

US INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract:

The disintegration of the USSR in December, 1991 and the consequent emergence of independent states in Central Asia, Caucasus, and the Baltic were unprecedented historical events in the global politics of modern times. As a result, five independent Central Asian states of significant geopolitical importance emerged on the vast Eurasian landscape. It is a land locked region of the gigantic Asian continent contiguous to six large states- Russia in the North-West, China in the East and Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India occupying the whole swathe of Southern fringe. The geographical location of Central Asia has been of decisive importance. The 19th century Great Game, Britain's against Russia, was mainly explained in terms of the strategic significance of the region because of its geographical location as the gateway to the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf. In today's Great Game focus is on how to delink Central Asia from Russian ethnic domination and to build a polity attuned to democracy and liberal values, also to revamp their shattered economy marked as it is by shortages, inflation and unbalanced and lop sided pattern of development, evolve beneficial programmes of regional cooperation within the Central Asian states and with neighbouring countries and others.

Keywords:

Central Asian states, US, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, democratization, market economy.

Introduction:

The US interest in Central Asia is of recent origin. During the heydays of the Soviet Union, an iron curtain separated the Central Asian states from the outside world. The disintegration of Soviet Union opened the doors for the outsiders into the region, which was hither-to a *terra incognita* for outside powers. The newly liberated states felt the resource crunch and looked for possible new investors from the West, Japan and South Korea. However, there is no gainsaying that US was to play a central role in the region, being the sole super power. What are then the US objectives in the region?

Inaugurating the Central Asian Institute at the John Hopkins School of Advanced Studies, Washington in October 1996, James F. Collins, Special Advisor to the Secretary for the newly independent states, defined the US objectives in the Central Asian region as follows:

1. Support for the independence, sovereignty and security of each of the Central Asian states.

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2. Assistance in the establishment of free market economies and democratic governments committed to equal opportunity and human rights for their citizens.
3. Integration of these states into the world community of political and financial institutions as well as their participation in the Euro-Atlantic security dialogue and co-operation programmes.
4. Encouragement of these states to pursue peaceful relations among themselves and with their neighbours for regional cooperation and to resolve local conflicts with international mediation.
5. Prevention of any trafficking in weapons of mass destruction or their elements across the region or the borders.
6. Enhancement of US commercial interest and the expansion and diversification of global energy supply.
7. The highest American priority, however, was to denuclearize these Central Asian states in exchange for political, diplomatic and economic support. In this respect, Washington cooperated with these states to dismantle and transport fissile material to the US. The departure of the last nuclear warhead from Kazakhstan in 1995 was a significant achievement in support of non-proliferation.¹

US in Central Asia:

The US appears to be taking keen interest in defining the interests, goals and strategies of Central Asian states. It roped in all the five states into the NATO Partnership for Peace and to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)- a process by which Washington not only sought to enlarge the European security complex, but also intended to provide fresh mechanisms to address Central Asian security concerns.

The promotion of democracy and free market are among the principal objectives of the US administration. According to Strobe Talbott, formerly the Deputy Secretary of State, political and economic reforms in Central Asia would contribute to stability in a strategically vital region that borders China, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan and that has growing economic and social ties with Pakistan and India.² It is increasingly in the US interest to encourage the development of stable democratic systems, and that market economies in these new states emerge strong and take deep roots.

While numerous US programmes have had a beneficial impact, other initiatives have been criticised by locals as patronizing the very governmental structures, which are in need of reform. The US efforts

¹ Saleem Kidwai, "US Strategy in Central Asia", *Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol.6, March - April, 1999, pp 33-34

² Saleem Kidwai, *Journal of Peace Studies*, pp 33-34.

have been subjected to criticism for viewing democratic and market reform as something to be imposed from the top. Despite the stated commitment of the US to expand the role of grassroots efforts, US-Central Asian partnerships in small non-governmental organization (NGOs) have played a relatively minor role in overall assistance programmes.

