

THE MIDDLE EAST'S
RELATIONS WITH
ASIAN AND RUSSIA

Edited by Tom Pierre Najem and Martin Hetherington

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The Middle East's Relations with Asia and Russia

This book considers the significant geopolitical, economic and security links between the Middle East and the wider Asian world – links which are often overlooked when the Middle East is considered in isolation or in terms of its relations with the West, but which are of growing importance. Topics include Asia's overall geostrategic realities and the Middle East's place within them. Relations between the Middle East and China, Russia and Central, South and South East Asia are covered, as well as the important links between the Middle East and India and Pakistan's military and security establishments.

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Foreword

This book is based on papers given at a conference held in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in January 2001, organised jointly by the Middle East and North Africa Research Group of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies of the University of Durham. The papers have been revised and updated to take account of regional and international developments since the conference. Individual contributors are solely responsible for their chapters and HMG does not necessarily agree with the views or policy they express.

The aim of the conference was to illuminate the significant geopolitical, economic and security links between the Middle East and the wider Asian world – links which are often overlooked when the Middle East is considered in isolation or in terms of its relations with the West, but which are of growing importance. The conference was one of a series held by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in cooperation with the University of Durham in order to bring the ideas of academics and other specialists to the attention of policy-makers, and to promote debate among experts inside and outside government on issues of relevance to foreign policy.

Greg Shapland
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1 Asian geostrategic realities and their impact on Middle East–Asia relations

Anoushiravan Ehteshami

Asian geopolitical realities today

Much of the international security agenda since the end of the Cold War seems to have been shaped by developments and the course of events in Asia. Indeed, the whole idea of a ‘new world order’ tabled by President George Bush had its origins in the US-led international response to Iraq’s invasion and attempted annexation of the tiny state of Kuwait in the south west corner of Asia in 1990.¹ In the Asian context, therefore, the drama of ‘9/11’ has created a new backdrop for an already complex and dynamic situation in which states have learnt to regulate their relations with each other with an acute awareness of the volatility of the environment surrounding them. Before the events of 11 September 2001, the formulation of the USA’s ‘war on terrorism’ as a new foreign policy doctrine, and the dismantling of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, Asia had already undergone huge strategic changes. The last two decades of the twentieth century had seen the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet superpower, both causing major movements in regional relations. It is in fact not too far-fetched to suggest that the final collapse of the Soviet superpower itself may have been linked to the regional developments in south and west Asia which followed its military occupation of Afghanistan in December 1979. This act, to become known as ‘Russia’s Vietnam’, enabled the US strategically to open accounts with a number of Asian countries and to draw closer to Moscow’s main Asian rival, China, and to a number of Muslim countries bent on punishing Moscow for its invasion of Muslim Afghanistan.

The American covert support for the Afghan Mujahedin fighters from the late 1970s to the late 1980s, which was only made possible by technical, financial and logistical assistance from such countries as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt (amongst others), and the presence of a large number of Muslim volunteer fighters from the Arab world, kept the anti-Soviet alliance together until the collapse of the Soviet Union. This loose alliance not only facilitated the rise of the Mujahedin factions to power in Afghanistan in 1990, but also created the conditions for the coming to power of the Taliban in 1996. Many Muslim actors, such as those linked to Islamic groups in

Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, and those Sunni Muslim countries wedded to Salafi interpretations of Islam, positively supported the Taliban in its bid to act as a new pole for the disparate groups of anti-US and largely anti-Western Islamist militants.² With its strict interpretation of Islam, Islamic values and precepts, the Taliban set about changing social relations in its home country; but, as these 'ruler-students' grew in confidence and as the level of support for them from their three main backers (Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) increased, so they became emboldened to intervene in regional affairs as well. Thus in 1998 they almost managed to provoke Iran into a war with their forces, they emerged as one of the key suppliers of arms and finance (with money earned through the narcotics trade) for the Islamic groups in neighbouring Central Asia, made efforts to provide weapons and personnel for the Muslim Uyghurs fighting the Chinese government in the western Chinese Xinjiang province, and committed themselves to supporting the '*jihad*' of the Pakistani-backed Kashmiri Islamists against Indian rule in that province and that of the Chechens against Russian rule in the Caucasus. These relationships had very much deepened after the Cold War due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The events of 11 September, however, disrupted these already destabilising regional relationships and caused a more or less total revision of the balance of power equation in Asia. In short, Asia was already in some strategic turmoil when al-Qaida struck at the heart of America, and invited the American superpower to revisit South Asia.

