

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

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K. Warikoo

## Cockpit of Central Asia:

### Afghanistan Factor in Tajikistan's Crisis

<http://www.kashmir-information.com/Afghanistan/Warikoo.html>

**Geographical** contiguity, racial and religious affinity and long established border trade have provided a strong basis for cross-border fraternization between the people of Central Asia and adjoining Afghanistan, particularly its northern part also known as Afghan Turkestan. Afghanistan not only shares its borders with the three Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, but the majority of people settled in northern Afghanistan are also of the Central Asian stock. About 4 million Tajiks, 1.7 million Uzbeks and half a million Turkmens live in Afghanistan. Besides, the Pamir Tajiks living in the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous oblast of Tajikistan share their language and lifestyle with their counterparts in the Badakhshan region of Afghanistan.

## AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA: TRANS-BORDER CONTACTS

Notwithstanding their intra-ethnic or intra-tribal diversities, this Central Asian population of northern Afghanistan has been quite conscious of its group identity as distinct from the Pashtun majority of Afghanistan. This is becoming increasingly obvious from the political assertion by the Uzbek and Tajik factions led by General Dostam and Ahmad Shah Masood, respectively, in the post-Najib era in Afghanistan. For most part of its history, the influence of Pashtuns and the central government at Kabul over Afghan Turkestan including Badakhshan has remained tenuous at least till Amir Abdur Rahman Khan subdued the area in 1884. And at about the same time, the northern boundary of Afghanistan was delineated and duly recognized by the Afghan, British and Russian authorities. Areas north of the Oxus such as Shignan, Roshan, Pamirs etc. came under Russian control and the areas south of the Oxus

including Wakhan were recognized as part of Afghanistan. But this did not mean the cessation of links between the two sides.

The traditional border trade and family ties between the people of this region developed over the years particularly after the improvement of communication facilities under the Soviet regimes. The Soviets used the cultural similarities among people living north and south of the Oxus, to bolster the pro-Soviet regimes in Afghanistan. Closer interaction between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, particularly the exchange of students, academics, literateurs, artists, media persons, cultural delegations etc. was encouraged. Mazar-i-Sharif became the main center of economic exchanges between the two sides, as it was well connected by roads with Central Asia. Cotton produced in northern Afghanistan was trucked to Tashkent for processing. Movement of people and their goods increased. Afghanistan and Tajikistan signed agreements of technical, scientific, educational and cultural cooperation envisaging exchanges of scholars, scientists etc. A joint Afghan-Tajik enterprise Intertrans which was set up in southern Tajikistan's Kurgan Tyube oblast, engaged itself in the transport of textile and consumer goods from Afghanistan to Tajikistan. In September 1992 Mayors of Dushanbe and Mazar-i-Sharif signed formal agreements on economic and social cooperation. Similarly an Afghan firm concluded an agreement with the Central Samarkand Store undertaking to supply goods to Samarkand. In southern Turkmenistan, a power line was laid upto the Afghan border village of Mari Chaq to bring electricity to more than 1000 Turkmen families living in this village. More recently, Afghanistan has joined the Iran sponsored Association of Persian Speaking Peoples. A joint meeting of the member countries - Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan was held in Teheran in February 1992 in which it was agreed to revive and spread the Persian language, traditions and customs of the three countries. All these measures have only helped in strengthening the hands between the people and more 50 those of the Central Asian racial stock living on both sides of the Oxus.

## **RISE OF ISLAMIC MILITANCY IN TAJIKISTAN**

The specter of cross border movement, which was earlier limited to social and trade contacts, changed dramatically after the Soviet army's intervention in Afghanistan which was perceived as direct Communist attack on Islam. The Soviets and those who represented the Soviet regimes came to be seen as the enemies of Islam. This was more so because most of the present settlers in northern Afghanistan had left Central Asia as refugees at the height of anti-Soviet Basmachi movement (1917-21) and the collectivisation campaigns in early 1930s. For instance, Azad Beg - the sixty year old leader of the Islamic Union of the Northern Provinces of Afghanistan (Ittihadia-i-Islami-yi-vilayat-i-Samt-i-Shamil-i-Afghanistan), who is responsible for numerous operations against the Soviet forces, is closely related to Ibrahim Beg, one of the leader of the Basmachi movement. (Naseeruddin, the last Amir of Kokand was Azad Beg's maternal great grandfather). That this Islamic Union was founded in Peshawar in 1981 with the help of Pakistan government for "bringing together all the Turks (az Nizhadi-Turk) of Afghanistan and then to liberate Soviet Turkestan", was disclosed by Azad Beg himself in an interview to a French scholar, Olivier Roy. Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) provided Azad Beg "great deal of money and weapons to build an alternative framework for channeling Turkic nationalism against both the Soviet and Kabul regimes". It is not a mere coincidence that Pakistan's forward policy in Afghanistan and trans-Oxiana was pursued by Mirza Aslam Beg, former Chief of Pakistan's army, who is a descendant of a Central Asian muhajir and is also related to Azad Beg. Azad Beg did succeed in enlisting the support of some Uzbek, Tajik and even Turkmen field commanders, notably Uzbek muhajirs from Soviet Central Asia like Khaluddin of Kunduz and Ait Murad

from Barqa (Baghlan province). Azad beg who has been operating in Balkh, Djauzdjan, Farib, Sari Pul and Samangan areas, has been actively involved in shipping weapons to his Islamic supporters in Tajikistan". That the Central Asian muhajirs from Tajikistan who migrated to Afghanistan during the Bolshevik revolution are in the forefront of what is described as jihad (Holy war), was confirmed by Mohammad Sharif Himatzade, Chief of Islamic Renaissance party (IRP) presently in exile in Afghanistan. Common ethnic and religious background of the people inhabiting this border region facilitated the cross-border smuggling of religious and subversive literature, arms and ammunition by the Afghan mujahideen into Tajikistan.

