

*Central Asia and Pakistan —
A Troubled Courtship for
an Arranged Marriage:
Conflicting Perceptions and Realities*

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The courtship that Pakistan has been engaged in for a close relationship, if not alliance, with the newly emerged Central Asian Republics (CARs)¹ of the former Soviet Union, has been going on for almost three years now — if the tour of Sardar Assef Ahmad Ali in December 1991 is considered as the starting point. The question arises today if Pakistan has come any closer to the cherished goal and to what can the trouble be attributed that has plagued this courtship so far.

Keeping in view the mass of material that has been collected on both Central Asia and Pakistan's policies towards this region over recent months, this paper sets out to deal with differing perceptions and concepts that have evolved in this process. For this purpose, an inquiry is suggested into the nature of the "Muslim identity" of the Central Asian states, the "Russian strings" attached to them, the "American fears" about their Islamic identity, "Pakistan's hopes" to cooperate with them, and the "Indian threat" to this cooperation. The transition aspect will conclude the exploration. What is meant to argue here is that it is much less these hopes and fears which rule this cooperation effort than the processes of identity formation and transition.

In order to understand the clash of perceptions and expectations of the various sides involved, it may be helpful to recall some of the basic co-ordinates. By now, Muslim Central Asia has turned into an international phenomenon that means

very different things to very different people, partners or parties. The issue itself is used — or rather has emerged — as a useful symbol to sort out very difficult issues of the post-cold war period in this region. This is not surprising. An international order which had existed for almost 40 years went down almost over night. It was structured around the enmity of two extra-regional blocs — looking at it from South and Central Asia. It was based on the possession of or access to nuclear weapons. And, whole generations of politicians built their careers in their respective countries on a firm set of values tied to one or the other element of this confrontationist international system. Central Asia, therefore, serves many different purposes nowadays. Countries and politicians, participating in the effort to intensify cooperation among the member states of the ECO, use the Central Asia phenomenon to negotiate their mutual relationship, issues of supremacy and competition, of a regional power structure, of relations with the big powers on the edge like Russia, China, India and the United States, but also of internal political competition, issues of dominance of political parties and concepts, and most basically, of power, how to stay in it and how to get into it. This discourse is, therefore, extremely varied and sometimes almost loses sight of its object, Central Asia.

The question arises: why did the issue of Central Asian get so much prominence? A sober look at the facts reveals that there are a number of post-Soviet republics which remain in dire need of economic reform, well endowed with natural resources, with an educated population, but with little experience in market economy or in participatory politics. In this they do not differ much from the Baltic states or from Moldavia, but for the natural resources. If they differ it is more to the debit side. And, to get to natural resources requires so much investment into the infrastructure that this advantage is very doubtful and at least difficult to obtain. It is probably only their common Islamic denominator which made them special in the international context.

In itself, this would not have happened had it not been for the threat perception of the United States after the end of the Cold War. For the United States, the emergence of Central Asia was apparently very welcome to fill a gap that had been created by the disappearance of a political and military enemy.

It is not that one should assume that the US mechanically substituted communism with Islam in its international perception, thus “conspiring to do harm” to the Muslim world. This process is much more complex. (Some part of the military and security establishment classified Germany as a potential threat or object of containment and more resources are moved now to study this option.) But it is not surprising that the military and security establishment which had been trained to be on the watch out for enemies would locate militant and violent politics as a potential threat. US personnel and institutions in the past have experienced violent attacks for which Islamic militants had publicly claimed responsibility. Radical Islamic politicians still regard the US as a demon. Despite all the changes that have taken place under Refsanjani, Iran still feels constrained to restore its relations with the US.

It is this unique combination of the assumed Muslim identity and the US threat perception combined with a residue of nuclear warheads which were left under the control of Kazakhstan at the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union — but which it controls no longer, one must add here — that propelled the issue of Central Asia into prominence. Suddenly the issue acquired the quality of a handle, a lever which you had on the US and other potential players on the international scene who would be interested to remove this perceived threat. Hordes of specialists would find employment offering their opinion which otherwise would not have been sought after very much. Institutes and conferences in Russia, in the US, in South and in Central Asia legitimise their existence with a new and potentially powerful phenomenon that is partly of their own making.