While some of these changes were stimulated by the demise of the Soviet Union as the dominant Eurasian empire, deeper Asian transformations were driven partly by economics and partly by the presence of other forces. So while chief amongst the economic factors is the rise of China and the other East Asian economies, in other contexts the growth of Islamic militancy as a pan-Asian phenomenon, and the growing economic and military links between West Asian states and Asia's new powerhouses, have played a crucial part in defining Asia's post-Cold War strategic map. An exploration of the intricate relations between the eastern and western edges of the Asian continent, for instance, and the way in which these have come to influence the shape of Asia's geopolitical mass, will provide a fascinating point of reference for an understanding of the effects of recent events on the strategic map of Asia and the ways in which President George W. Bush's 'axis of evil' thesis will be understood in this most dynamic of regional systems.³

To state the obvious, it was the end of the Cold War which transformed Asia's strategic landscape, in one stroke giving birth to a new set of geostrategic realities. Until then Asian affairs had been dominated by the power politics of the USSR, China and India as its main actors, and the security calculations of the United States and its core Asian allies (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia and the Philippines).

But as the chain of events, which had begun in the late 1980s in central Europe, accelerated the end of superpower rivalries in Europe, the spectacular

disintegration of Eurasia's only modern-day superpower created the conditions for a major shake-up of the Asian balance of power rubric. The old Asian power equation, that between the USSR and China, began eroding in the early 1990s. In the first instance, the demise of the Soviet empire transformed Russia from an international, or global, power into a dominant but weakening regional power. In Michael Yahuda's graphic explanation, in a stroke Moscow's presence in Asia was reduced to that of a minor power:

The once awesome Pacific Fleet now lay rusting in their Pacific waters bereft of fuel, maintenance and the capacity even to carry out exercises. The capacity to project power in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific that had shaped the regional power balance in the 1970s and 1980s had suddenly ended. With it had ended much of Russia's significance in the Asia-Pacific as a whole . . . Russia had declined absolutely as a power capable of shaping events throughout the Asia-Pacific region.⁴

The rapid corrosion and disintegration of the Soviet Union was a seminal development in Asia. Its true regional significance, however, can only be appreciated if set against the resurgence of China, Asia's most populous country, as a global economic player and a growing Asian military force in its own right. Throughout the 1990s, China consolidated its position as continental Asia's economic powerhouse, absorbing well in excess of \$20 billion a year in foreign direct investment. Inward investment had been so huge that at the end of the twentieth century China's stock of foreign direct investment stood at \$350 billion, and its foreign trade at a massive \$475 billion, enabling the country to join the league of the world's top ten exporters.⁵ Such growing economic muscle also allowed for an acceleration in the pace of modernisation of its military structures and systems. With such eye-catching income figures it was only a matter of time before the military would be given the opportunity to accelerate the pace of the armed forces' modernisation. Thus, a general restructuring, re-equipping and modernising of the armed forces was proposed in 2000 in the context of *China's National Defence in 2000* document. As a consequence, in pursuit of a stronger military force, military expenditure for 2000/01 was increased at a faster pace, by 17.7 per cent, taking defence expenditure to a new high of \$17.2 billion,⁶ though reliable sources report that the real figure for its military expenditure might be as high as \$42.0 billion.⁷ The refitting of the People's Liberation Army has included massive purchases of weaponry from Russia, from equipment for tactical forces to such big-ticket purchases as strike and bomber aircraft (Su-27s and Su-30s), submarines, missile systems, and Sovremenny-class destroyers (an order for two of which in January 2002 will have cost China some \$1.5 billion).

Although the rise in China's military commitments in the 1990s has been explained by its growing fear of the USA's military superiority and the

resurgence of 'Japanese militarism' (Japan's annual defence budget has hovered around the \$50 billion mark since the early 1990s), China's renewed interest in defence matters since the end of the Cold War has created the opportunity for extended security links with many of Asia's regional powers. China's steady rise through the ranks of Asia's powerhouses in the 1990s has therefore inevitably encouraged the establishment of closer economic, diplomatic and political links with a number of other Asian countries and sub-regions, including several in west Asia and the Middle East. Indeed some of these countries have been the main customers of China's arms exports, which stood at \$2.2 billion for the 1995–99 period.⁸

Thus after over a century of Russian supremacy in Sino-Russian relations, in the 1990s the Moscow–Beijing pendulum had slowly but surely begun swinging in China's direction. As we shall see, this shift in the bilateral balance of power has had quite serious consequences for the Asian balance of power as a whole.

The collapse of the Soviet Union also created the conditions for the (re)birth of a number of land-locked countries in the heart of Asia. But unlike the USSR's European republics which managed to attach themselves to the European Union, the five newly created Muslim republics were disadvantaged from the start by their relative geographic isolation and also by their rather weak political, economic and social structures.⁹ These states also found themselves amongst a number of fairly powerful regional competitors and in the fast-stream of changing regional structures. While in reality they were the entities which would eventually fully fill the geopolitical vacuum in Asia's heartland, at the time of their birth in 1991/92 they seemed to have neither strong political institutions nor the foundations on which to build strong socio-economic systems. Although some were believed to have potentially strong lifelines, such as commercially viable quantities of hydrocarbon deposits, their remoteness, combined with broader regional instabilities, seemed to suggest that the key to the very survival of the Central Asian states, let alone their prosperity, would remain firmly in the hands of their neighbours rather than those of their own political masters.

