

strategic considerations behind Pakistan's Afghan policy, which produced tangible benefits for the country. No doubt, Pakistan was at the same time taking considerable risks by antagonizing Moscow, but Islamabad correctly calculated that the Soviet Union would not go so far as to attack Pakistan for fear that this would lead to a global war.

There has been the argument that as a consequence of the Afghan policy, there is gun-running all over Pakistan, ensuing terrorism and violent religious fanaticism. However, this again does not stand the test of a careful scrutiny. The greatest accumulation of guns and ammunition had been in Pakistan's bordering provinces of NWFP and Balochistan from where they used to be sent across to the Mujahideen. But in the 1990s there was relatively little terrorism in these two provinces. Clearly, the reasons for the terrorism in Karachi, which is located far from Afghanistan, have to be looked for elsewhere and cannot be mainly attributed to Pakistan's role in the Afghan Jihad. Moreover, the fighting against the Soviets had ended by 1988 with the signing of the Geneva Accord. The fact is that during Ziaul Haq's eleven year tenure (1977-88), terrorism in Karachi was much less than the scale reached after his death. In fact, terrorism increased after the end of the fighting against the Soviets when the arms flow to Afghanistan had already stopped. Hence, there was little linkage between the two events. Also, factional violence inspired by religious fanaticism was in that period more pronounced in the Punjab rather than in the two provinces bordering Afghanistan.

As for the spread of narcotics in Pakistan, this is probably a part of a world-wide phenomenon, in which the pervasive Western way of life, as carried by films, television, and literature, has been a key factor.

## **The Afghan Problem in the Post-Soviet Era**

The Geneva Accords secured the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan on schedule in 1989. Soon thereafter, Moscow

witnessed dramatic events when the communist hard-liners made a last-ditch effort to seize power from Gorbachev. They failed in this bid, but Gorbachev too had to go. It was his former protégé and subsequent rival Yeltsin who managed to seize power with popular support. As a reaction to the revolt of the communist hard-liners, Yeltsin decided to put an end to the entire Soviet State structure under communism. One of the world's two Super Powers along with its East European empire thus disintegrated without a shot being fired. The Soviet misadventure in Afghanistan had been a contributory factor in this momentous development which has altogether changed the global equations.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the old-time fear of Soviet expansionism has disappeared and thus one of Pakistan's security threats has been eliminated. With the emergence of six independent Muslim states in Central Asia, an unfriendly Super Power is no longer breathing down Pakistan's neck. The Central Asian Muslims have old linkages with Pakistan. The Central Muslim Empire in India—the Mughal dynasty, which ruled from 1526 to 1857—was established by Babur, the ruler of Ferghana in today's Uzbekistan. Many Uzbeks came over to India during the Mughal period to become part of the ruling elite. Many Pakistanis trace their roots to Central Asia. For these reasons, there is inherent goodwill and fraternal sentiments between Pakistan and the six Muslim countries of Central Asia.

Moreover, all of these countries are land-locked and can secure a natural transit route to the sea via Pakistan. Although Iran is also vying to serve as the land transit route, Pakistan seems to be a better choice for these countries for logistic reasons. Peace in Afghanistan is, however, a prerequisite for such a transit route. Indeed, the concept of a Central Asia enjoying friendly relations with, and giving a strategic depth to Pakistan *vis-à-vis* India is apparently inseparable from the situation in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, after the Soviet withdrawal and the ouster of the communist regime in Kabul three years later, the seven Mujahideen parties, who had fought the Soviet-backed regime,

got involved in an internecine struggle for power. Pakistan tried to play the role of the honest broker between the warring factions (1992-96) with short-term success. On the whole, it seems to have only burnt its fingers. The situation was aggravated by outside involvement in the power struggle, this time from Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as by Russia—each of which has its own ethnic or other interests in Afghanistan.

While Pakistan came under suspicion for supporting Hekmatyar in the initial phase of the civil war, it later found itself in a more awkward position. The sudden rise of the Taliban, a radical Islamic fundamentalist movement, and their ascendancy over most of Afghanistan aroused apprehensions in the neighbouring Central Asian countries, with the possible exception of Turkmenistan. Even after becoming independent in 1991 these Muslim countries continue to be ruled by their old-time communist bosses who were raised on a staple of secularism, atheism, and modernism. During the Soviet era, one of the main security concerns for Moscow in the Muslim-majority areas was any adherence to Islamic orthodoxy. Thus, despite pretensions of religious freedom, everything was done to crush Islam. After the Central Asian states became independent, Islam re-emerged as the dominant religion in these countries and even the former communists now pay lip service to Islam. However, since these rulers are left-overs from the communist era, they have run into serious opposition from Islamic orthodox circles. In their threat perception Islamic 'fundamentalists' top the list and a militant Islamic regime in Afghanistan is seen as a threat.