As US assistance networks expanded, they were restructured to take account of population whose support for reform was more complex and ambivalent than observers had envisioned. The US efforts were sensitive not only to the social safety nets, cultural values and traditions of Central Asia but also to the uniquely evolved mixtures of Soviet and Middle Eastern political and economic systems in these new countries, which may be quite specific. The Americans understood that it was possible to encourage democracy in the Muslim world without establishing themselves as enemies of Islam. The fear of Muslim fundamentalism that seemed to drive so many of the US initial efforts in Central Asia had also been viewed as leaving a destructive legacy that may have only encouraged the growth of fundamentalism itself.

The enormity of resources of these states made this region an attractive investment destination for the US business tycoons. The region has been identified as one of the most promising unexplored oil rich regions in the world. The \$20 billion Chevron oil venture with Kazakhstan and the western consortium to exploit the oil fields in the Caspian Sea are among the world's largest and particularly most lucrative oil and gas ventures, and the number of other US companies seeking opportunity for entry into this field has grown exponentially in the past few years. Besides exploiting oil and gas deposits, the US companies are seeking influence in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, whose vast deposits of gold appear to be more lucrative than oil.

With these parameters, American's interest in Central Asia's development was vital. Domestic stability of all five states was a policy goal. Conflict resolution was a prerequisite for any successful energy development plans to be executed there in the region. Any conflict there would have profound repercussion on the US commercial interests. However, with slashes in foreign aid, the scope for direct US governmental involvement in developmental programmes, aimed at supporting Central Asian states economically and politically remained limited. Given the limits on its foreign aid, Washington did encourage its European and Asian partners to take leading roles.³

³ Saleem Kidwai, *Journal of Peace Studies*, pp 35.

The Required Role:

The US as the sole remaining super power has great stakes in Central Asia which could be shaped and safeguarded by foreign policy experts, and not from public forces driven by market mechanisms. It is absolutely necessary for the US policy makers to respond to the basic aspirations of all the Central Asians. An effective US policy must seek to address their aspirations as central goals, rather than suggesting that the Central Asia's main concern is to check the Iranian influence.

The prevailing tendency to lump all the Central Asian states together as one entity should be discarded. All these states are anything but homogenous. The fact that all of them once were constituent elements of super power is surely not reason enough to pretend that they are of equal importance to the US. Differentiation among them is a necessity. The US policy ought to be oriented towards each of the individual states and not to all of them as a whole. The real challenge to the US is to correctly assess the American interests in the region. The US needs to formulate a policy towards the region which should be based on quest for real solutions.

The US involvement in Central Asian states is not only an opportunity but also a challenge. This is because of the speed with which things have happened. To quote Abdul Shakoor, "Never in the history so much has happened in such a short period of time and in such a peaceful manner as it has been in Eurasia in the past two decades. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and consequent emergence of the Central Asian states (CAS) has even caught the US policy-makers unawares. Perhaps one of the biggest foreign policy problems for the US today is to deal with the newly liberated CAS. The problem is biggest in the sense because both the US academicians and policy-makers knew very little about the region as well as the US had no experience of interaction to deal with the region".⁴ This is what Leslie Gelb, in the *New York Times*, once commented: "Washington's Soviet experts were mainly experts on Moscow, and with the break-up of the Soviet Union they have been adrift".⁵ It was also pointed out by an anthropologist, William Beeman that "Years of neglect have left the United States starved of knowledgeable regional specialists. Only one institution-

⁴ Abdul Shakoor, "Central Asia: The US Interest-Perception and its Security Policies", *European Studies*, Vol. 2, Number 2, 1995, p. 14.

⁵ Mowahid Hussain, "Central Asia: Impact on and Implications for Pak-US ties", *Central Asia and the Region*, S. M. Haider, Ed., Progressive Publishers, Lahore, 1993, p.406.