Further south, in one of Asia's oldest sub-regions (the Indian sub-continent) stability has been steadily eroded as India has established itself as the sub-continent's premier power since the early 1990s. With a stock-pile of tactical and strategic nuclear weapons and a growing blue water navy, India has been able to widen its circle of influence in Asia, but as Pakistan has always been viewed as its closest rival, New Delhi's efforts in this regard were until recently mirrored in Pakistan's own nuclear weapons development and in its attempts to challenge New Delhi's evident military superiority through support for radical Islamic groups in Indian Kashmir and Afghanistan. Bad relations between India and Pakistan have added to regional tensions which, thanks to the presence of nuclear weapons, have in turn deepened pan-Asian strategic interdependencies which were first evident in the 1980s.¹⁰ Instability

in South Asia has been further compounded by the weakening of Pakistan as a state, a coherent polity, and an effective socio-economic entity. The depreciation of the balance of power equation between India and Pakistan and the presence of nuclear weapons in such an unstable environment is a major cause for concern.

Another important strategic development since the end of the Cold War has been the steadily growing military links between Russia and continental Asia's big three – China, India and Iran. These links not only provide Russia with effective access to Asia's main powerbrokers, but also engender closer links between Iran in West Asia and China and India further east. The growth of such relationships has also helped deepen Asian strategic interdependencies and create new opportunities for both cooperation and competition between the major continental Asian powers. In terms of co-operation, one can point to the efforts that the three have been making to identify new ways of extending cross-border trade opportunities to the countries of Central Asia.

Competition is most apparent, however, between the big two Asian neighbours of China and India. Although competitive relations between India and China have a long history, India's deployment of nuclear weapons has disrupted the old uneven stalemate between New Delhi and Beijing and has created the conditions for the birth of a new strategic relationship between them. Now not only do the two parties find themselves on a new (nuclear) strategic threshold, but they have to factor into their calculations the role of China's close ally and India's main regional rival – Pakistan – as a nuclear weapon state in its own right. With a chain of nuclear states now stretching across Asia, from the Yellow Sea to the Arabian Sea, it is not hard to see that a more dangerous balance now marks the relations between the world's two most populous countries.

Added to the complications which have resulted from the broader post-Cold War transformations and the more specific security developments is the absence of any concrete security cooperation agreements in Asia and the paucity of any recognisable balance of power structure which could provide the framework for the establishment of inter-state regional or sub-regional security organisations. Sure, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has developed into a broad sub-regional body, as has the Asia-Pacific Forum, but these organisations work largely at the economic level of exchange, precisely because they wish to avoid discussion of security problems. Yet in the absence of proper security 'skeletons' it is hard to envisage the emergence of security structures which could accommodate Asia's complex strategic landscape. Indeed, it is perhaps because of such complexities that, until China's recent efforts to found an 'Inner Asia' regional organisation around the Moscow–Beijing axis, an overarching security structure has proved difficult to build in Asia, where bilateral agreements have largely been more durable.

Asian strategic forces at play

Continental Asia is a vast space combining a rich and fertile terrain with some of the world's most inhospitable lands, divided into a wide and varying range of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural groups and states. Asia is also large in demographic terms, with over 60 per cent of the world's inhabitants residing there, including the bulk of the world's Muslim peoples.

Asia comprises several regional systems which constantly interact with one another. Some of these regional systems, like South Asia's, are more 'introvert' while others – for example those straddling the Eurasian borderlands – are more 'extrovert' and interactive. Few of the Asian regional systems are self-contained however; in Asia, more than anywhere else on the planet, we sense the presence of 'strategic interdependencies' at work.

Much of the debate about the post-Cold War order has revolved around the notion of unipolarity in the international system, in which the old bipolar world is said to have been replaced by a US-led unipolar international system. While there may be some truth in this argument, particularly with regard to the direction of the international political economy and the USA's presence in its old regional haunts, it is far from clear that unipolarity at that level has taken root in Asia. Here, one of the key characteristics of the system is its dynamic multipolarity. Furthermore, because of its multiple regional systems structure, Asia is also a multipolar security complex in which power is divided, albeit unevenly, between the three continental actors of China, India and Russia, as well as shared with a number of smaller, but equally influential, regional players – Iran in West Asia; Japan and South Korea in the east; and Indonesia in South East Asia.