The rapid politicization of Islam and the emergence of a militant Islamic fundamentalist movement in Tajikistan took place after the Soviet action in Afghanistan. This coupled with the success of Khomeini revolution in Iran brought a new awakening among the Muslims of Central Asia. The Central Asian clerics and Sufi brotherhoods which withstood the Soviet policies, now not only became stronger but came under the influence of Wahabism - the radical and politicized form of Islam. The Afghan mujahideen established wide contacts with the Tajiks particularly after the Soviet troops most of whom were from Central Asia, landed in Afghanistan. They started crossing the border into Tajikistan where they were greeted by radical Islamic activists. Afghan mujahideen Leaders acknowledge that the 1979 Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan "helped re-establish links between the Tajiks and their Muslim brethren in Afghanistan, who have the same language, same culture, same religion and same ancestors in common". Another mujahideen leader Masood Khalili disclosed that Soviet soldiers conscripted from Tajikistan were not only reluctant to fire on Afghans but they even sold their rifles to purchase the Koran. Two Afghan resistance parties, namely Jamat-i-Islami led by Burhannuddin Rabbani and Hizb-e-islami of Gulbadin Hikmatyar were particularly active enrolling members and distributing shabnemeh (night letters) in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. These Afghan mujahideen groups evoked maximum response from young Tajiks with high education, especially teachers and engineers.

Reports about the active involvement of Afghan mujahideen in propagating jihad in Tajikistan began to appear in the Soviet press since 1986, that is following Gorbachev's policy of glasnost (openness) in the media. K.M. Makhkamov, the then first Secretary of the Tajik Communist Party admitted at a party meeting held in Dushanbe on August 30, 1986 that young people and children were getting increasingly swayed by propaganda from across the border. Communist Tadjikistana of December 30, 1987 published a statement of Tajik KGB Chief, Petkel confirming the existence of "hostile foreign ideological centres and organisations in Tajikistan". An article in the same paper of May 13, 1988 disclosed that Islamic revolutionary literature was being distributed in thousands, which was later confirmed by Afghan mujahideen sources. There was wide circulation of audio cassettes, video films etc. to spread radical Islam in Tajikistan. Works of Maududi - the founder of Jamat-i-Islami, Said Kutab, Muhammed Kutab and Jamal Din Afghani, the noted Muslim revolutionary were translated into Russian and printed at Peshawar and then smuggled across Afghanistan into Tajikistan for wide circulation. Wahabism gained roots in the rural areas of Tajikistan especially along the Tajik-Afghan border. The Wahabi literature that was smuggled via Afghanistan, lays emphasis on religious absolutism and is opposed to Sufism and holy shrines which represent the traditional and tolerant trend in Islam. Tajikistan's Wahabi leader Abdullo Saidov advocated the creation of an Islamic State and called for jihad against the Soviets. This ideological onslaught was followed by the smuggling of arms and militant cadres across the Oxus. That the Soviet Borderguards under the authority of KGB failed to prevent illicit traffic on the Tajik-Afghan border was illustrated in March and April

1987 when Afghan mujahideen staged two cross-border armed attacks in Kulyab and Kurgan Tyube regions of southern Tajikistan. Apart from the surreptitious trans-border movements and smuggling of arms and ammunition, Afghan mujahideen leaders openly abetted rise of militancy among the Muslims of Tajikistan. For instance, Burhannudin Rabbani and Ahmed Shah Masood, both being Tajiks and belonging to Jamat-i-Islami faction, reacted strongly to the Dushanbe disturbances of February 1990 (anti-Armenian riots). They characterised these disturbances as "freedom movement" or "internal revolt" against the "Soviet Subjugation". Harping on the linguistic, cultural, religious and racial affinity of Tajiks and Afghans, these leaders exhorted the Muslims in Central Asia to break from Moscow. Rabbani warned that "the Afghans living on this side could create complications for the Soviets".

From the foregoing discussion it becomes clear that the Afghan mujahideen groups with active guidance and assistance of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) played a key role in fomenting the Islamic military in Tajikistan with a view to establish a friendly Islamic State there. The Deputy Chairman of Tajikistan's KGB, Belousov openly accused Pakistan's intelligence services of carrying out a subversive programme code-named 'M' to destabilise the socio-political situation in Central Asia. Belousov claimed that 150 groups of Afghan mujahideen were operating near the Tajik border and training centres were set up to give religious and military training to youth Tajiks. And by the time the Soviet Union crumbled, an underground network of Islamic movements, arms dumps and trained Islamic militants had positioned themselves in Tajikistan for launching the offensive to oust the remnants of Communist system and establish an Islamic form of government. This is borne out by the subsequent events in Tajikistan which has witnessed the rise of Islamic fundamentalist political parties and proliferation of armed bands resulting in bloody armed clashes between rival groups.