Indiana University - currently offers courses on the region as part of a regular masters' curriculum".⁶

It becomes apparent that lack of in-depth knowledge and having no experience at all to deal with the region has created complications for the US. One such example is related to the much exaggerated furour over the issue of fundamentalism. The US academicians and policy-makers were making a strategic blunder by taking "Sufism" as another form of Muslim fundamentalism or extremism. This has clearly become a source of alienation and confrontation among the Central Asian nations on the one hand and the US on the other. Hence the main problem for the US is to define its interests and formulate policies vis-à-vis the CAS in such a way that masses are not alienated.

The present geo-political scenario is in sharp contrast with that of the post-1945 era, when the US readily filled the power vacuum created by the withdrawal of Britain from its colonial world. One fundamental difference is that unlike Britain, Russia does not want to be replaced completely by the US even though there is a much wider range of cooperation between the two. Russia, despite its severe and pressing domestic political problems, remains keen to retain its hold and influence over the whole region known as near abroad of which Central Asia is an inalienable strategic component. Moreover, the situation also varies from that of a post-World War-II era in terms of the number of actors involved in the "revisited great game". Along with Russia, the US has not only to face China as a strong regional power, highly conscious of the Western and the US designs and moves towards the region; but also has to face a number of other assertive actors like Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. Within this framework of the US policy-making, one may address the following perspectives:

1. Where does the US stand in the region?
2. How do the US elite tend to visualize or define its interests?

Having identified these two possible variables in US interest perceptions, one may elaborate them as under:

The US Standings in the Region:

With the Soviet disintegration, the United States is now able for the first time to inject its political presence in the new post-Soviet states of Eurasia all the way to the frontiers of China as well as to dominate the Persian Gulf region on the southern fringes of Eurasia.⁷ On the Asian side, America has to face three states on the southern rim of the CAS -

⁶ *Central Asia and the Region.*

⁷ Zbigniew Brezinski, "World Order of the Future", *Dawn*, Karachi, March 3, 1994.

Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. To have inroads into the CAS, America has to operate either through them or in combination with these three states. Iran, obviously, is a nonentity for the US. Turkey and Pakistan are the two states which could prove to be instrumental for the US. Again the extraordinary rise or the possible establishment of even a secular Pan-Turkic region (which has such potential because of ethnic, religious and linguistic proximity) is not acceptable either to the European Community (EC), or to the US and Russia. This leaves out Pakistan to play a crucial and instrumental role for the US for its geo-political centrality.

Yet there is another option for the US, that is, Russia with whom America can do business. Already she has signed a “partnership for peace” agreement with her. However, any such US linkage or commitment with the region is, primarily, contingent upon its intensity of interests-perception. The question arises how the US visualize its interests in Central Asia. This leads us to the study of the phenomenon of interest-perception, particularly focusing on the few following components in great details.

The US Interests:

- a. Containment of Fundamentalism.
- b. Military-Strategic Interests.
- c. Containment of Iran.
- d. Economic and Commercial Interests.

a. Containment of Fundamentalism

The spread of Muslim fundamentalism in Central Asia is not only a popular bogey, but a conceived real threat in the Western media, especially after the Tajik civil war. The then US Secretary of State, James Baker, publicly warned Central Asian leaders, to stay clear of radical Muslims and the influence of Iran.⁸

In the words of a leading American strategic analyst, Zbigniew Brzezinski, the horizon of this threat-perception emerging from the phenomenon of so-called fundamentalism is “For Russia and America the geo-political vacuum which may become a dangerous whirlpool. The political awakening of Islam is generating not only a collision with residual Russian imperialism in the north, but, in time, is also likely to contest American domination in the South”. He further adds that “the geographical perimeter of this whirlpool may extend from Adriatic sea next to the Balkans all the way to the border of the Chinese Xinjiang. From south to north, this border loops around the Persian Gulf,

⁸ Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?*, Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1994, p. 245.

embracing parts of the Middle East, then Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan in the South, all of Central Asia along Russian-Kazakh frontier to the north, and all the way along the Russian-Ukrainian border”.⁹ Infact, it is a distant threat-perception. We are highlighting the significance of curbing of such potential Islamic resurgence.