These relationships provide evidence for the view that Asia does not have, nor has it had in modern times, a stable balance of power structure or a dominant power capable of imposing order on the region. As a consequence of the unevenness of its power relations, Asia has been exposed to and has tended to suffer from the dynamic and exploding energies of its regional and sub-regional actors. Thus, while Russia has managed to remain an important Eurasian power into the twenty-first century, the depletion of its strategic assets is only matched by China's rapid rise. This causes a flux which is in itself destabilising, but if we add the impact it is likely to have on the broader Asian structures and Asia's myriad of regional systems we will find that the imbalance in this equation is undesirable. Additional complicating factors relate to India's role. Although India has continued to attach itself to the falling star of Russia, in its search for a bigger regional and international role it has built up its military base, invested in both nuclear weapons and a blue water navy, and sought to draw close to the United States.

Asian power relations are further complicated by the overarching presence of the United States as Asia's dominant 'intrusive power'. The USA's presence in Asia is felt through its economic muscle, which is very strong, and also through its global security structures straddling the continent. On

the one hand there is NATO, now expanded not only to include several Soviet satellite countries on the western edge of Eurasia, but also to have a presence in some of the former Soviet Asian republics as well; and on the other there is CENTCOM (Central Command), whose remit includes much of the Middle East and all of Central Asia and the Caucasus region. Added to these structures are Washington's close military alliances in East Asia: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. These security structures are underpinned by the United States' own overwhelming military presence: the Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf, the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and the Seventh Fleet in the Pacific.

One must also consider the impact that geo-economic forces will have on Asia's security structures. The potential of the Caspian states to emerge as medium to large hydrocarbon producers and exporters in the twenty-first century will raise their strategic importance, while inevitably adding a competitive edge to their relations with the traditional hydrocarbon exporters of West Asia. Hydrocarbons will of course, as they have elsewhere, introduce their own power hierarchies to the Caspian 'haves' and 'have-nots'. But they will also suck into the area a number of energy-hungry economies from Asia and Europe. The needs of the latter groups and the ways in which they set about satisfying them will act as a powerful tool in the redrawing of the strategic map of Asia. It is therefore highly likely that the presence of hydrocarbons will give birth to a new range of power relations in Asia. Energy may also cause a shift in West Asia's strategic map, gradually moving the focus away from an exclusive concentration on the Persian Gulf to a new 'energy zone' which will be an amalgamation of the two hydrocarbon centres of West Asia.

Finally, a panoramic glance at the core and periphery of the Asian continent would suggest that the right conditions may be emerging for the rise of a 'pentarchical' Asian power structure, in which four or five large players could grow in the next twenty-five years or so to dominate the expansive Asian landscape. They will be able to play a dominant role in shaping the continent's regional systems within multilateral agreements as well as through unilateral action.

If history is any guide, the chances are that this scenario will not come to pass peacefully and may well result from major conflict between the key contenders, or as the consequence of sub-regional tensions spilling over to engulf the large actors or their local allies. Also, a pentarchical structure of the largest powers may overshadow the smaller states of this vast area, resulting in their domination or worse still liquidation. But on the other side of the equation, pentarchy may also lead to the creation of a relatively stable and cooperative balance of power system in Asia, which could prove to be an effective means for mediating regional and sub-regional crises and also for providing the necessary conditions for the development of a broad Eurasian economic community stretching from Europe's westerly edge to Asia's eastern frontiers. In this scenario, it is possible to envisage that the

European Union and 'Chapan' (China plus Japan)¹¹ would form Eurasia's economic engines, with the Gulf and the Caspian energy zone functioning as the energy plant of this vast, increasingly interdependent, economic space. Such economic interdependencies will inevitably deepen the continent's strategic interdependencies, and also increase the ease with which both good fortune and bad can be transmitted across Asian borders.

Middle East–Asia ties

As already mentioned, the transformation of Eurasia into a geostrategic map of interlocking sub-regions has generated a number of cultural, economic and security threads which have tended gradually to tie the fortunes of the Middle East area more closely with that of the other Asian regions. Of these threads several can be said to be strategic in nature. Broadly speaking, such 'threads' as energy, Islam as a trans-national political force, labour and financial movements, military links and the arms trade (including weapons of mass destruction), and Central Asian geopolitics keep Asia's regional systems joined at the hip, making each increasingly dependent on the others.