## **CRISIS IN TAJIKISTAN**

Soon after its independence in 1991, Tajikistan has been engulfed by political conflict and violent inter-group clashes between the pro- Communist and the Islamist forces and their supporters. Regional disparities both in terms of ethnic composition and economic-industrial base, have further complicated the situation. Khodjand in the north and Kulyab in the south of Tajikistan, which have a strong presence of Uzbek population, have been the communist strongholds. These have given determined fight to the radical Islamic groups led by the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) and the Rastokhez, which draw support from majority of Tajiks living in Dushanbe and Kurgan Tyube and Gorno Badakhshan regions which are adjoining Afghanistan. Trans-border infiltration of armed bands and smuggling of arms has been the main destabilising factor. Besides, Afghan Mujahedin controlling the Afghan border have been actively involved in armed clashes with the Russian and Tajik border guards. About 500 Tajik transgressors were reported to have been detained at the Tajik-Afghan border in the first six months of 1992 alone. 50 Afghans who were heading for Termez with drugs were also detained. The establishment of Islamic government in Afghanistan led by Mujahideen factions gave a boost to Islamic fundamentalist groups in Tajikistan. The Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, which is populated by the Ismailis and where the influence of Islamist groups has been strong, declared itself as Badakhshan Autonomous Republic in April 1992. On May 10, 1992 the Chairman of Democratic Party of Tajikistan, Shodmon Yusufov issued a public appeal to Afghanistan asking for aid in the ongoing conflict between pro-Nabiyev and Islamic opposition forces and also against the "interference" of the CIS forces in "Tajikistan's internal crisis". This statement only accentuated the crisis, as the incidence of cross-border infiltration and smuggling of arms from Afghanistan increased

manifold. So much so, a civil war like situation developed in some areas of Tajikistan resulting in bloodshed, killings and refugee problems. The Deputy Commandant of the Central Asian Border District, Major General A. Martovitsky later confirmed that after Yusufov's statement there were increased attempts by groups to cross the Tajik-Afghan border and get weaponry for the opposition parties.

The violent clashes in Kurgan Tyube between the rival parties and the victory of Islamic opposition parties over pro-communists in May 1992 led to unprecedented exodus of Russians and Uzbeks from the region. In fact Shodmon Yusufov's public threat that they would seek aid from "Afghan brothers" and that national minorities in Tajikistan could be used as hostages" created a panic reaction among the Uzbek and Russian minorities. The situation on the Tajik-Afghan border became tense and all efforts by the local commander of CIS border forces to persuade the local Afghan majahideen leader belonging to Hizb-e-Islami, Abdul Latif Ibrahim to prevent arms smuggling and infiltration of armed persons failed to yield any result. Latif not only admitted the fact of illegal entry of Tajik groups into Afghan territory for arms, he also refused to hand over these people without authorisation by the Tajik opposition party which had sent these groups. In Kulyab region too, otherwise the strong support base of Nabiyeu, the members of opposition Democratic Party organised themselves with the active Afghan assistance. A number of groups from Kulyab came to Dushanbe and openly threatened to seek armed assistance from Afghans.

The spurt in incidents of border violations and armed clashes on the Tajik-Afghan border during July to September 1992 escalated the tension. In July alone more than 80 persons (both Tajiks and Afghans) were detained on the border and hundreds of automatic guns, grenade launchers, plastic mines and tons of thousands of ammunition pieces were confiscated. There were about 20 cases of firing on the border guards from the Afghan side. Over 150 border crossers with arms and ammunition were reportedly captured by Russian border guards in September 1992 alone. The situation became so tense that the Tajik government expressed concern over the continued and systematic violation of border and supply of Afghan weapons and drugs into Tajikistan. About 400 rifles were confiscated on the Tajik-Afghan border between May and December 1992, which was a meagre fraction of more than 20,000 weapons reported to be in illegal possession of armed groups in Tajikistan. Fighting in Tajikistan which raged during this period involved regional, ethnic and clan disputes as well as differences in political and religious connections. By the end of 1992, about 50,000 were reported to have been killed in these armed clashes, whereas more than six lakhs became refugees.

Rakhmon Nabiyeu, the former Communist who had been elected as the President of Tajikistan in November 1991, tried to buy peace by including members of the Islamist opposition groups in government and administration. But the IRP and its supporters were determined to wrest total political control. On September 7, 1992 Nabiyeu's motorcade was attacked at Dushanbe airport and soon after his government was ousted by an alliance of Islamist forces comprising the IRP, Raslokhez and the Democratic party, under the leadership of A. Iskandrov. This was followed by violent clashes between Nabiyeu's supporters and his opponents in Kurgan Tyube regions. Subsequently the anti-Islamists rallied their forces and formed regional government in Kulyab and Khodjend. Finally in December 1992, they stormed the capital and installed Imamali Rakhmanov as the new leader. Rakhmanov and his forces have since been working to rid Tajikistan of radical Islamic extremists, who retreated into the Gorno Badakhshan region and also sought refuge in Afghanistan. It was in January 1993 that the new government was able to strengthen its position in the eastern parts of

Tajikistan. The Garmsky region, which had declared itself as an independent Islamic Republic was freed of Islamists' control soon after in the last week of February 1993. On March 2, 1993 the Tajik Government announced the recapture of Tadjikabad. The State Procurator General, Mukhammadnazar Sabikhov claimed that during the offensive over 100 tonnes of weapons and 20 tanks and armoured vehicles had been captured. By March 1993, the Tajik government had thus consolidated its control over most of the country. Government sources claimed in early June 1993 that about 5,90,000 refugees had returned to their homes and the Tajik authorities had taken steps for guaranteeing their housing, employment and personal safety. However, with the concentration of Islamist radicals in the southern mountainous province of Badakhshan, this vast and rugged terrain continues to pose problems for the Tajik government forces. Tavildara, Komsomolabad, Kharog and other areas in the Pamirs are the strongholds of opposition groups. Notwithstanding the peace initiatives pursued by Rakhmanov government using the well respected Ismaili leader, Syed Mohammad Naderi as its mediator, peace is still fragile in Badakhshan.