Muslim Identity

When the Soviet system collapsed Pakistan assumed that in the Muslim republics of Central Asia “greater religious freedom had released pent-up yearnings for closer ties with the Islamic world”.² It was apparently assumed that under the cloak of a Soviet citizen in the Central Asian Republic a true Muslim was hidden who had struggled all the time to come to the forefront but was prevented from doing so by adverse circumstances. This approach was based on the conceptual understanding that political identity was enforced by the Communist

system against the will of its people. Soviet identity was seen as artificial and sitting on top of their true identity. This approach was obviously deduced from the suppression of religious freedom in the twenties and thirties of this century, from the blood-stained repression and deportations to which ardent believers and a part of the Muslim clergy fell victim, from the wide-spread destruction of religious institutions. But this position takes little note of the changes which occurred afterwards. Generations grew up and were socialised under conditions and on values completely at variance with what would have been called Muslim in the traditional sense.

Pakistan was not alone in making this assumption that you need only to remove the Soviet layer of identity and you could most easily and conveniently access the true or core identity to which you feel politically and culturally close. The same miscalculation was permitted in other parts of the world with similar consequences. The Baltic states were judged as being very much European as compared to the rest of the USSR and, therefore, easily amenable to the blessings of liberalism and the civil society, to democratic institutions and first of all to market reforms. A quick and blaring success story was predicted which three years on is not borne out by reality. German unification to a large extent proceeded on the assumption and was legitimised with reference to the essential "Germaneness" of the East Germans. Once you remove the dictatorship of the party, the true German could express himself in favour of unification with the German core lands for which he must have longed since eternity. You find more similarities in the discourses on the identity of the Rumanian population of Moldava, of the Ukraine etc.

Three years on in the process of independence, judgements gain currency condemning the "die-hard" communists in Central Asia or in other places of the former Soviet Empire for their inaptitude and unwillingness to reform and to change. Impatience is displayed and doubt raised that they are worth all the effort, support and money.

Here, it is argued, one has arrived at the very heart to the misunderstanding. Political culture is not exhausted in the top layer of political power. It involves the whole gamut of daily interaction, the way to conduct the routine affairs. It contains

strong local and sociological elements, where to go to satisfy cultural and social needs, if it is the cultural centres, the party centres or the mosques, what role the womenfolk play, how children are reared, and so on. A political culture is, therefore, not removed through a change at the top. It usually only transforms through a long and painful process of institution-building and re-orientation of values which at least stretches over one generation. In the meantime, one has to deal with the people you got in these countries. One has to bank on their ability to learn, to accept their judgement and to see the road they are traversing from one mode of living to another.

If Pakistan's rationality and compulsions for dealing with the outside world and with Central Asia are accepted as special and unique in a sense that they are primarily shaped by internal considerations and by its competition with India — which will be elaborated upon a little later — the CARs must be equally conceded their own rationality and compulsions, even if they are not shared by others nor considered rational at all.

Those Pakistani politicians who had been dealing with Central Asia from the very beginning and had the benefit of direct contacts, like Sardar Assef Ahmad Ali, understood very well that the Central Asian leaders are firmly rooted in the previous social and political set-up. One faces more elements of continuity than of change. Their break with the past was less clear than in other areas. One reason for this is that political culture in the Soviet system was not homogenous. Central Asian republics did preserve elements of the paternalistic oriental society which combined with the authoritarian approach of communism. It is, therefore, no coincidence that they are least happy about liberalism and participatory politics. Their presidents, with variations, represent family fathers looking after their nations. They find a lot of support for this approach. The reasoning goes: what we need and what the people want is not elections for elections sake, but to find solutions to problems. Problems are very much the same as under the late Soviet system. They think in terms of access of common people to housing, city transport, consumer commodities, education, water, jobs. They can primarily imagine solutions in administrative, bureaucratic terms. As before, they hold emergency talks with district chiefs, to discuss the harvest situation or the consumer