The influence of Turkey in Central Asia is also a factor in this scenario. Ethnically, the Central Asians are Turkish and see Turkey as a kind of a big brother. For its part, Turkey seems to regard these Central Asian countries as a special preserve of its own. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Pan-Turkism had been an important political movement in Central Asia, until it was crushed by both the Russians and the Chinese. But ever since the Central Asian countries regained independence in 1991, Turkey has been seeking to advance its influence in this region.

The Turkish ruling circles, who are wedded to secularism and are facing opposition from orthodox Islamic circles in their own country, are enthusiastic promoters of secularism in Central Asia as well. A serious tussle is thus taking place in Central Asia between the secular rulers and the orthodox Islamic majority.

Russia continues to hold sway in the Central Asian states, even after their separation. The whole region was colonized by the Russians in the last 200 years and Russian political and cultural influence persists, despite the break-up of the Soviet Union. Moreover, Russian troops are stationed in some Central Asian states in accordance with the provisions of Treaties under the aegis of the CIS. It seems that the hang-over of the colonial past has not disappeared altogether from the mind-set of Moscow. Pervasive Russian influence in Central Asia is pitted against the spread of Islamic orthodoxy and is working in tandem with the instinct for self-preservation of the Central Asian rulers in their own struggle against the Islamic opposition. These rulers are fearful that the militant Taliban ideology in neighbouring Afghanistan could spread to their own countries, or the Taliban could even extend material support across the Oxus River to the Islamic opponents of the present regimes, thus posing a grave threat to their internal security.

In addition to ideology and security, ethnic considerations are also a factor. Northern Afghanistan is mostly populated by Uzbeks and Tajiks in whose welfare Uzbekistan and Tajikistan clearly have some interest. In the more recent fighting in the Afghan civil war, the Uzbek and Tajik population of northern Afghanistan was undoubtedly the recipient of considerable material aid from their cousins across the borders. The success in the civil war of the mainly Pukhtun Taliban had also raised the fear that Uzbek and Tajik refugees might be pushed across the Oxus River into Central Asia. This adds to the concerns of the Central Asian countries.

On the western side, Iran was bitterly hostile to the Taliban Government for reasons of its own. It has come down heavily against the extremist Islamic policies of the Taliban. Ironically, prior to the rise of the Taliban, Iran had been regarded as the

Islamic fundamentalist country. However, the Taliban are Sunni Muslims and, hence, Shiite Iran has shown little enthusiasm for the former. Moreover, ever since the fall of the communist regime in Afghanistan in 1992, Iran has evidently sought to acquire for itself a position of special influence in Afghanistan, by promoting the power and influence of the Afghan Shia minority as also the Persian-speaking and non-Pukhtun ethnic groups. Iran was extending all out material and moral aid to the Rabhani regime even after it had been ousted in 1996 from the capital Kabul and, two years later, from its provisional capital Mazar-e-Sharif.

It is thus tragic that for the past three decades, peace has eluded Afghanistan. First there was the long, and ultimately successful, *Jihad* against the Soviet occupation. This was followed by a prolonged civil war in which the Taliban emerged as the victors. The supremacy of the Taliban did, at long last, bring peace and stability to Afghanistan in the areas under their control. However, the threat to peace was coming more from outside because of the apprehensions and hostility towards the Taliban of some of the neighbouring countries, particularly Iran.

Unfortunately, there is an impression among these neighbouring countries that Pakistan has been actively supporting the Taliban in their military successes. Very little evidence has been advanced to support this contention which minimizes the real reason for the rise of the Taliban, namely, their popularity amongst large sections of the Afghan people. It is true, however, that the ascendancy of the Taliban could produce two main advantages for Pakistan. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan would enable Pakistan to promote beneficial co-operation in the region and obtain a natural transit route via Afghanistan. Also the Taliban have much more in common with Pakistan and are more well-disposed towards it than the other Afghan groups. Thus, it was natural that Pakistan was the first country to recognize the Taliban regime.