With the leaders of Tajik opposition groups and their Tajik supporters numbering about 90,000 seeking refuge in Afghanistan and the active involvement of Afghan mujahideen leaders in arming and training these Islamist radicals, prospects of peace and stability returning to Tajikistan remain elusive. Clashes between Islamist fighters and Russian/Tajik security forces have been taking place along the Tajik-Afghan border. More than 50 militants were killed when some 200 to 300 Islamic radicals and Afghan mujahideen intruded into Shurohabad around April 20, 1993. Eruption of serious clashes on the Tajik-Afghan border on July 13, 1993 when at least 25 Russian border guards, 70 Islamic fighters and 200 civilians were reportedly killed, highlighted the explosive nature of the situation. This incident sparked outrage in Russia and Afghanistan was warned of punitive military action in the event of further trans-border raids into Tajikistan. Soon after, Russian forces launched artillery and air attacks on the bases of Tajik militant and Afghan mujahideen in northern Afghanistan. Tension on the border mounted again when 1 Kazakh and 4 Russian border guards were taken hostage to Afghanistan after their unit was ambushed by the Islamic militants on August 10, 1993. Tajik opposition groups namely Islamic Renaissance Party, Democratic Party led by Shodmon Yusuf, National Front led by Abdul Jabbar Takir and Lal-e-Badakhshan of Atta Beg, have joined hands and set up a Tajik government in exile in Taloqan, Afghanistan. Both the Jamat-i-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami led by Gulbadin Hikmatyar are reported to be "training and arming" Tajik militants in guerilla warfare against the Tajik government. A local Hizb-e-Islami commander, Mohammad Zaman claimed in an interview with Washington Post that his party had trained about 1000 Tajiks most of whom "filtered back into Tajikistan". An Islamic field commander in Gorno Badakhshan was quoted by Interfax as saying that 15,000 Afghan trained Tajik mujahideen had infiltrated Tajikistan, which was in addition to several groups of 70 to 300 men undergoing training in Afghanistan. Given this situation, there has been no let-up in tension on the Tajik-Afghan border. In fact the fighting escalated in Pyandz in mid-September and Gorno-Badakhshan region in October 1993. Meanwhile, the Tajik Islamist radicals have set up a new Radio Station "Voice of Free Tadjikistan" somewhere in Afghanistan, which started operating since mid - October, 1993. The Tajik Islamic leader and their supporters presently in exile in Afghanistan have become radicalised. Encouraged by the active military support received from major political parties such as Jamat-e-Islami and Hizb-e-Islami of Afghanistan, the IRP leaders have taken a hardline posture declaring its opposition to any peace talks with the Tajik government. They have also refused to accept Uzbekistan as a party in these negotiations. One may be skeptical about the claim of IRP leader, M.S.Himatzade that "more than fifty percent of Tajik territory was now in hands of the alliance of four main resistance parties", but there is no denying the

fact that the Tajik Islamic militants and their Afghan mujahideen allies are preparing to launch fresh offensive. And it does not augur well for regional peace and security.

## UZBEKISTAN'S REACTION

Uzbekistan has been the foremost CIS state to take strong notice of the developments in Tajikistan and the continuing crisis situation on the Tajik- Afghan border. The Uzbek President, Islam Karimov has been repeatedly warning against the "advance of Islamic fundamentalist and extremist forces from Afghanistan and Tajikistan". Karimov's fears are based on the belief that events in Tajikistan would not only consolidate the rapidly growing Islamic consciousness in Uzbekistan but also lead to its politicisation. The increasing clout of militant Wahabi radicals including the formation of armed bands in Ferghana valley and influx of Uzbek/Tajik refugees and even Afghan nationals into Uzbekistan further strengthened these fears. We have it on the authority of Tajik Islamist opposition leaders that Uzbek Islamic volunteers from Ferghana valley have been participating in the ongoing "jihad" against pro-Communist regime in Tajikistan. It is also known that the Afghan General Abdul Latif, associated with the Hizb-e-Islami of Gulbadin Hikmatyar, is an ethnic Uzbek and he had been conducting fierce attacks on the Tajik government positions from his base in Imam Saheb area in northern Afghanistan. Presence of a sizeable number of ethnic Tajiks who constitute about a quarter of Uzbekistan's population, is yet another factor for the Uzbek concern over disorder in Tajikistan. There have been reports about massive influx of refugees from Tajikistan, majority of them being Tajiks, into the Samarkand and Bukhara regions of Uzbekistan which is worrisome for Uzbekistan keeping in view Tajikistan's claims over these two cities.

Disquietened at these developments, President Karimov initiated a series of steps to meet the perceived security threat to Uzbekistan. During 1992 when the Islamic opposition groups were in control in Tajikistan, Karimov launched suppression of the Uzbek opposition groups like Birlik and the Islamic radicals in Ferghana. He sealed Uzbekistan's borders with Tajikistan and Afghanistan and closed all traffic from that direction to prevent any influx of arms and men. More than 2000 foreigners (mainly Tajiks and some Afghans) are reported to have been expelled from Uzbekistan on charges of "illegal entry and for involvement in subversion in Ferghana valley". Recently Uzbekistan's Security Chief, G. Aliyev claimed to have recovered arms, explosives and even drugs from the possession of some Tajiks who aimed at "sparkling off Tajik style conflict in Uzbekistan and also foment Tajik-Uzbek clashes".