goods supply or the price situation. It is the late-Soviet, *perestroika* approach, that you have to improve the system — not change it. Reading their statements on market reforms and privatisation you get the impression that they make these statements because they are a condition for getting new credits from the west to cover their budget deficits. But they cannot entirely see the wisdom of these demands which are made on them to traverse to the market. The switch to bank on the individual initiative is not yet accomplished. The institutions to introduce an efficient, social and democratic capitalism are little known. Privatisation is thought of as a means to get rid of inefficient factories. And, it should leave the elites in control over the commanding heights of the economy. The role of law-making and a dependable legal situation is only beginning to dawn on them. And, after four or five years of reform, opposition is building up to these half-hearted and truncated reforms, not to rectify the flaws and make them more radical, but to stop them altogether, maintaining that privatisation or reform has not bettered the lot of the common man and should, therefore, be abandoned. (This, of course, is a simplified picture to show the general trend).

The major rationales of the CAR administrations are, therefore, to stay firmly in power, to avoid political disputes and challenges which they assume will only polarise the situation and create a rift in society, at a time when they need unity to survive the transition to the market. They know that they have to live with the compulsions of international donors and are ready to profess whatever conviction is required to get access to funds. It is, therefore, part of their survival strategy that to the Russians they are the most dependable CIS partners, to Pakistan and Iran they are Muslims, to Turkey they are Turks to the European Community they are almost Europeans entering through the backdoor of the membership of the ex-USSR in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Does this mean that they are not or never genuine when they say they are Muslims? One should not think so. But given a situation where religious practices and the very idea of belief in God played a very minimal role in society, Islam is primarily regarded as a cultural commodity. It is a focus which helps them to articulate their search for identity and their need of belonging

somewhere. Characteristic are the returns of a sociological survey on the attitude of young students towards Islam undertaken in Kazakhstan in March 1993. 42 per cent of respondents did not observe Muslim religious rites, while 38 per cent limited observance to festivals and only 30 per cent said they did observe Muslim rites. For the majority, for 65 per cent of respondents, Islam was an inalienable part of Kazakh national culture because Kazakh history, the religious habits of previous generations and Kazakh customs were shaped by the religion of Islam. Yet, also on the issue of culture, 33 per cent of respondents thought that Islam was not the only source of national culture. They considered pre-Islamic and other elements equally important. Regarding the relationship of Islam and market reform, about 90 per cent of respondents did not see any contradiction between the ongoing liberalisation of society, the market economy and Islamic religion. They believe that the choice of religion could not influence the economy. A small percentage, 14 per cent of the students, believed that Islam could not be reconciled with economic reforms. But for this they gave entirely different reasons. Some would say that Islam stands in the way of social progress, referring to the Marxist-inspired argument, while others would maintain that market relations go against Islamic moral values, using the orthodox argument.³ Considering the special nature of the ethnic composition of Kazakhstan where Russians account for a large share of the population, the figures, which result from a survey among the Kazakh, not the Russian students in the republic, show an impressive rise of Islamic consciousness. Yet, it is primarily structured around cultural values. Comparable figures for the other CARs are not easily available. Experience of direct contact suggests that they would not differ much.

One could, therefore, assume that people in Central Asia are willing to practice Islam to the extent where — to put it a bit profanely — this does not prevent them from enjoying the new-found freedom of video shops, pop music or consumerism. Their approach is entirely utilitarian. Islam is welcome if it delivers the goods, that is, if it makes their lives better, easier more comfortable, and preferably now.

Theoretically speaking, their identity is largely situational and in transition. Only when a stable mode of new interaction

has been established will they finally settle their allegiances. Identity is always a complex phenomenon of competing loyalties. So far, this competition is still wide open.