On the other hand, the success of the mainly Pukhtun Taliban, who were controlling nearly 90 per cent area of Afghanistan,

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seemed to have brought about a congruence in the thinking of some neighbouring countries, though for diverse reasons. Unfortunately for Pakistan, it found itself the target of criticism from some of its traditional friends and neighbours for a 'sin' which it had not even committed.

Pakistan was thus facing a serious dilemma. Most of the Taliban are ethnic Pukhtuns, like many Pakistanis in the two provinces bordering Afghanistan. Many Taliban leaders had studied in Pakistan's religious schools. (Incidentally, Afghan religious students from all ethnic backgrounds have long been coming to Pakistan.) Thus, the Taliban had strong linkages with Pakistan and were basically well-disposed towards it. At the same time, the Taliban succeeded in holding their sway over most of Afghanistan due to their own policies and the support of Afghanistan's majority Pukhtun population. Pakistan neither had the resources nor the political will to secure the success of the Taliban. However, if Pakistan tried either to distance itself from the Taliban or to adopt a negative attitude towards them, then it ran the risk of annoying the major Afghan ethnic group—indeed the only group—which was well-disposed towards Pakistan. In fact, the Taliban can pose problems across Pakistan's porous border.

The Taliban have been accused of ill-treatment of the Shias and ethnic minorities. They have strongly denied these charges, which have hardly been substantiated. The restrictions imposed by them on women's education and holding of jobs, use of the veil, as well as Islamic punishments have brought charges of human rights violations from international bodies, including the UN. For this reason also, the Taliban remain highly isolated internationally. Pakistan, followed by Saudi Arabia and UAE, were the only countries to extend recognition to the Taliban government. Further, Iran stepped up a war of nerves against the Taliban and even threatened to launch a military invasion against them.

Under these circumstances, Pakistan risked being dragged into a situation where its objectives of securing regional co-operation and the perceived strategic advantages, accruing from

the emergence of six Islamic states in Central Asia, might prove illusory. If on the other hand, the Taliban government was able to establish a better equation with its neighbours and peace at home, Pakistan could look forward to a close and highly beneficial political and economic relationship with several countries in its backyard with which Pakistan has had centuries-old links.

Pakistan has always been in favour of establishing a broad-based government in Afghanistan including the main ethnic groups and various factions. The overwhelming success of the Taliban all over Afghanistan, except the north-eastern part and the Panjsher Valley, however, made them less inclined towards having a coalition with the other factions.

In the event that the Taliban regime had been able to maintain its hold over Afghanistan it is likely that the rest of the world would have, sooner or later, accepted the reality of its existence and come to terms with it. The Taliban would, however, have to show some malleability in their own interest by broadening their ethnic base and by improving their human rights record. On the other hand, Pakistan's interests would be best served by coaxing the Taliban to move towards conciliation and more flexibility. The establishment of a durable peace in Afghanistan and a friendly regime in Kabul, which is at peace at home and with its neighbours, should remain Pakistan's objective. If this can be achieved, Pakistan's strategic interests in the region would receive a big boost.

### Pakistan-Iran Differences on the Afghan Issue

The Afghan issue arose almost at the same time as the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The Afghan people's resistance against the communist regime and Soviet occupation forces was steeped in their strong adherence to Islam. This naturally evoked all-out sympathy and support from the Islamic revolutionaries in Iran. At the same time their xenophobia and hatred towards the USA resulted in the adoption of a strange attitude towards Pakistan's role in the Afghan crisis. In the first place, Tehran chose to be

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suspicious of Pakistan's sincerity in opposing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The fact that American arms were reaching the Afghan Mujahideen via Pakistan aroused Iranian suspicions, since the US was considered to be the 'Big Satan' by the Islamic revolutionaries. It was clearly not understood by Tehran that a common interest to oppose the Soviet designs in Afghanistan had brought the US, Pakistan, China, Saudi Arabia, and the Afghan Mujahideen together. In fact, nearly all countries in the world were opposed to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Furthermore, Iran seemed to be unmindful that it was Pakistan which was making the greatest sacrifices by opposing the Soviets—in terms of security hazards and the burden of refugees—certainly as compared to the losses incurred by Iran in supporting the Afghan resistance.