At other level, Karimov has kept channels of his friendly communication open with General Dostam, an ethnic Uzbek and the powerful military leader in Afghanistan with his stronghold in Mazar-i-Sharif. Dostam visited Tashkent several times during 1992 and held discussions with the Uzbek authorities. In November 1992 Dostam's troops captured a key Amu Darya river crossing to Tajikistan at Sher Khan Bandar which was earlier used by Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami as a staging point for cross-border forays. Subsequently a network of border posts along the river supported by boat patrol was set up under the new Afghan Uzbek Commander incharge of border security, Maj. Gen. Abdul Hamid Aka. This led to sealing of an important channel of supply of arms and support to Tajikistan's Islamic opposition. Besides, Dostam has been in close touch with General Nadiri, a leader of the Ismailis and some other important personalities in northern Afghanistan in order to influence the course of events there. That Dostam's family has been staying in Tashkent on a long term basis is also cited as evidence of cooperation between Dostam and Uzbek authorities. There have been reports that

General Dostam and Uzbek President, Karimov have been toying with the idea of creating a "secular buffer state" in northern Afghanistan to cover the southern borders of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which would act as a wedge against the spread of radical Islam from the direction of Iran from the west and from the side of Pashtuns under Hikmatyar from the south. However, it becomes clear that there is a basic understanding between Dostam and the Uzbek leadership on the need to keep at bay the radical Islamist fighters.

The Uzbek President, Karimov took the initiative in mobilising regional response against external interference in Tajikistan. He called upon Russia to take into account the "powerful offensive of pan-Islamism" in the south and asked for continued presence of Russian forces in Tajikistan to control the Tajik-Afghan border. Karimov explained that the "border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan is not only a border between these two states, it can turn into an open gate to all CIS countries from the point of view of arms smuggling, drug running etc." Karimov also initiated diplomatic moves to stop the situation on Tajik-Afghan border from spilling over into other republics. He has been urging upon the leaders in Iran and Afghanistan to help in defusing the tension. Uzbek Foreign Minister was deputed to Teheran in October 1992 to seek Iran's cooperation for settling the issue peacefully. Karimov has been pleading with the CIS leadership particularly Russia and Kazakhstan to take note of the alarming situation. On March 14, 1993 Karimov appealed to the UN Secretary General seeking his help in "ensuring the security and inviolability of border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan". He warned that the continuing conflict in Tajikistan could become a "powerful detonator of political and social upheavals in the region". Karimov wanted the UN to take note of the "arms and ammunition being stockpiled and camps set up for terrorist groups in Afghanistan for sabotage and subversion". Karimov's stand that the southern borders of Tajikistan are the southern boundary of all CIS countries, has finally been accepted and endorsed by the CIS leaders in August 1993.

## **THREAT TO KYRGYZSTAN'S SECURITY**

That the turbulence and strife in Tajikistan has spilled over into the neighbouring state of Kyrgyzstan is evidenced by the influx of thousands of armed Tajik Islamic radicals into the Osh oblast. The Kharogh-Osh highway which provides direct access from Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan to the CIS is also used as the channel of drug trafficking via Kyrgyzstan. The republican leadership has been worried over the protracted civil war in Tajikistan and the possibility of Tajik armed groups supplying arms to Kyrgyz criminal bands. The Kyrgyz President, Akayev publicly expressed his concern over the steep increase in the crime rate witnessed in Kyrgyzstan during 1992 (70 per cent in the whole state and 220 per cent in Osh oblast) and most of this crime was related to drugs. To meet this new threat of illegal entry of narcotics and arms from Tajik territory into Osh through the Afghanistan - Pamirs route, the Kyrgyz army and militia units were transferred from Bishkek to Osh.

Pan-Islamic Tajik radicals also seem to have established some foothold in Osh. In early January 1993 reports came about the disruption of supplies to Osh by the Tajik militants who also killed 3 local Kyrgyzs and held 18 others hostages in the border area of Jergetal of Kyrgyzstan, for their refusal to join their pan-Islamic movement. They are also reported to have hoisted the green Islamic flag on the building of regional administration. These Tajik radicals have been urging the local Kyrgyz populace, which is not so fervent in its Islamic zeal, to fight for the establishment of an Islamic state. The Islamic resurgence in Tajikistan and also in Ferghana region of Uzbekistan, has already created a marked impact on the Uzbeks in the Osh oblast. This is reflected in a study conducted by the Bishkek Polytechnical



Institute, which found that 25 per cent of Uzbeks in Osh oblast favour the establishment of an Islamic state in Kyrgyzstan as against only 10 per cent of Kyrgyzs there. Bitter memories of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz riots that took place in 1990 are yet another source of social turmoil and political instability in the region. Similarly, the border dispute between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which was the cause of Tajik-Kyrgyz clashes in 1989 in Batken region of Kyrgyzstan over division of land and water, has not been resolved yet.

Conscious of this uneasy situation, Kyrgyzstan has been pressing for the conclusion of a formal treaty with Tajikistan to confirm and consolidate the "inviolability of the existing borders". At the same time, Kyrgyzstan has in consonance with the CIS agreement on collective security of the Tajik-Afghan border, sent a battalion of Kyrgyz troops to take positions at the border posts of Ishkashim and Murghab in Tajikistan. It signifies an end to the earlier reluctance to commit Kyrgyz troops, which was essentially due to the local women's protest against sending their sons to what they viewed a second Afghanistan and in deference to the Parliament's decision against Kyrgyzstan's participation in defending the Tajik-Afghan border. Due to the escalation of conflict on the Tajik-Afghan border, better understanding of the security threat to Kyrgyzstan from drugs and arms trafficking and influx of armed Tajik/Afghan militants has dawned upon the political leadership. The need to take urgent preventive steps has been left more so because the Kharogh-Osh highway provides direct connection from the republic to the stronghold of Islamic radicals in Gorno Badakhshan region of Tajikistan.