Energy

Asia's insatiable appetite for oil and gas is one of the key elements cementing West and East Asian economic links. As fast and as surely as the Persian Gulf states produce oil, the Far Eastern economies consume it. Data from 1999 shows that the Asia-Pacific region accounted for nearly 60 per cent of oil movements from the Middle East, compared with just 13 per cent to the US and 21 per cent to western Europe. By the late-1990s, Asia-Pacific countries (excluding Japan and Australasia) were consuming the same amount of oil as the combined imports of western Europe and the US. The trend is irrefutable: in the mid-1980s, the region accounted for 10 per cent of world oil production and 18 per cent of crude oil consumption; at the end of 1999 its share of production had hardly moved while its share of oil consumption had risen by about 27 per cent.¹² The main oil-consuming countries of China, India, Japan and South Korea will continue to lead the Asia-Pacific hydrocarbon consumption table well into the twenty-first century.¹³ Their thirst can only be quenched by other Asian hydrocarbon producers.

It is, therefore, not unrealistic to suggest that, on current patterns, by 2010 around 65 per cent of the Middle East's oil will be heading for the Asia-Pacific region, a total reversal of the previous 100-year trend in which much of Middle East oil exports had headed westwards. This structural shift is compounded by the behaviour of the traditional consumers of Middle Eastern oil. The biggest global consumer, the United States, has based its energy strategy on securing the bulk of its hydrocarbon imports from the

Americas, and Europe has been deepening its energy links with North Africa and some Gulf suppliers while also tapping into its own significant deposits. As a consequence of these changes to the patterns of consumption and Asia's rising demand, it is likely that in less than a decade's time as much as 95 per cent of Asia-Pacific needs will be met by the Middle East.

One sees that relations are likely to become even tighter when one factors in the key role that natural gas is likely to play in the coming decades. As Asian economies, from China right around the Asian coast to India, switch from coal to gas (in its liquefied form, LNG), so they will look to countries nearer home (Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Russia) as well as the Middle Eastern and Caspian producers to meet this growing demand.¹⁴ In the Middle East, Iran, Iraq, Qatar and Saudi Arabia will be the key exporters of LNG to Asia, and in the Caspian, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. These suppliers will inevitably be competing in the same markets, but for security and strategic reasons the consumers will be looking to secure a number of alternative exporters of their energy needs. Such patterns of behaviour will do nothing but reinforce the relationships arising from the hydrocarbon trade.

The Asian energy partnerships will of course create broader relationships, resulting in deeper interdependencies. As the Middle East exporters increase their exposure to the Asian economies, for example, so they will leave themselves more vulnerable to the ups and downs of Asian mercantilist economic cycles. This was the case during the economic downturn in South East Asia of the late 1990s, in which the Middle East's oil exporting economies bore the brunt of the crisis emanating from Asia. The economic pressures would have been much greater and more intense if both the Japanese and Chinese economies had also nose-dived.

On the other hand, the deepening of hydrocarbon relations will facilitate a substantial capital transfer from the eastern to the western edges of Asia. If we assume that Asia-Pacific imports of Middle Eastern oil reach 25 million barrels per day by 2020, at \$20.0 per barrel (a very conservative estimate), then Middle East oil exporters' coffers will be boosted by an annual income of some \$200 billion by their eastern Asian neighbours. Such substantial sums will encourage the oil exporters to intensify their eastward expansion, thus reducing their exposure to the traditional Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) markets of Europe and North America. Such economic shifts will cause political movement as well, loosening the Western grip all the time that the link with the East becomes greater.

The growing hydrocarbon relations will also increase the economic vulnerability of the Asian economies to oil price fluctuations and related crises emanating from the Middle East, even though some Far Eastern producers (like Indonesia and Malaysia) stand to gain from such price increases. As the *Far Eastern Economic Review* notes, 'At Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, economist Andy Xie calculates that if oil prices average \$29 . . .

annual growth in East Asia, excluding Japan, could drop by 0.6 percentage points . . . in dollar terms, it could still cost the region between \$15 billion and \$20 billion [in 2000].¹⁵ Indeed, it is estimated that for every \$1 rise in the price of oil, East Asia's trade surplus shrinks by over \$2 billion a year. Asia, therefore, is extremely vulnerable to oil price fluctuations and feels the pain of price increases almost immediately.

Such price increases hit Asian consumers in several ways: first, they cause a deteriorating trade position; second, they increase inflationary pressures in the economy; and third, they act as a severe strain on government budgets. The financial balance is further complicated by the peculiarities of the petroleum pricing structures for Asian importers, where the Asian importers in fact pay much more for their Middle Eastern oil than do their Western OECD counterparts.¹⁶

The future energy picture of Asia would not be complete without a sketch of the strategic impact that the pipeline network and energy routes out of the Caspian may have on Middle East–Asia relations. Although proven Caspian oil reserves may not be too impressive (around 29 billion barrels, compared to the North Sea's 17 billion barrels and the Persian Gulf's 600+ billion), the United States Department of Energy and several oil companies continue to calculate that the Caspian's potential oil reserves could be as great as 160 billion barrels, which would turn the Caspian into a leading source of energy this century.¹⁷ It is based on these estimates that experts calculate the Caspian's locked hydrocarbons' total value to be in the region of \$4 trillion.¹⁸ And it is this kind of sum that drives the oil majors' interest in the Caspian's strategic reserves, despite the fact that the cost of extracting a barrel of oil here is many times that in the Persian Gulf.¹⁹