Russian Strings

Pakistan and other ECO countries like Iran often talk about the compulsions the CARs face in their dealings with Russia. In order to make real progress in the regional cooperation to which the CARs are invited one has to explore this concept a bit further.⁴ To set the record straight in the beginning: there is no doubt, that Russia did benefit from Russification policies pursued since Stalin's time in terms of transfer of material wealth, particularly raw material, and its free use of human and economic resources of the smaller nations for big power politics instead of socio-economic advancement. But it is equally true that Lenin's and Stalin's theory of national self-determination also had the opposite effect. It turned Russia into a creditor and major donor towards the end of the Soviet Union seeing Russian living standards sharply decline and fall behind those of other border states. It also created nations where none had existed before. The emergence of the Central Asian Republics on the territory of Turkestan is a vivid example of that. Today's ethnic identities of Uzbeks and Kazakhs, of Tajiks have largely developed from a common stock and differentiated later. This means that Russian will be remembered for having fathered their nationhood. Their attitude towards Moscow and love for Russia was and is ambivalent. When the Soviet Union went into open decline and decay Russia could not longer fulfil the expectations and the CARs along with other border states turned away, striking a pose of "disgust" over the imperial and hegemonic rule of Russia. When their economic fortunes were sagging and Moscow, through civil strife and conflict, ploughed a thin line of real change, the tide reversed. As long as in the black markets of the CARs, for the sale of dollars, the Russian ruble is preferred over the local currency, people and politicians will continue to look towards Moscow and try to understand how to reach the same results from introducing market reforms. They fear renewed dominance no doubt, but only to a certain extent. They are willing to cooperate with Moscow if they are left in control of their local administrations. They want to rejoin the

new ruble zone but they don't want to submit themselves to the control of inflation and budget spending. Of course, Moscow is no virgin and no saviour either. Its reform is shaky enough to be dangerous. But it is miles ahead of most of the border states including the CARs where the real switch in the mode of ruling the economy, with the limited exception of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, is still to come.⁵

Russian politics went through different stages. While the first impulse of the Russian democrats was to let them go as quickly as possible, orthodox nationalist pressure on the Yeltsin administration forced it to look out for occasions on which to show the Russian flag. The Russian interest was also discovered by politicians to get a higher profile in the elections. The Russian democrats, who provide the intellectual backing to the administration, now seem to have returned to a position of legitimising an active Russian interest in the border states. In this context, an article by Andranik Migranyan, a political scientist and member of the President's Council published in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, the Russian intellectual tribune, merits attention in which the theories on the new-found craze for Russia in the border states.⁶ He believes that instability in the border states has reached proportions where it threatens the success of economic reform in Russia. And, referring to Brzezinski and Kissinger, he strongly opposes a kind of "geopolitical pluralism" which allegedly aims at creating new forces, or coalitions of forces, capable of confronting and containing Russia in a kind of cordon sanitaire. Here he mentions "the Ukraine, possibly Kazakhstan or, let's say, some combination of states," as he puts it, tactfully avoiding the term Islamic or Muslim. Pakistan and other potential partners of Central Asia have to see and understand these dynamics if they want to make cooperation work. This process shows that cooperation with Central Asia will not go ahead to the exclusion of Russia or in mutually exclusive competition with it.

On the contrary. More and more arguments are advanced for a re-amalgamation of the ex-Soviet republics. Recently an argument gained wide currency that western models from outside the former Soviet Union did not go a long way to help them solve their problems. Since none of these efforts was particularly successful, they now favour their own blend of

change and continuity and even look back to Russia.⁷ There are calls to restore the cultural and information space of the former Soviet Union. In this context, the **Eurasian** concept catches attention which envisages a common political space stretching over parts of and Asia of the ex-Soviet territory. The term is not always used with the same connotation. The Kazakh President tabled a proposal for a Eurasian Union which would be quite close to the former Soviet Union, but less centralist and on an inter-state basis. These ideas are no doubt heavily influenced by the western models of successful integration — the European Community and NATO.⁸ One author limited the Eurasian concept to the ECO members plus the Caucasian states, calling it Southern Eurasia.⁹

Another term which is used in this context is **civilisation**. There is increasing opposition towards grouping the ex-Soviet states under the aspect of civilisation into a Catholic, a Russian-Orthodox and an Islamic belt. This thesis echoes widely the approach used by the American scholar Huntington¹⁰ at the recent Davos meeting in which also the Pakistani Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, participated and where she rejected his arguments.¹¹ One should, therefore, think that on this ground there should be some scope for intellectual understanding between Pakistan and Russia¹².