## **RUSSIAN RESPONSE**

Preoccupied with its own domestic problems and obsessed with the Eurocentric approach in its foreign policy, Russia initially viewed the crisis in Tajikistan as an internecine struggle for power between rival groups, in which it did not wish to get involved. This perception was mainly based on the past Soviet experience in Afghanistan which had cost the Soviet Union too high in terms of men, materials and international image. The Central Asian Border Guards and their Russian commanders, who continued to remain under the CIS unified command, did not receive adequate support from Russia after the disintegration of USSR. The Border Guards defending the Tajik-Afghan border were now facing acute shortage of men, fuel and funds which prevented them to get reinforcements or increase mobility for effectively dealing with the increased border violations. Besides, the Russian officers and troops were reluctant to shed their blood for the security of Tajikistan which was now an independent and sovereign country. At one stage, even the air defence radar stations at Pamirs broke down in October 1992 due to lack of infrastructural support by Russia. This confusing scenario not only worsened the border situation but also emboldened the Tajik and Afghan militant groups. However, in response to Nabiyeu's requests for assistance, Russian Vice Premier, A. Shokhin visited Tajikistan in July 1992 and reached an agreement on the "status of Russian troops in Tajikistan and modalities for recruitment, material and technical supplies by Russia". It was agreed that the Tajik-Afghan and Tajik-Chinese borders would be reinforced by the Russian subdivisions. Subsequently, President Yeltsin issued a decree placing the border troops stationed on the Tajik border under Russian jurisdiction. Soon after, the CIS Commander-in-Chief, E. Shaposhnikov visited Tajikistan at the end of August 1992 and reached a preliminary agreement on the deployment of forces. These measures were intended to remove the structural anomalies in the functioning of the border troops in Tajikistan. But it was a belated response to the fast deteriorating situation in Tajikistan.

Nabiyev's ouster on September 2, 1992 by the Islamic extremist parties and the escalation of fighting in Tajikistan provoked prompt and strong reaction from Russia and the neighbouring Central Asian states. Just one day after the removal of Nabiyev, the Presidents of Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan issued a warning to the government and political organisations of Tajikistan describing the unrest as a danger to the CIS. They also announced their collective decision to deploy CIS troops along the 1300 km long Tajik-Afghan border to stop the large scale smuggling of arms and cross border movement of armed bands. Towards the end of September 1992 the Russian Defence Minister sent additional troops to strengthen the beleaguered 201st Motorised Rifle Division stationed in Tajikistan and authorised its commanding officers to prevent "seizure of arms, equipment and munition belonging to Russian troops and unlawful acts against Russian Servicemen and their families". But matters were made worse by the connivance of Tajik authorities and leaders with the armed Tajik extremist groups and Afghan field commanders. Piqued at this ground situation the Russian Border Guards Officers Corps in Tajikistan sent an appeal to Boris Yeltsin, the President of Russia on November 13, 1992 questioning the "expediency of further stay of their units in the absence of guarantees of legal and social protection". The problem was compounded by the stiff opposition by Tajik media and Islamic parties to the presence of Russian troops who were accused of interference in the internal affairs of Tajikistan and were even charged of supplying/selling arms and fuel to anti-Islamic forces. Tajik Deputy Premier, Davlot Usman compared the ongoing conflict in Tajikistan to Russian intervention in Afghanistan and called it as "a war between Tajikistan and Russia, a war between Islam and non-believers". Protest rallies against the Russian presence were held in Dushanbe on October 6, 1992 which were also addressed by Tajik President, Iskandrov and the Chief Kazi, Turadzonzoda. On the other hand, Kulyab and Khodjent oblasts and also the Russian and Uzbek minorities sought additional CIS peace keeping troops to bring order in Tajikistan. Russians held a rally in Kulyab on October 10, 1992 appealing Yeltsin to keep units of 201st Motor Rifle Division of Russian troops in Tajikistan.

Increasing attacks on Russians and their continuing exodus from Tajikistan became important factors in determining Russia's active policy in this region. Now senior leaders of the Russian government and military openly voiced their concern over the security of Russian minorities and vowed to discharge their responsibilities on this account. Whereas Khasbulatov, Chairman of Russian Federation Supreme Soviet wrote to the new Tajik President, Iskandrov asking him to "guarantee the security of Russians living in the Republic", the Russian Foreign Minister, Kozyrev warned that the "entire might of Russian state is poised to defend human rights, including the rights of Russians and of Russian speaking people". Similarly, the Russian Dy. Defence Minister, General Toporov viewed the presence of Russian troops in Tajikistan as necessary to protect Russians there. The Russian Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded statement on October 15, 1992 expressing concern over the "expanding fratricidal civil war in Tajikistan and the danger of conflict spreading to adjacent countries. It drew the attention of Tajik authorities, movements and leaders to "the attempts to provoke outbursts of anti-Russia and anti- Russian sentiments and use of violence against Russians and attacks on Russian servicemen". It warned that "Russia will do everything necessary to protect the legitimate rights and interests of the Russians". This signalled an end to the drift in Russia's policy towards Tajikistan. Now Moscow took the lead in involving the concerned Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan or evolving a joint strategy to control the situation on the Tajik-Afghan border. A meeting of leaders of these Central Asian states and the Russian Foreign Minister, A. Kozyrev was held at Alma Ata on November 4, 1992. It was agreed that Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division should remain in Tajikistan, which could be supplemented later by CIS peace keeping forces. Next

day Kozyrev led a CIS delegation to Tajikistan for on the spot study. He also met the Russians trapped in Kulyab. It was at the Minsk summit of the Heads of CIS States on January 22, 1993 that a formal decision to reinforce the Russian border troops by forces from the neighbouring CIS states for effectively closing the Tajik-Afghan border was taken.