b. Military-Strategic Interests

The proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction is a reality for the Americans, as they are highly determined to check any such possible proliferation. CIA chief, James Woolsey, told a senate committee that “nonproliferation poses one of the most complex challenges the intelligence community will face for the remainder of the century”.¹⁰

The problems raised by Kazakhstan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, the fourth largest nuclear power in the world, dominated American and the Western strategists. Kazakhstan inherited 104 SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) with a total of 1400 warheads. Each ICBM could travel up to 11,200 kilometers and carry 10 independently targeted warheads, each of which is equivalent to half a million tons of TNT. The point to be noted is that Kazakhstan has become the first ever state which could strike directly at the heartlands of the West. That is why Kazakhstan has become a source of grave concern for the US whose diplomats have been visiting frequently Almata after the failed coup of August 1991.¹¹ However, the continuing concerns were set at rest only after Kazakhstan signed the NPT and agreed to dismantle its nuclear arsenal – the first CIS country to voluntarily do so.

Sometime back, rumours abounded in the western press that Kazakhstan had sold an SS-18 to Iran and that it was about to provide Tehran with enriched uranium. Speculative media reports in 1992 also spoke of Tajikistan selling enriched uranium to potential Third World customers at the rate of \$100,000 a kilogram. The nuclear card became a political leverage for Ukraine and Kazakhstan, as both had tried to extract more concessions from Russia and greater financial aid from the US¹² by using the nuclear lever at that point of time.

However, the hectic diplomacy of the US had resulted in the signing of a treaty in May 1992, when the President of Kazakhstan agreed to sign the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START-I) which would eventually allow the elimination of one third of Soviet and

⁹ Zbigniew Brezinski, *Dawn*, Karachi, March 3, 1994.

¹⁰ Ahmad Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, p. 236.

¹¹ *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, p. 234.

¹² *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, p.236.

the US nuclear weapons.¹³ The importance attached to Kazakhstan's possession of weapon could well be judged from the treaty provision that the very first of these missiles to be eliminated would be the SS-18s, the lethal missile on Kazakh soil. This may be the convergence of the American and Russian interests and hence of their security policies.

c. Containment of Iran

Ever since the fall of the Shah, Iran has become the chief opponent of the US in this region. In the words of former advisor of American National Security Council, Zbigniew Brzezinski: "Iran is clearly an aspirant to regional hegemony and it is prepared to outwit the US. It has an imperial tradition and possesses both the religious and the nationalist motivation to contest both the American and the Russian presence in the area. With both religion and motivation conspiring an alien regional hegemony, the current American supremacy in the Middle East is built quite literally on sand. A good illustration of the US limitation of regional control is provided by the fact that even the extraordinary one sided military outcome of the Gulf War of 1991 did not yield equally commensurate political results: Saddam Hussein's regime remained in power, and both the Shiite and Kurd revolts despite American encouragement of them, were suppressed".¹⁴ Moreover, a total destruction of Iraq in a Gulf War would have led to the emergence of Iran as a decisive regional leader, which for obvious reasons America did not want.

d. Economic and Commercial Interests

Although US officials regard economic interests in Central Asia as private sector interests,¹⁵ given the huge energy potential, this may turn into an official one or as an alternate to the Middle Eastern oil resources in future. These days American investors and businessmen are very active in evaluating the region's oil and gas potential. Shafiqul Islam, an Economist, in an article said, "The natural resources that has attracted the attentions of Americans, Japanese and other foreign investors to Central Asia is energy - oil and natural gas"¹⁶ He identified that the US, major European countries, Japan, China and South Korea were on their way to becoming the region's major trading partners and investors.

In an overall analysis, the nature of American interests may be concluded in the words of a recent study group's report on Central Asia, published by the US Institute of Peace, which says:

¹³ *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, p. 235.

¹⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Dawn*, Karachi, March 3, 1994.

¹⁵ M. A. Bhatti, "Pakistan's Perspectives on Central Asia", *Strategic Studies*, (Islamabad), Vol. XVI, No.3, Spring, 1994, p. 36.