Does all this mean that the Soviet Union is being resurrected as it was known through seven decades? This is highly unlikely, even after the recent CIS summit of 18 — 19 October 1994 in which the first inter-state body, an economic committee, was created. A combination of the republics will be very different from the past. If a fundamental change has taken place it is the desire of the people to share in the benefits of any kind of any kind of change or progress. It is very difficult to see an authoritarian structure re-emerge that could accomplish economic growth and prosperity without market reforms. And, the elites of the new states who found employment in their national administrations will want to guard this play field in the wake of dark prospects of increasing unemployment.

American Fears

The US position on the Central Asian phenomenon is equally ambiguous. Top priority for the US is the minimisation

of any threat potential emanating from the territory of the former Soviet Union, not the containment of Russia, irrespect of what Brzezinski or Kissinger might have to say on this account. The US certainly wants to encourage independence and transition towards a liberal and participatory market economy with strong social guarantees. If the CARs are successful in this on their own, the US would certainly prefer this since it would keep Russia in check. But the US is equally weary of dealing with civil and economic unrest and instability in the border states single-handedly, and it would much prefer other countries to take on a major share of this burden, including Russia. The US would obviously still prefer Russian influence in Central Asia over Islamic 'fundamentalism' as the Americans understand it. And the US would also prefer Russian control over nuclear resources to continue. This leaves us with the American concept of regional powers looking after their spheres of influence in the post-Cold World War, in spite of all hesitations and doubts over Russian intentions.

Pakistan's Hopes

For Pakistan, the Central Asia issue is an excellent occasion to negotiate for itself a new place in the regional power alignment that is meant to replace the ruins of the Cold War alliances. When Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Germany in April this year she emphasised Pakistan's "Pivotal position on the Asian continent. Addressing the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag she was quoted as saying.

Pakistan "is not only a South Asian country but, by virtue of its location and close historic and cultural ties with the Muslim countries to its west, also enjoys a privileged position in relation to Central Asia and the Middle East. We are linked with Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and the countries of Central Asia in the ECO, which provides a framework of great potential in stimulating economic exchanges among the member-states".¹⁸

However, it appears that since the Benazir administration took office the issue of closer links with Central Asia was fiercely competing for news coverage, and sometimes unsuccessfully, with the nuclear issue and strains in relations with India, particularly over Kashmir. Where do Pakistan's intentions

on cooperation with Central Asia stand in connection with these two issues? A comparative analysis shows that Pakistan's position, neither in West nor in South Asia, is as pivotal as Benazir would rightly wish. Many agreements with Central Asia were concluded but progress on the ground was slow. People benefiting from projects, like trainees or delegations count in the tens. More extensive was the tourist trade but that was curtailed on account of the black market activities of some enterprising travellers.¹⁴ A major project like investing in the generation of electricity in Tajikistan ran into trouble where investment requirements inside Pakistan took precedence over cross-border needs.¹⁵ Why did the nuclear issue and the Indian trouble come to the forefront? The reason is not entirely clear but it seems to be linked to the internal divisions of Pakistan politics. The almost even split of political forces between the main camps of Nawaz and Benazir for the past many years makes political power volatile and seduces the politicians to look out for particularly flashy issues that allow them to mobilise a larger following. While Nawaz concentrated on the issue of a Muslim foreign policy and the solidarity with Muslim Central Asia, with Benazir emphasis seems to shift to the nationalistic issue of delimitation from India. Both issues, Central Asia and India, however, were probably seen fit to fight the looming marginalisation of Pakistan in regional affairs after the end of the cold war. "Marginalisation" could only be understood in relative terms as compared with intentions to play a leading role in the region. In absolute terms, Pakistan cannot be marginalised since its weight derives from the power and success of its internal, mainly economic policy, from its manpower and natural resources. Observers, particularly in the US, have speculated that the Kashmir issue is pushed up to prevent the US from ascribing to India any sort of leadership role in the region, and to legitimise the continuation of the nuclear program. On this issue the Benazir government has given some of the strongest statements yet, officially linking the nuclear issue with security and threat perceptions over Kashmir.¹⁶ The issues of threat and security, however, are difficult to separate from military aspects. This apparently stands at odds with the professed peacefulness of the nature of Pakistan's nuclear program. Whether the campaign over Kashmir can be successful in convincing India to

change its position on the issue seems doubtful. In the long run, local resistance to conditions in Kashmir may be difficult to sustain. Developments in the India Punjab show an almost inexhaustible resilience of the Indian polity. It is still remembered that at the height of the terrorist campaign Punjab suddenly turned to economic concerns and started to have a boom period and bumper harvests. In the end of the day, there seems to be little chance for fundamentally altering the present status so that a solution would apparently have to proceed from this. With the current divisions besieging both Indian and Pakistani politics it looks doubtful whether both governments are internally strong enough to sell a solution, or any solution for that matter, to their political constituency.