Despite Russia's success in mustering the support of four CIS states, it were the Russian forces which bore the brunt of defending the Tajik- Afghan frontier. The massacre of more than 25 Russian border guards on the Tajik border post on July 13, 1993 sent shock waves in Russian official and public circles. President Yeltsin called a special session of the Russian Security Council in Moscow on July 26, 1993 to take stock of the situation and adopt remedial measures. Taking the border incident seriously, Yeltsin described the Tajik-Afghan border as "the frontier of Russia", and removed Shlyakhtin, the commander of Russian Border troops from his post. The Russian Security Minister, Victor Barannikov was also reprimanded. It was for the first time that a comprehensive Russian policy aimed at settling the problem on the Tajik-Afghan border and at normalising the situation in Tajikistan was worked out and adopted in the form of a Presidential decree. It was decided to seek political solution to the crisis by organising a diplomatic dialogue between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and to encourage talks between the Tajik leadership and the opposition leaders. At the same time, need for taking coordinated steps by the Russian ministries of Security Internal Affairs, Defence and Foreign Affairs on Tajikistan was stressed. To achieve this objective, Foreign Minister Kozyrev was appointed the President's Special Representative for Tajikistan and Defence Minister, Grachev was made responsible for general operational leadership in coordinating all the forces and hardware involved in carrying out the defense of the Tajik- Afghan border.

Having set the task for his government, Yeltsin organised a summit meeting with the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan at Moscow on August 7, 1993, on the Tajikistan issue. He stressed the need to "neutralise the growing threat to security in Central Asia and ensure stability". Yeltsin called upon the leaders of these states for concrete joint action to reinforce the Russian border troops in Tajikistan on an equal basis. Four important documents which were signed by the five CIS states at this conference provided the legal basis to legitimise direct Russian/CIS role in Tajikistan. These documents are :-

- i) the Declaration on the Inviolability of the State Borders
- ii) Statement on the ways to normalise the Tajik-Afghan border as part of the common CIS border
- iii) Appeal to the UN Secretary General to take measure against the offensive launched from the territory of Afghanistan against Tajikistan.
- iv) Appeal to leaders of the CIS member states to discuss the creation of an economic union.

In sum, the basic parameters of Russian policy in Tajikistan, which is now looked after by a separate Tajikistan Desk instead of the general Central Asia Section, as it has evolved over the past two years, are:-

1. Commitment to the inviolability of State borders,

2. To prevent Islamist extremist forces from Tajikistan and Afghanistan from destabilising the social and political situation in the CIS.
3. To ensure security of Russian speaking minorities.
4. Treating the Tajik-Afghan border as the common CIS border. Hence its protection is to be the joint responsibility of Russia and adjacent CIS states. A formal agreement was reached by the Foreign and Defence Ministries of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for the establishment of an allied defence force to ensure security of the Tajik-Afghan border.
5. Right to retaliate including military action and hot pursuit of enemy. In July 1993 Russian jet fighters bombed several villages in northern Afghanistan to eliminate Tajik Islamic militants who were operating from their bases. It is significant that the Russian policy in Tajikistan finds an expression in the new Russian military doctrine which allows stationing of armed forces outside its national territory to preserve its territorial integrity and that of the CIS, and reserves the right to nuclear strike against the territory, troops or military targets of an aggressor country.
6. To encourage Tajik government to expand its support base within different ethnic groups and clans in Tajikistan and to have reconciliation with the Tajik opposition leaders.
7. To encourage and organise dialogue between Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Russia to seek a solution to the vexed problem using all available diplomatic means.

## **MOVES FOR TAJIK AFGHAN DIALOGUE: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

Occasional contacts have been established between the Tajik/Russian Border Guards and the Afghan Mujahideen field commanders controlling the border on the Afghanistan side to resolve the recurrent problems of arms smuggling, infiltration of armed men or even to secure the release of captives. But these local contacts failed to bring the desired improvement in the border situation. The visit of high level Tajik delegation led by Prime Minister Akbar Mirzoyev to Kabul on July 14, 1992 to seek the help of new Islamic government of Afghanistan for stopping the Mujahideen field commanders from supplying arms and ammunition to Tajik militant groups also proved to be ineffective. The Tajik delegation met the Afghan President, Burhanuddin Rabbani and other Afghan leaders including Ahmad Shah Masood. Though the Afghan leaders shared Tajik concern over the increased border violations and smuggling of arms, they expressed their inability to exercise any control over General Latif Ibrahim, the Afghan commander of rival Hizb-e-Islami group who has been controlling the Pyandzh border stretch in Kunduz. Similar opinion was later expressed by Rabbani during his visit to Tashkent in October 1992 when the Uzbek President raised the issue of Afghan interference in Tajikistan.

It was in mid-August 1993 that the Afghan Foreign Minister visited Dushanbe at the invitation of his Tajik counterpart for talks to settle the vexed border problem, to expedite the process of repatriation of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan and to prepare the ground for bilateral summit between the two heads of state of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The Dushanbe meeting resulted in a joint communique (issued on August 15, 1993) which announced the