Even though Pakistan faithfully kept Iran fully informed of all developments, from 1982 onwards, in the context of the UN-sponsored Geneva negotiations to bring about the Soviet withdrawal, still Iran persisted in maintaining a negative attitude. It refused to participate in the talks but only agreed to be kept informed. The Iranians told Cordovez that 'they were much more honest and determined friends of the mujahideen than the Pakistanis.'<sup>17</sup> Iran, however, refused to be 'pinned down' to any agreement. Thus, Deputy Foreign Minister Larijani told Cordovez that Iran preferred 'to remain a wild card. We will see what we can do when a settlement is nearer.'<sup>18</sup> In fact, Iran kept on apprehending that these negotiations were nothing more than a trick or façade for 'betraying' the Afghan Mujahideen! While Iran did not take even a fraction of the risks incurred by Pakistan in opposing the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, it was inexplicably suspicious of Pakistan's commitment to the cause of the Mujahideen fighting against the Soviet occupiers. In fact, the Iranian prognosis of the situation was so widely off the mark that, till the actual signing of the Geneva Accords in April 1988 and even for sometime thereafter, the Iranians kept on saying that the Soviets would never withdraw from Afghanistan.

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 and the overthrow of the communist regime in Kabul in 1992, were

*great victories—above all, for Islamic ideology and solidarity. This should have indeed ushered in an era of fraternal cooperation and greater understanding with Pakistan, in the context of Afghanistan, consistent with the Islamic spirit behind Iran's Revolution. In reality, since 1992, Iran has played, from the point of view of Pakistan, an increasingly unhelpful and unfriendly role in Afghanistan.*

It seems that since the rise in oil income in the early 1970s, there has been a transformation in Iran's attitude when the Shah began dreaming of a revival of the Persian Empire. Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 War had diminished its earlier importance in his eyes. The Islamic Revolution in Iran has not basically changed this attitude despite all protestations of fraternal feelings for Pakistan. A close analysis of events suggests that, behind the friendly façade, the real problem has been Iran's hegemonic ambitions in Afghanistan. According to Selig S. Harrison, with oil prices rising, the Shah of Iran had 'embarked on his ambitious effort to roll back Soviet influence in neighbouring countries and create a modern version of the ancient Persian empire. Until the eighteenth century, Iran had ruled western Afghanistan, and the fall of Zahir Shah (in 1973) revived Iranian ambitions.'<sup>20</sup> It is ironic, however, that the Islamic radicals, who toppled the hated Shah, have evidently persisted with his hegemonic ambitions, particularly in respect of western Afghanistan. Since the fall of the communist regime in Kabul in 1992, their effort has been to acquire for Iran a position of special influence in Afghanistan. To achieve this objective, Iran has sought to secure a key position for the small Shia minority in Afghanistan's power structure.

In the pursuit of these ambitions, since the ouster of the communist regime, Iran has in effect opposed the control of Afghanistan by the Pukhtun/Sunni majority, which has ruled Afghanistan for the past two hundred years, including the period of the Communist rule (1978-92). Iran is, of course, aware that the Pukhtuns have much more in common with Pakistan; the leaders of the main Pukhtun political groups had lived in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation, and had in fact operated

from bases in Pakistan against the Soviets. They are obviously well-disposed towards Pakistan. Evidently conscious of this reality, Iran has thrown its support behind the non-Pukhtun groups in Afghanistan, some of whom also speak the Persian language.

Following the successful outcome of the ten-year long *Jihad* against the Soviet forces and the subsequent ouster of the communist regime, the Afghan people naturally expected that there would at long last be peace and tranquillity in their country, and reconstruction under a Mujahideen-led government. Unfortunately the loose coalition of the Mujahideen leaders, which had operated successfully against the Soviet forces and the Afghan communist regime, fell apart in the individual just for power. The Mujahideen leaders soon enough turned into regional war lords each with his own personal agenda. This led to civil war and large-scale bloodshed in the battle for succession. Several attempts at reconciliation, brokered by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, came to nought. The Mujahideen leaders even broke the pledges they had made in the sanctity of the Holy Ka'aba in Makkah. This caused deep frustration in Saudi Arabia, which had solidly stood by the Mujahideen during the long struggle against the Soviet occupation. As a consequence the Saudis have, subsequently, taken only a marginal interest in developments in Afghanistan. This in turn has weakened Pakistan's ability to manoeuvre in the Afghan imbroglio.