But the main practical hurdle to the fulfilment of Pakistan's hopes is the situation in Afghanistan. All reconciliation efforts have failed so far. The present collision has probably little to do with Islam and conceptual differences. Pakistan was involved in a large number of talks and efforts aimed at reconciliation. Therefore, the question arises, can the two sides be reconciled at all? Reports differ as to what Pakistan can still do in this respect. If Rabbani is suspected of Indian support, Hekmatyar may have access to his own sources of supply since he could not have survived so long on his own. There is speculation that some of his supply lines from Pakistan may still be in act.¹⁷ Obviously, the ultimate recourse has not yet been tried which would mean to effectively cut off both sides from all assistance until they come to terms on the basis of an electoral, participatory solution. Before Afghanistan is returned to a semblance of normalcy and peace no economic cooperation with Central Asia may be successful or attractive. Though preparations are underway to start work on the rail track to Kushka in Turkmenistan through southern Afghanistan, which is regarded largely calm,¹⁸ it is difficult to see how real economic activity can start before a solution to the Afghan dilemma is found.

India Threat

The Indian challenge in Central Asia is becoming more "fierce" very day. The publicity which the option of a Muslim bloc in Central Asia received in the US and also in Pakistan seems to have shaken India out of complacency and sent it run-

ning for the laurels of cooperation. (Which, of course, is only a perception since India has been cooperating with Central Asia since the mid-fifties). India is seen rushing into what cooperation it can lay its hand on. Talks have been going on to import gas from Iran,¹⁹ very much like Pakistan. India is said to be ready to assist Iran in building a railway link to Central Asia,²⁰ a track which would not touch Pakistani territory. In the Afghan context, India was much talked about as a source of military supplies to the forces of President Rabbani.²¹ India was one of the first donor countries to pledge funds to the \$59.8 million UN-programme on winter assistance to Afghanistan in 1993.²² The pattern of the Indian approach stays clear of Pakistani territory. It supposedly believes that it can find access to Central Asia circumventing Pakistan, or even excluding it. In Central Asia, India is still seen as a good example of how to apply modern market economics in an Asian country. Bonds and common traditions of a thousand years are evoked, even referring to Al-Biruni, without mentioning Islam.²³

Does the Indian challenge automatically convert into a threat? An impression is left that the mutual aggravation of tensions has led India to intensify their efforts to gain a foothold in Central Asia. For Pakistan, the worst-case scenario seems to be that India could outflank Pakistan in an area which the Pakistani elite regards as a home area. It is feared that this would result in a two-front situation for Pakistan where it could face Indian control over, or its dominating influence in, Central Asia and partly in Afghanistan.

Yet, is this potential threat real? India may have a trade turnover with the Central Asia states exceeding that of Pakistan three times — with the exception of Tajikistan, where Pakistan's position seems to be stronger.²⁴ But this is a share of less than one per cent for either of them. The comparative strength of India's position in Central Asia becomes clear also from the figures quoted by the Uzbek President Karimov during his visit to India. Out of some one thousand joint projects with foreign companies in Uzbekistan, Indian partners are involved in 14 out of which only 6 projects are really working.²⁵ Pakistan may have less projects but India still has to go a long way before it can be called dominant or even influential.

More than India and Pakistan together it is other international players that make big strides in their cooperation efforts. As this paper concentrates on the issues which Pakistan faces it will be mentioned in passing only that China is foremost among them, accounting for more than 30 per cent of Kazakhstan's trade turn over. Turkey²⁶ enjoys a strong position, although somewhat selective towards the Turkic states while Iran concentrates on Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.²⁷ The European community is increasingly active, having concluded cooperation agreements with all of them. Newly-industrialised nations like South Korea, Taiwan and Israel make strong and efficient efforts to enter this market through various connections like a Korean minority living in one of these areas. It is competition of the highest order and no preferential treatment is waiting for Pakistan.