¹⁶ Shafiqul Islam, "Capitalism on the Silk Route", *Current History*, Vol. 93, No. 582, April 1994, p. 156.

“The only threat in former Soviet Central Asia to have evoked US interests since dissolving the USSR seems to come from some combination of Iran, Muslim fundamentalism, instability and the presence of a nuclear capability. Turkey, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are contending for the position of primary American or Western surrogate in containing this threat, with Egypt, India and Israel coming for similar but lesser roles”.¹⁷

Given the nature of the US strategic interests, the point is how would these interests be better served? What are the US policies to attain these very interests? What would be the means to achieve these ends? To answer these interrelated questions, one has to analyze the past and the present trends of the US security policies vis-à-vis Central Asia.

Political Targets:

It is being observed that the USA’s political targets in Central Asia are primarily to increase stability, to speed up democratization, to settle free market economy and make sure that it smoothly operates, to increase commercial activity, to control nuclear weapons and to settle human rights standards. Washington promotes all these targets in such a manner of political priority which could be formulated as preventing the development or the activities of radical regimes in the region. In a more general sense the US purpose is to help the Central Asian states with their integration into the world thus making them aware of their own international rights and responsibilities. Therefore these states will take responsibility in security problems and the like by not allowing the rise of anti-Western radical regimes, which may threaten international peace and security.

Although there is a consensus among the American policy makers about the targets listed above, there are divergent views on dimensions of American interference in Central Asia. The group supporting an active policy towards Central Asia is mainly concerned with the negative effects of a probable instability on the neighbouring states which have good relations with the US, including Turkey.¹⁸ On the other hand, because of the existence of the equipment and resources suitable for producing nuclear weapons in this region, this school of thought draws attention to the danger of a possible armament and the spread of these weapons to the radical third world countries or to the terrorist organizations. Within this perspective, the US should increase its support for the region; it should even make efforts in improving bilateral

¹⁷ Robert B. Oakley, *Afghanistan and Post-Soviet Central Asia Prospects for Political Evolution and the Role of Islam*, US Institute of Peace, Washington DC, p. 36.

¹⁸ Warren Christopher, “Towards a Secure, Free and Fully Integrated Europe”, *Dispatch*, 1994, p.403.

relations. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the interests of the allies and the US are not always overlapping as far as this region is concerned and that a limited amount of fund for aids are apportioned for these friendly states. Another crucial factor is the belief that the chance of a transformation through direct American involvement is higher, as far as America's prestige is concerned. The advocates of direct American intervention point out that through increasing American aid and investment, the region's dependence on Washington would be enhanced and Russia could be balanced.¹⁹ The last argument is that to lag behind the competition against China, North Korea, and some European states which are penetrating the Central Asian market, will have a negative effect on America's position in the global competition.²⁰ The group criticizing America's current policy and demanding less involvement in Central Asia argues that the region does not mean much to American interests, and even that the developments in the region remain marginal, as far as America is concerned. Ignoring the claims that there is a threat of Muslim radicalism in the region, and that such a thing would damage American interests in the Middle East or in any other region. The members of this group point out that the regional interests of Washington could be pursued by Turkey and other friendly states. While some are stressing that interference in different cultures, for the sake of democratization lead to authoritarianism within the historical process, another group claims that since giving of continuing aid will mean ensuring permanent American interference, which will become the sole means of checking Muslim radicalism. Another approach is that oil and natural resources of these new states are not of vital importance to America, and that it will take years for these states to open up to the Western markets. Yet another factor which is considered having as much importance as the other factors is the anxiety that any conflict or instability would be dangerous for the American personnel.²¹

Of these two approaches, which have been touched upon with its main points, the first one is dominant as far as the current conjuncture is concerned. The most obvious proof of this situation is America's rapidity in recognizing the newly independent states following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Strobe Talbott, aptly pointed out that Washington took into consideration these countries' characteristics and thus

¹⁹ Jim Nichol, *Central Asia's New States: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*, Washington, 1996, p.2.