Despite the reservations about Caspian oil reserves, it is estimated that by 2015 the Caspian will be producing up to 4 million barrels of oil per day, more than Iran's output in 2001. Such a level of output, if sustained, can bring significant riches to the producer countries, generating in excess of \$10 billion in annual income for them. But as the Caspian's reserves are much smaller than the Persian Gulf's, the Caspian oil states and the oil majors will be looking to optimise the return on their huge investments by maximising output, possibly hurting the position of the established producers.

The estimates of the Caspian's natural gas reserves, set to become one of the main energy sources of the twenty-first century, are quite impressive however. According to the US Department of Energy, the Caspian may be harbouring some 650 trillion cubic feet of this valuable resource. In comparison, Iranian and Russian natural gas reserves (outside the Caspian) stand at 1,700 trillion cubic feet and 810 trillion cubic feet respectively.²⁰ The figures for the three new Caspian states do, therefore, provide support for the contention that they are likely to emerge as key players in the Asian energy market of this century, despite worries about their oil reserves.

To find and develop the Caspian's hydrocarbon resources is a big enough task in itself, requiring considerable technical skill and experience. But in the

Caspian this problem is overshadowed by the difficulties associated with establishing viable transport routes. The Caspian's hydrocarbon deposits are located largely offshore: over 80 per cent of Azerbaijan's, around 40 per cent of Kazakhstan's and around 35 per cent of Turkmenistan's are under the Caspian Sea. The discussion about Caspian hydrocarbon transport routes has been highly politicised. On the one hand, the United States has attempted to by-pass Iranian and Russian territories by encouraging the building of the trans-Caspian and the Baku–Ceyhan pipelines. On the other, Iran and Russia have been busy making the business case for the building and strengthening of existing north–south transportation routes. The fact that the \$3.5 billion Baku–Ceyhan pipeline is even being discussed is testimony to the strength of the USA's position and its ability to convince local actors in the Caucasus that on this occasion politico-security considerations should override financial calculations. But neither Iran nor Russia is willing to abandon the Caspian's strategic prizes to the US; both have been engaged in diplomatic battles for the transport routes out of the Caspian.²¹

Apart from the hype about the potential of Caspian oil and natural gas reserves, the key attraction of the Caspian to the international oil companies was the new states' willingness to offer fairly generous concessions to the oil majors at a time when the oil business was consolidating and very few new business opportunities in upstream investment were forthcoming. Here was a potential bonanza situation with few political strings attached, and no one seemed prepared to spoil the party by factoring in such substantial problems as security, geography, law or supply routes. Few even questioned the authenticity of the data on Caspian reserves.²² At this critical juncture, Western states and their trio of Caspian counterparts (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) saw fit to enter undetermined cooperative arrangements, which in turn provided the conditions for closer political and diplomatic relations between the West and its security vanguard (NATO) and the trio.

By and large, the relationship between these states and the West, and the US in particular, has been based on one simple calculation: 'the Caspian region will hopefully save [the US and its allies] from total dependence on Middle East oil';²³ the chief US concern being that 'stable and assured energy supplied from the Caspian [will reduce American] vulnerability to disruption in world energy supplies'.²⁴ It has been vital, therefore, that this oil should not flow southwards and out of the Straits of Hormuz (which would defeat the object of diversification of supplies by giving countries like Iran an even greater lever in relation to the Caspian–Persian Gulf energy zone and effective control over both Persian Gulf and Caspian oil flows), nor northwards (thus reinforcing Russia's position in the Caspian), but rather westwards and eastwards.

In a word, encouraged by their mineral wealth and now no longer hampered by the pressures of the Cold War and the presence of powerful Asian rivals, the US set about creating new levers of influence in the heart of Asia, slowly nestling the trans-Caspian countries into an increasingly pro-

Western orbit. While US actions can be seen as displaying neo-hegemonic tendencies, they do signal a long-term commitment to the Caspian. Regional powers in the shape of Iran, India, China, Pakistan and Russia are already taking stock of this reality. While some of these states are looking for ways to accommodate the US, others are actively seeking ways to render the American presence limited and ineffectual in the long run.

Arms trade

Another binding fibre of Asia–Middle East relations is the arms trade. Firstly there is the role that Russia plays. Since the late 1980s, Russia has been able to consolidate its position as Eurasia's largest arms manufacturer and exporter by becoming the leading supplier of arms and military technologies to Asia's big two (China and India), as well as to Iran. Russia, therefore, is at the centre of an arms trade web which brings together Asia's largest countries with some of its biggest energy providers. This relationship gives Moscow considerable influence in Asia and also binds it inextricably into the Asian balance of power.

