soon after the Taliban took control of Kabul, a declaration was announced according to which there is a “Complete Islamic State” where a “Complete Islamic System” will be enforced.³¹ The Taliban brand of Islam is the most brutal and reactionary model of Islam and will destroy the very fabric of Afghan society. Since the Taliban took control of Kabul, seven Afghan males convicted of adultery have been stoned to death. Afghan women have been barred from most jobs and schools under rules enforced by the Taliban.

POSSIBILITY OF THE DISINTEGRATION OF AFGHANISTAN

The Taliban factor accelerates the already fragile politics of Afghanistan, which is divided on political and ethnic lines. The three major nationalities are already struggling for power.³² For the first time in the history of Afghanistan, two non-Pashtoon nationalities shared political and military power for a very short time, but the Pashtoon Taliban again took control of Kabul and 22 other provinces. With this development an alarming phenomenon emerged; to annex parts of Afghanistan inhabited by similar ethnic groups. Correspondents from Pakistan during their visit to Tadjikistan, heard talk of Greater Tadjikistan, embracing the Tadjik area of northern Afghanistan.³³ Similarly, General Dostum visited Turkey and Uzbekistan in August 1992 to get support for a separate northern state for the Uzbek people. In Ankara he met Turkish officials and in Tashkent with President Islam Karimov. During the meeting Dostum argued that a confederation of autonomous states is the only solution for the chaos in Afghanistan. He warned that the Uzbeks will never again live under Pashtoon domination. He demanded a separate state, which would be a secular entity and act as a buffer for Central Asia against the spread of Islamic fundamentalism from the Pashtoon-dominated area in the south.³⁴ Russia is also toeing the same line but with a different angle. After the emergence of the Taliban, Russia became more interested in confining Pashtoon dominated Islam to the south and creating a Tadjik and Uzbek entity as a buffer area for the Central Asian states, which also suits Russia’s ‘near abroad’ policy.

The latest development is that the non-Pashtoon element has been ousted from Kabul. Now they have formed their own government in Mazar-Sharif, in the north of Afghanistan and close to the Central Asian states. With the emergence of the Taliban the dynamics of Afghan politics has changed. The new government of Mazar-Sharif is comprised of Tadjiks and Uzbeks who desire to have close relations with the Central Asian states and Turkey. This development has played a very positive role in Tadjikistan. The Tadjik opposition feels that nobody will support their struggle and the only way is to negotiate with the Tadjik government. The sixth round of peace talks opened in Moscow on 26 February 1996. According to it, the Tadjik government and Islamic opposition signed an accord aimed at merging rebel units with government troops to form a new national army. Under the accord, several thousand members of the opposition armed forces are to “identify themselves, disarm, regroup and integrate” with the government forces.³⁵ Furthermore, Russia and three Central Asian states agreed to deploy a joint army on the Afghan-Central Asian border to check the march of the Taliban.³⁶ Thus the Central Asian states are directly involved in Afghanistan’s affairs.

CONCLUSION

The struggle for power in Afghanistan remains the trouble spot for the Central and South Asian region. However, Tadjikistan is now politically stabilised. From 1992 to 1997, a parallel can be drawn between Afghanistan and Tadjikistan. But the emergence of the Taliban has paved the way for a resolution of the conflict between the Tadjik opposition and the government. An accord has been signed between the two which is a positive signal for democratic forces in Tadjikistan. However, Afghanistan is still in trouble. The need of the hour is to pave the way for a broad-based government in Kabul and regional powers should realise that their interference in Afghan affairs will

harm the stability of the region, which is not only destabilising for Afghanistan, but it has far reaching implications for South and Central Asia.³⁷

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32 *The Spokesman of the Talaban*, Mullah Khaksar, in a interview with the writer stated that Talaban's ultimate goal was to "establish God's rule and Islamic Shari'ah," prescribed by Talaban. When asked about Islamic ideology, he stated that "we have our own Islamic ideology, outside of that, we have no concerns". 14 December 1996, Karachi.

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