²⁰ Strobe Talbott, Presidents and Prime Ministers, 1994, an address in Washington DC, May 3, 1994, p.3.

²¹ Jim Nichol, *Central Asia's New States: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*, p.2.

established relations on different dimensions with each country.²² In this context the bilateral relations and the characteristics which determined these relations need detailed examination.

Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian state recognized by the US on December 25, 1991. The cornerstone of the present relations with Kazakhstan is the law of “endorsement of Russia’s and Eurasia’s newly established democracies and their freedom to free markets. A law to this effect was passed in 1992. This law has implications directed at military, political, and economic transformation. Washington sent aid to this country for a smooth transition to market economy. The President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazabayev had paid his first official visit to the US from 18 to 20 May 1992. Vice-President Albert Gore’s visit in September 1993 was followed by Foreign Secretary Warren Christopher’s visit to Almaty in October 1994.²³ During Nazarbayerev’s second visit to the US, he and Clinton signed the “Democratic Cooperation Agreement” which emphasized democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law.²⁴ After Nazarbayerev’s visit, another high level contact was realized in April 1995 with Defense Secretary William Perry’s visit to Kazakhstan.²⁵

In addition to high level visits, the American administration had taken the lead in establishing educational programmes about various subjects in order to help Kazakhstan with its transition to democracy. These programmes consist of different topics such as political party and voter education, election arrangements, public administration, human rights, law and legal reforms, foreign policy, diplomacy, university administration and English training. Services like translation of articles and books, on the other hand, have also not been neglected.²⁶

As could be understood from the US-Kazakhstan relations, there emerged the opportunity of establishing bilateral relations between the newly independent states and the US due to the end of the Cold War. Washington recognized Kyrgyzstan on December 25, 1991 and opened an Embassy in Bishkek in February 1992. The relations with Kyrgyzstan were conducted within the framework of the Freedom law, like the other newly independent states. Kyrgyz President Askeer Akayev visited the US from 15 to 22 May 1993. Akayev made contacts with President Clinton, Vice-President Al Gore and Foreign Secretary Warren Christopher. During this visit Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Karabayev and

²² StrobeTalbot, Presidents and Prime Ministers, 1994.

²³ *Turkish Daily News*, December 11, 1993.

²⁴ *Turkish Daily News*, February 16, 1994.

²⁵ *Turkish Daily News*, April 6, 1995.

²⁶ *Despatch*, 1994, p.282.

his American counterpart signed a framework agreement; about the aid the American administration would give to Kyrgyzstan. Vice-President Gore reciprocated this visit in December 1993. In addition to an agreement that would facilitate bilateral investment relations, Gore also put his signature on a joint agricultural project.

Within the general logic of its relations with the Central Asian states, Washington had taken a series of initiatives for securing and consolidating transition to democracy. Although there were ups and downs, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were ahead of others in the democratization process, according to the reports prepared by the American think-tanks.²⁷ American authorities are engaged in various services in Kyrgyzstan such as administrative reorganization, and exchange programme for local and central government officials, diplomatic training, pluralism, electoral law, political party training, free media activities of cultural groups, university administration and students exchange. Furthermore, "Peace Corps" volunteers are working to spread English teaching in the country.

The American administration established diplomatic relations with Turkmenistan in mid-March 1992 and opened an Embassy in Ashkabat. The relations of Washington with Turkmenistan were on a lower course compared to relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This is because Turkmenistan had traversed less distance in transition to democracy and free market economy than others. Despite this situation, the American administration did not fail to engage in various projects to settle democracy and civic culture in that country.

The US had recognized Uzbekistan on December 25, 1991 and opened an Embassy in Tashkent in March 1992. Despite early recognition, the relations had not improved to the desired level. The reason was Uzbekistan's problems regarding human rights, civil liberties and transition to democracy.²⁸ Washington, as in its relations with Turkmenistan, had continued its dialogue in and its call for democratization to Uzbekistan.²⁹ Defense Secretary William Perry had emphasized the strategic importance of the country during his visit in April 1995 and has reiterated the American support for democratization and maintenance of stability. The American authorities on the other

²⁷ Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asian on its Own", *Journal of Democracy*, 1993, pp. 92-103.