At least as far as Central Asia is concerned, the Indian threat is, therefore, more a matter of perception than reality. Pakistan and India are still involved in a zero-sum game which belongs to another era, that of the cold war, where one side's gain was considered the other side's loss. As history has proved in the larger context, this is potentially a no-win situation. In the context of Central Asia it drives the price of cooperation up and the profit down, perhaps also in terms of real costs since Central Asian leaders may be tempted to exploit this competition for their own benefit. On the other hand, a settlement on Kashmir would allow a solution to the nuclear issue and remove obstacles in the way of the flow of financial and economic resources to the region. Only then could projects of the magnitude envisaged towards Central Asia such as railways, gas pipelines, roads, etc. be successfully tackled. International bankers will presumably think twice before committing money to long-term infrastructure projects over which the cloud of tension and a nuclear threat is hanging. The irony of the regional pattern is that Pakistan's road to Central Asia where it hopes to find new support vis-a-vis India may eventually lead through solving its differences with India first.

Transition

But why is it that this region faces such a wide margin in articulating policy goals and implementing them? Part of it

could be attributed to the problems of transition which all the countries of the region have to cope with in one or the other way.

The Central Asian states have to make their way to the market economy. The present leadership there is interested in it inasmuch as it ensures their hold on power.

Afghanistan is no doubt in a deep turmoil which certainly is a transition from the trenches of the civil war to the plains and hills of economic development and civic institutions.

The events proceeding the last elections in 1993 showed that Pakistan itself is involved in a transition of historic depth which largely determines the present withering and dithering of politicians and political goals. Caretaker Moeen Qureshi had formulated the agenda for a new society where the common man would have much better access to all facilities and amenities.²⁸ Transparency of the political system, efficiency of the economy, re-defining the economic role of the state, strengthening and rebuilding of Pakistan's fundamental economic and political institutions; such were the issues which dominated the election programs of the major parties, including the religious parties. The goal of "Islamic welfare state" has become an important catchword in this context. India is involved in a similar exercise. Its economic reform program has already started breaking open a society which still know many constraints despite democracy and other virtues. Here, it is felt, lies the real, the strategic challenge for Pakistan, whether it wants to implement its Central Asian options or pursue other political goals. The sheer size of the Indian market and of its economy, combined with a gradual introduction of the open society approach will have a tremendous effect on India's political and social forces, and will not leave its neighbours untouched. The Chinese example of the acceleration of growth affords some comparison. China moved to a position where it can press ahead with its own political and international agenda, because its economic strength and attractiveness have effectively silenced all dissenting voices in the US or anywhere else. It is, of course, difficult to foresee whether the Indian project will be equally successful and which road it will eventually take.

The transition aspect makes believe that it is in the field of economic development and political stability that the future

security options will be decided, not in the military filed. This is equally true of all partners in regional cooperation.

Conclusions

Perceptions connected with the Central Asian phenomenon vary widely between the partners involved. Results will only come if they can find a large enough area to agree on. If there is a real interest to make the Central Asia option work, this seems to be the time to take stock of options and objectives, to set priorities right and to shed clichés of the past.

At the same time perceptions and imaginings are important. It is true that one should constantly challenge them and explore their contents and real meaning. But mismatch of perceptions and reality is nothing unusual. It is the space where people try to get to grips with the increasingly complex surrounding changing ever faster. Perceptions set goals and reflect agendas. It is important that perceptions remain flexible. This ensures that any gap towards reality would not reach menacing proportions and can still be handled politically with no need of recourse to weapons of violence. In this aspect, the Central Asia phenomenon is not unique but a very common global phenomenon.

Still, the outlook is not negative at all. If cooperation is approached in a practical and realistic manner Pakistan can still be successful. As long as goods cannot be moved Pakistan can go there with its services. Banks, insurance, information are promising fields of activity. The first business guides to the Central Asian states are being published in Pakistan. Regional cooperation always deserves the benefit of doubt since it is the most efficient way to help an area besieged by tension, conflict and doubt. If it succeeds the benefit will be tremendous.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For the purpose of the general political argument Azerbaijan is subsumed under the Muslim Central Asian Republics, though it does not belong to Central Asia.