The post-communist civil war in Afghanistan was initially spurred by personal ambitions of the various Mujahideen leaders. Later on ethnic and linguistic considerations have become an increasingly important factor in the power struggle. Significantly it was disgust with this internecine fighting for power, which gave birth to the Taliban movement. It first emerged in the Pukhtun areas, around 1994, as a third force and speedily gained popularity. The Taliban denounced the existing political factions as un-Islamic, corrupt, and self-centred. They also promised to bring peace and Islamic justice to areas under their control. This message was evidently well-received. The business community

also welcomed the prospect of stability and good law and order. Thus, one region after another in the Pukhtun belt came under the control of the Taliban, usually without any fighting. The capital Kabul fell to the Taliban in September 1996 and thus the new regime came to control nearly two-thirds of Afghanistan, including some non-Pukhtun areas.

The sudden ascendancy of the Taliban confounded most observers. Looking for explanations, some analysts concluded, by inference rather than on the basis of concrete evidence, that Pakistan was behind their success, since the movement of the Taliban (meaning students) had originally started among Afghan students who had studied in religious schools in Pakistan. The fact that most of the Taliban were Pukhtuns like many Pakistanis and were also well-disposed towards Pakistan was considered as further proof that Pakistan must have had a hand in their successes. In actual fact their rapid growth has been due largely to indigenous factors. Pakistan had neither the military capability, financial resources, nor even the political will (under the Benazir Government then ruling Pakistan) to launch such a religiously-oriented movement. If Pakistan had possessed such a capability, why could it not secure the success of its former alleged favourite, Hekmatyar, in the power struggle before the Taliban emerged on the scene? It is also noteworthy that, in most instances, the Taliban have succeeded in the Pukhtun belt through political persuasion and appeal to Islamic solidarity, rather than by using military means.

The Taliban are very puritanical and extremely rigid in their version of Islam, which is basically the way in which Islam has been traditionally practiced for centuries in the Pukhtun villages. However, the Taliban's rigid enforcement of these beliefs such as keeping of women behind the veil, confined to their homes, and the shutting down of girls' schools, public flogging for sex offences, etc. quickly aroused deep concern in the West and even more so among the international human rights groups. The fact is that the moral and religious attitudes followed by the Taliban are widely prevalent in even the non-Pukhtun parts of Afghanistan. Some similar practices are to be found in Saudi

Arabia, which, however, has generally escaped Western criticism due to its oil wealth and pro-West foreign policy. Afghanistan is poor and of little material interest for the West. Thus, the Taliban have been singled out for strong criticism by the Western countries and human rights organizations. Ironically, Iran has been even more outspoken in criticizing the fundamentalist views of the Taliban, even though Iran has itself been branded by the West as an oppressively fundamentalist regime. The secularists elsewhere (including Pakistan) have also been highly critical of the Taliban.

Hence, an odd combination of liberals and conservatives have joined in condemning the Taliban regime. At the same time, the Taliban themselves have not helped their cause by their handling of the UN offices in Afghanistan, their violation of human rights, and by their poor public relations in general.

The successes of the Taliban regime in winning over most of Afghanistan also aroused deep anxieties amongst its northern neighbours, particularly in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Though independent since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, these countries continue to be ruled by their former communist bosses who now profess to be Muslim liberals. Moreover, the Russian presence remains strong in these countries and their southern borders with Afghanistan are in fact guarded by Russian troops. These regimes are facing local opposition in their own countries from the orthodox Islamic circles. Hence, these governments were deeply disturbed at the growing power of the Taliban in Afghanistan. They apprehended that the Taliban would, sooner or later, openly or covertly, give support to the local Islamic movements across the Oxus River.

Thus, for varying reasons, the Western countries, Iran, and Afghanistan's northern neighbours manoeuvred to prevent the Taliban from occupying the seat of Afghanistan at the UN. This seat continued to be held by the ousted Rabbani regime, which, in August 1998, even lost its temporary capital Mazar-e-Sharif. The Taliban controlled nearly 90 per cent of Afghanistan and the Rabbani regime simply did not exist. According to

international practice the Taliban regime had every right to represent Afghanistan in international bodies since it was in effective control of most of the country for over four years. It is notable that the communist regime had immediately secured recognition in 1978 even though it was clearly opposed by the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people. Similarly, Rabbani was given recognition even though he was bitterly opposed by Hekmatyar in a bloody civil war. The Taliban regime had been singled out for stringent criteria for securing recognition. Under International Law, it is for the Afghans alone to decide as to what system of government they want. Whether the Taliban were right or wrong in their interpretation of Islam was their own business and was entirely an internal matter for the Afghans themselves to resolve.