setting up of a trilateral commission comprising representatives of Afghanistan, Tajikistan and office of the UN Chief Commissioner for Refugees to assist in the return of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan. Both sides reposed faith in "principles of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in each other's affairs". But the Tajik-Afghan dialogue was made difficult by the kidnapping of 1 Kazakh and 5 Russian Border Guards who were taken as hostages to Afghan territory on August 10, 1993. It was no mere coincidence that the border incident occurred on the same day when Afghan Foreign Minister H. Amin Arsala arrived at Dushanbe thereby assuming priority in the bilateral dialogue and pushing substantial issues to the backstage. Obviously the Tajik opposition groups and their Afghan supporters positioned in northern Afghanistan were seeking to disrupt the process of direct political dialogue between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. However, the Tajik government's unilateral decision to hand over 5 Afghan prisoners as a goodwill gesture to the Afghan authorities was calculated to pave way for the return of hostages. Notwithstanding this gesture and the assurance by Afghan Foreign Minister to have the hostages released soon after his return to Kabul, the Russian and Kazakh Border Guards continued to be held captive by the Afghan authorities for about 20 days. On one occasion, Gulbadin Hikmatyar, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan refused to free the CIS Border troops on the plea that the Russian guards were attacking Tajik refugees on the Afghan territory. The hostages were finally released on August 31, 1993 when the Tajik Head of State, Rakhmanov arrived at Kabul to hold discussions with Afghan President, Rabbani. Both sides discussed the border problem but had to content with the ratification of earlier decision to create a trilateral commission for looking into the problems of Tajik refugees. Later Rakhmanov conceded that release of CIS border guards was "the major result of his visit to Kabul". However, this visit too was marred by renewed fighting on the border in which one Russian border guard was killed. This again reflected the rivalry between different factions of Afghan leadership. The problem is compounded by perceptual differences as Hikmatyar has been against the "deployment of Russian border guards along the Tajik-Afghan border". To him this is the mutual concern of only two states-Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

That there is remote possibility of any peace process taking off in this region, is indicated by the renewal of intense fighting in October 1993 on the border and in Pamirs area and another kidnapping of 3 Russian and 3 Kazakh Border Guards by Tajik/Afghan militants. It has been viewed as yet another attempt by the Tajik Islamic opposition groups and their Afghan Mujahideen supporters to disrupt the process of Tajik-Afghan dialogue and in particular to torpedo the planned return visit of Afghan President, Rabbani to Tajikistan. However, Rabbani did visit Dushanbe on December 19, 1993 and held talks with Rakhmanov, the Tajik Head of State on issues of border security and repatriation of refugees. Both leaders signed a Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, economic and trade accords and an agreement on border security. However, these conciliatory moves did not cut ice with the Tajik Islamist leaders, who dismissed it as meaningless. Tajik Islamic opposition leader, Haji Akbar Turajonzoda also discounted the possibility of Tajikistan conducting any trade with Afghanistan. The Afghan Dy. Minister of Planning, D. Mahadi, who had earlier signed the trilateral agreement on return of Tajik refugees with UNHCR and Tajikistan, also voiced his disapproval to the presence of CIS forces on the Tajik-Afghan border. With the escalation of fighting between Hikmatyar and Rabbani factions in Afghanistan and due to persistent Tajik Islamists' opposition, the Tajik-Afghan peace moves initiated by Rabbani and Tajik government, are doomed to failure.

## CONCLUSION

The crisis in Afghanistan has had a direct impact on the situation in Tajikistan due to supply of arms and ammunition and training imparted by the Afghan Mujahideen to Tajik Islamic extremists. After the demise of Soviet Union narcotics trade in the Golden Crescent has found yet another lucrative supply route via Pamirs-Tajikistan to the Commonwealth of Independent States and European countries. The Afghan Mujahideen have been playing an overt role in subverting the socio-political situation in Tajikistan to establish an Islamic regime there. The situation gets further complicated by different Afghan Mujahideen groups exercising control over different areas in northern Afghanistan who keep on pressing ahead on the Tajik border regardless of what happens in Kabul.

The hostilities in Tajikistan going on for about two years now, have already taken a heavy toll of almost one lakh killed and injured and more than six lakhs rendered homeless. And there is very little prospect of peace and stability getting restored in the region, given the belligerent stance adopted by the Tajik Islamist radicals who have now set up a "Tajik Government in Exile" in Afghanistan. The exchange of friendly visits by Heads of State of Afghanistan and Tajikistan in late 1993 has not resulted in any let-up in the tension on the Tajik-Afghan border. The Tajik-Afghan peace process has been marred by Hikmatyar's continued support to Tajik Islamist extremists and his opposition to the presence of CIS troops on the border. Though the intensification of bloody fighting between rival groups led by Rabbani and Hikmatyar has sidelined the Tajikistan issue for the time being, it has turned the situation murkier. The trans-border movement of armed Tajik and Afghan Islamist extremists and smuggling of drugs and arms has been the main source of destabilisation for the entire Central Asian region.

External factor in Tajikistan's crisis, particularly the trans-border export of Islamic extremism and terrorism from the direction of Afghanistan evoked strong reaction from the adjoining Central Asian States and Russia. Whereas Uzbekistan played a key role in galvanising opinion against "the advance of Islamic fundamentalists and extremists forces", Russia has been concerned over the security of ethnic Russian minorities and the defence of Tajik-Afghanistan border. Though the Russian official and public opinion, still reeling under the impact of Afghanistan syndrome, is divided over the ways and means and extent of Russian involvement in Tajikistan, there is unanimity over the need to keep Islamist extremism at bay. Russia has outlined its geopolitical interests in the region as, "preserving internal stability in Central Asia, protection of Russian speaking minorities and preventing Islamic extremism from passing through the Tajik-Afghan border into the CIS". Conscious of the highly destabilising potential of the situation and the efforts made at redrawing of borders in this region, Russia and the adjoining Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have declared their firm commitment to the "Inviolability of State Borders". Not only that, Russian jet fighters have on several occasions bombed the bases of hostile Tajik and Afghan militants in northern Afghanistan, thereby following the policy of hot pursuit. Given the ground realities, the CIS peace-keeping forces are bound to stay put to defend the Tajik-Afghan border.