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4. The Russian argument in this paper is debated at length in order to introduce material that is otherwise little used in this context.
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6. Andranik Migranyan "Sny ob SNG," (Dreams about the CIS in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 14 Sep. 1994, p.11.
7. Cf. Round-table discussion by Russian academics on The new geopolitical situation in Central Asia and its consequences for Russia, (Russian) in *Vostok*, No.6 1993, pp.63-131. The same argument is used in Migranyan's article, "Dreams about the CIS," *op.cit.*
8. Umerserik Kasenov, "Razmyshlenya o evraziyskom soyuze," (discussing a Eurasian Union), in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 16.10.94. The author is director of the Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies attached to the President's office.
9. Vyatcheslav Ovlev, "Novaya geopoliticicheskaya real "nost", (New geopolitical fact) in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 12.10.94.

10. For Huntington's concept, see Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" in *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 72, No.3, Summer 1993, pp.21-49; for a critical evaluation of his thesis from the American perspective, see Richard E. Rubenstein, Jarle Crocker, "Challenging Huntington," *Foreign Policy*, No.96, Fall 1994, pp.113-128.
11. *Dawn*, Karachi, 30.1.94.
12. Cf. Kasenov's article, discussing the Eurasian Union where he also discussed the civilisation argument, *op.cit.*, and interview with Shameem Akhtar, "The Clash of Civilizations thesis is untenable, in *The News*, Islamabad, 1.11.1994, p.11.
13. *Dawn*, Karachi, 21.4.94.
14. 'Visa curb on non-Muslim visitors from ex-USSR,' in *Dawn*, 9.5.94.
15. Cf. Foreign Minister Assef Ahmad Ali during his tour of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in January 1994, in *Dawn*, 8.1.94; see also press release on the visit of the Tajik President, Emomali Rakhmanov to Islamabad in March 1994, in *Dawn*, 31.3.94.
16. For a recent exposition of this approach, see Benazir Bhutto's interview to the *Herald*, Karachi, October 1994, pp.42-46: The US-Pakistan relationship "got caught up in a groove where we were only talking on the nuclear issue....But we cannot do what is required by American law because it is not acceptable to our own security perceptions arising from the Kashmiri dispute, arising from the three wars with India." (p.43).
17. The Afghan Ambassador in Paris told the BBC on 16 July 1994 that "the military circles in Pakistan, and specifically ISI, is actively involved" in supplying arms to the Hekmatyar group. *Asian Recorder*, Delhi, Vol. XXXX, No.32, p.24143.
18. Cf. *Tehran Times*, 3.8.94.
19. 'India keen on gas pipeline from Iran,' *Tehran Times*, 12.7.93; also *ibid.*, 9.10.93.
20. 'India to take part in construction of Iran-Central Asia railroad,' *Tehran Times*, 11.11.93.
21. President Rabbani's administration expressed concern over Pakistani newspaper reports on Indian military assistance through a press release of his embassy in Islamabad on 17 July 1994. Cf. *Asian Recorder*, Delhi, Vol. XXXX, No.32, p.24143.
22. *Dawn*, 30.11.93.

23. Cf. the visit of Uzbek President Karimov to India in January 1994 and its coverage in the *Pravda Vostoka*, Tashkent, 3-5 Jan. 1994.
24. Cf. table 2 'Asiatische Handelspartner Zentralasiens 1993' (Asian trading partners of Central Asia in 1993), in Klaus Fritsche, *Indians Rolle in Zentralasien. Schlechte Karten im 'Großen Spiel'?* (Aktuelle Analysen, 51/1994) Köln: Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien, 1994, p.5.
25. *Pravda Vostoka*, 7-1-1994.
26. A major recent activity was the summit of Turkic states in Istanbul on 18-19 October 1994. Cf. *The News*, 20-22 October, 1994.
27. See Qureshi's address to the nation on radio and television, in *Dawn*, 20-8-93.