In the region itself, as the Taliban's bid to secure power gained strength in Afghanistan, the strongest opposition to their ascendancy came from Iran. There was also overwhelming evidence that Iran has been supporting the opponents of the Taliban, both materially as well as morally. In fact, even before the emergence of the Taliban, Iran had taken a partisan attitude in the Afghan civil war by backing the regime led by President Rabbani, one of the original Mujahideen leaders, belonging to the Tajik ethnic minority. In the peace agreements brokered by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in 1992, Rabbani had become Interim President for a limited period of time. But even after the expiry of his term, he doggedly refused to relinquish power. This first pitted him against Hekmatyar, another Mujahideen leader and an ethnic Pukhtun, who was next in line for the Presidency. In clear disregard of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, Iran openly supported Rabbani in the conflict against Hekmatyar.

Eventually, neither Rabbani nor Hekmatyar could prevent the Taliban from capturing Kabul and most of Afghanistan. Rabbani thereafter retreated north to Mazar-e-Sharif in the Uzbek-Tajik ethnic majority areas where he enjoyed the support respectively of the Uzbek warlord General Dostum and the Tajik warlord Ahmad Shah Massoud, apart from the support of some

neighbouring countries. However, the onward march of the Taliban could still not be stopped. In August 1998, they conquered Mazar-e-Sharif and thereafter reached the Oxus River, dividing Afghanistan from the Central Asian countries. Excepting for a few pockets of resistance, most of Afghanistan was controlled by the Taliban.

To stop the Taliban's northwards march, Iran did everything possible to fortify the Rabbani regime by forging understanding with neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as with Russia. While the first two have a natural sympathy for their respective ethnic brethren in northern Afghanistan, Russia's interest stems from its lingering ambitions in Central Asia, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Paradoxically, Iran itself has a general reputation as a 'fundamentalist' country. But it has had no hesitation in forging an alliance against the 'fundamentalists' in Afghanistan by joining hands, among others, with Russia, the successor of the Soviet Union, which was responsible for the devastation of Afghanistan following its military intervention in 1979. Moreover, there were reports that Iran had also colluded with India in the efforts to sustain the Rabbani regime. One would have thought that such an unholy alliance with countries which have done so much harm to Muslims would have been totally against Iran's Islamic ideology. But, here again, it would seem that *realpolitik* and hegemonic ambitions, rather than ideology, have determined Iran's policies towards Afghanistan.

Evidence suggests that Iran has been keen to make Afghanistan its zone of influence and to this end there has been a shadowy contest with Pakistan, despite all the claims of working hand in hand with Pakistan to restore peace in Afghanistan. Nominally, Iran and Pakistan keep consulting each other to promote reconciliation in Afghanistan but it is clear that they have been working at cross-purposes.

There also seems to be rivalry between Iran and Pakistan on the question of providing the transit route to the sea for the various land-locked countries of Central Asia. On the face of it, the better and shorter transit route from Central Asia would



appear to be via Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Iranian route is longer and might take greater efforts to develop. Iran's policies have also kept it isolated in the world and a transit route through Iran might be a riskier proposition. However, the Pakistani transit route becomes feasible only when there is peace in Afghanistan. Hence, it would suit Iran's chances for becoming the preferred transit route if Afghanistan remains in a state of turmoil.

This situation calls for a realistic evaluation by Pakistan of the relationship with Iran. A high ranking Saudi leader once confided: 'Saudi Arabia understands Pakistan's reasons for seeking friendly relations with Iran. But Pakistan will find out sooner or later that Iran is not sincere in its professions of friendship with Pakistan.'<sup>21</sup> The record would suggest that there is considerable weight in this observation. Pakistan would, therefore, have to take a hard and realistic look at all aspects of its relations with Iran. A new relationship based on a mutually beneficial give-and-take basis would have to be worked out, although obviously Pakistan's motive should remain to seek close co-operation with Iran.