²⁸ Roger Kangas, "Recent Developments in Uzbek Political Parties", *Central Asian Monitor*, No.4, 1992, pp.22-27.

²⁹ Jim Nichol, *Central Asia's New States: Political Developments and Implications for US Interests*, p.3.

hand, carried on with training activities in Uzbekistan as well “Peace Corps” volunteers were working for spreading English training.

The country with which the American administration had the lowest level of relations was Tajikistan. The reason for that was the civil war and instability. Washington recognized Tajikistan on December 25, 1991 and opened an Embassy in Dushanbe in March 1992. Thereafter the relations developed in the shape of sending in humanitarian aid to Tajikistan to heal the wounds of war. The officials of the American Department of Foreign Affairs had participated in the peace talks between the warring parties in Tajikistan, as observers within the UN Organization.

Conclusion:

The US interests in Central Asian states, together with that of several other European and Asian economic giants are of recent origin, consequent upon the raising of the iron curtain in 1991. Though freed from the hegemonistic control of the Soviet Union, these states were in the throes of development and desperately needed foreign capital investment for sustained economic growth. This inter-alia required not only support for the independence and sovereignty of these states but also their integration into the world community in terms of enhanced security and commercial expansion, their increased democratization to be followed by denuclearization.

Since changes took place with amazing rapidity and speed in this region, from the disintegration of the Soviet Union to the formation of Commonwealth of Independent States, from the liberation of nationalities to their integration in global institutions, the need of the hour for the US government is not to club these countries arbitrarily into one homogenous mould, but to differentiate between them and recognise their in-built heterogeneity in terms of political awareness, economic development, impact of the ideology of Islam and multi-national character of these states. Combating Muslim fundamentalism, which is being exported by neighbouring countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, requires a careful handling of ground level situation in such a way that without appearing to be an enemy of Islam, one may encourage increased democratization of traditional and antecedent political structures.

The containment of Iran without a total destruction of Iraq is yet another US policy goal in the region. This can be done by developing friendly relations with Pakistan and Turkey but not at the cost of Russia. In fact the US accepts that Russia has a predominant role to perform in the region; thereby reducing Pakistan and Turkey on the periphery. To

offset growing Iranian influence in the region, US, Turkey, Israel and Europe have come under a common umbrella to prevent Islamisation of Central Asia.

The nuclear issue of former Soviet republics is also linked with problems of health. A series of surface and underground explosions contaminated the environment of concerned states. Areas contiguous to test sites have shown an alarming rise in cancerous diseases, infant mortality and genetic disorders. The chief aim of the US is to ensure that within the framework of START treaties, all nuclear weapons of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus are transferred to Russia for liquidation. The denuclearization of Kazakhstan became a matter of utmost priority for the US, where she found a great convergence of interests with Russia. The states of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus were none too keen to use their nuclear card to extract more concessions - political as well as economic, from the US and Russia. Therefore, Kazakhstan has signed nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The primary focus of the US should have been on legal and technical assistance in tackling issues such as environmental protection, drug-trafficking and weapons proliferation. The US could also channel its efforts through international organizations that facilitate social progress such as refugee relief, health care and family planning. Particularly useful US roles might include providing technology and skills especially in dry land agricultural technologies, such as drip irrigation, that could reduce water use and help farmers shift from cotton production to a more balanced pattern of agriculture. One of Central Asia's most crucial needs is to train experts, who can play neutral roles in the transition to market economies and democratic political systems. Unmatched US capacities in higher education too could be especially useful.

Russia still regards its former republics to be in its interest zone and hence it will not brook any outside interference in this region. At the same time, it is keen to impress upon these states that their security is inalienably and inextricably linked with Russia which alone is capable of defending them against outside aggression. However, because of geographical and ethnic factors, Russia is apprehensive of the designs of China which is using its nuclear and economic clout to gain a firm foothold in these states.