This military 'square', however, is only one part of the picture. Another crucial dimension of the arms trade is China's extensive military ties with the countries of the Middle East. China is one of Iran's main military partners, for example, and has also had a fruitful military relationship with Iraq (until 1990), Saudi Arabia and Yemen. There is every indication that China will continue to foster military links with the countries of West Asia, particularly with those which have oil and the hard currency to pay for its military hardware. China, therefore, is able to underwrite its strategic energy needs with bilateral arms agreements with the hydrocarbon exporters of the Gulf region.

The arms trade has created other, less obvious, east–west Asian relationships as well. On the one hand there is the increasingly intimate military partnership between Israel on one side and China and India on the other, where Tel Aviv is known to have supplied the former with a wide range of military software and related technologies, and the latter with upgrade know-how about Soviet-built hardware. All the while Israel has also been a close military partner of Taiwan, China's main security concern in east Asia. Israel is also actively deepening its recently acquired military partnership with Turkey, which has enabled Ankara to hold major military exercises, buy a wide range of advanced military hardware, and use Israel's expertise in upgrading its older weapons systems. This relationship has created some tension not only in Turkish–Iranian relations, but also in Ankara's relations with the Arab world – which feels that this partnership is largely forged against them – and of course with Russia, which remains suspicious of Turkey's ambitions in the Caucasus, the Balkans and Central Asia. Both Moscow and Tehran are also worried that Tel Aviv will use its warm ties with Turkey as a means of developing closer links with Azerbaijan and the

Central Asian republics. The Israeli Prime Minister's comments in Turkey that 'I will say in Ankara that we are willing to enhance the relationship with Azerbaijan against Iran, Russia and Armenia', will of course have done nothing to allay these fears.²⁵ Robert Olson notes that with Israeli armed forces now stationed in eastern Turkey and Israeli access to Turkish military facilities (where 12 per cent of the Israeli air force's formidable strength is now said to be stationed), it is perhaps only a matter of time before the other parties react to this security challenge.²⁶

These are significant military relationships in their own right, but the point to underline is that while Israel is busy developing close security-related links with China and India, the latter countries, and to a lesser extent Turkey, are increasingly tied into an energy web which has at its heart Israel's Middle Eastern rivals, most notably Iran. In strategic terms, the dynamics of the energy and military axis are such that they seem to be leading the countries involved in opposite directions, creating the conditions for future polarisation, and possible conflict. One example of what the latter might be was seen in July 2001, when for the first time Iran used its Caspian naval forces in anger in order to assert its interests against Azerbaijan, in the process embroiling the oil giant BP in the tensions between Baku and Tehran.

The picture would not be complete without an assessment of the role that weapons of mass destruction are playing in the shaping of Asia's regional security equation. Today, not only do we have two powerful South Asian countries as established nuclear weapon states (India and Pakistan) but we are also witnessing the emergence of the economically weak and politically totalitarian state of North Korea as an 'almost' nuclear weapon state. Thus, in the course of just half a century, Asia has emerged as the most intensive nuclear theatre in the world, in which the number of states possessing nuclear weapons has risen from zero to five (Russia, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea). But Asian geostrategic conditions are such that we cannot rule out significant additions to the list: Iran, Iraq, Japan and South Korea have the potential and the geopolitical incentive to develop an independent nuclear weapon capability, and if they do so the pressures on other actors in the Middle East or continental Asia to follow suit would be enormous. Also, the assistance in nuclear weapon technology that North Korea has received from Pakistan in exchange for missile technology sets an unwelcome precedent for other nuclear exchanges, which would further destabilise what is already an extremely fragile set of Asian regional orders.²⁷

Investment and trade

Since the 1970s if not earlier, East Asian countries have been significant investors in the oil economies of the Middle East. The trade and investment relationship has grown partly out of the Asian energy importers' need to compensate for the high cost of their oil imports by exporting to the oil-

producing countries. But the leading Asia-Pacific countries are also interested in participating in the liberalising economies of the Middle East, where their firms are often seen beating Western counterparts for lucrative management or investment contracts.

The oil-exporting states, the only Middle Eastern countries with any 'surplus capital', have also invested some of their capital in Asian markets. For some time now Gulf Arab private investment has been finding its way into the Japanese downstream oil industry, for instance, and Gulf investment capital has entered the Korean, Taiwanese and Chinese markets as well.²⁸

These trade and investment ties have given each of the two sides of the energy equation a large and equal stake in the economic stability and security of the other. One can therefore add the impact of political economy to the strategic interdependencies straddling Asia: it acts very much as a reinforcing factor, bringing some of Asia's sub-regions together as partners in a hydrocarbon-based exchange.

The growing interest in Islamic economics (finance and banking in particular) is another important economic link between the Middle East, where Islamic banking is now a fully-fledged sector, and the Muslim countries of South East Asia (Brunei, Indonesia and Malaysia) which have a large commercial sector of their own. Billions of dollars of assets from West and South East Asian customers are now managed by Islamic finance houses in the Gulf or Malaysia. These banks work closely with each other, as do the Islamic banking branches of the Western banks, reinforcing economic links between these sub-regions of Asia.

Labour and migration

Labour is another link reinforcing relations between the Far and the Middle East. Since the 1970s labour from such countries as Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines and Indonesia has been providing the backbone for the Gulf Arab countries' building industry and a wide range of service industries as well. The rapid and large-scale construction expansion of the 1970s and 1980s was possible largely due to the cheap and plentiful Asian labour which the oil-producing countries were able to import. Some Asian countries, like Korea and Taiwan, actually provided the labour force for most of the building contracts won by their corporations. So significant has this trade become that in the 1990s, non-nationals made up nearly 72 per cent of the total Gulf Cooperation Council workforce of 7.5 million. Of the non-nationals, some 58 per cent were from East and South East Asia, and the remainder largely from the Arab world.²⁹

Collectively, these workers have emerged as major earners of hard currency for their home countries, while also servicing the most basic needs of the Gulf oil monarchies – from domestic servants, cleaners and drivers, to shopkeepers, municipality workers and attendants.

At another level, migration across Asian borders could create severe tensions between states. First, there is the issue of cross-border ethnic groups and their influence on inter-state relations. The presence of such groups is not in itself a problem, but in times of crisis, for example when tensions run high between India and Pakistan, their movement can make borders more porous and make their host countries more vulnerable to the export of political violence from other parts of Asia.

In another geographical setting, the presence of Uyghurs in both China and neighbouring Central Asian countries has complicated China's relations with its new Muslim neighbours. On the one hand, it has had to step up security structures on its western borders, and on the other it has had to forge closer links with its western neighbours. The latter Beijing has done through closer bilateral (and multilateral, like the 'Shanghai 6') relations with such countries as Kazakhstan over cross-border movement of militant groups, smugglers and such like. Since 9/11, the management of their mutual border has emerged as a very important factor in Chinese–Kazakh relations. This had already been underlined by China as it began to assess the importance of Kazakhstan as a potential solution to its energy needs and the securest route for the passage of its hydrocarbon imports from Central Asia.

Secondly, the flow of refugees, as from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries, can have a direct impact on the socio-economic stability of the weak states of West and Central Asia and the wider region. The presence of large numbers of refugees creates tensions with the local inhabitants, increases the pressure on what are often quite limited resources, and causes difficulties in diplomatic relations between states if refugees are deemed to be badly treated, or indeed if the host country comes to view them as a threat to its internal security. The rather tense relationship between the millions of Afghan refugees and their Iranian, Pakistani and Tajik hosts very much fits this pattern.

Religion

Political Islam has been a thorn in the side of many Asian countries. Even before the rise of al-Qaida to prominence, Islamic militants had been active in the Central Asian republics as well as in China, India and Russia. Moscow has been scarred by bombs said to have been planted by Islamist groups associated with the Chechens' struggle for independence from Russia. Western China has seen several attacks by militants in the Xinjiang province who have managed successfully to combine Islamic militancy with the local people's sense of ethno-nationalism, while in India, the Kashmir issue, attacks on its national symbols, and clashes between Islamists and Hindu nationalists have raised the spectre of internal instability in the world's largest democracy.

Within the Eurasian context, militant Islam is an important element in interactions between the Middle East and the rest of Asia. Iran, Saudi Arabia,

Pakistan and Afghanistan have each advocated a particular brand of political Islam and each has harboured a particular type of Islamic fundamentalist. As we have seen in relation to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaida network, many of these militants have international links, which allows them to operate easily in more than one country and gives them the capability to carry out terrorist acts across frontiers. For these reasons, trans-sub-state militant Islam, as exists between the Caucasus to the west, Xinjiang to the east, and the Arabian Sea to the south, poses a direct threat to the stability of the Eurasian heartland. This threat is in many cases sustained by Middle Eastern states or elements based on their soil.

Concerns about militant Islam, and the open disputes between the Islamist states themselves, have generated a number of responses from regional countries. The 'Shanghai 6' of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) was crafted by China as one response. This organisation was created in order to frame a regional response to the threats of 'terrorism, separatism and extremism', representing the concerns of a diverse group of Asian countries. For the big two in the Shanghai group, the three dangers listed all have an Islamic dimension, and such concerns are shared by their Central Asian counterparts. China and Russia are both grappling with ethno-Islamic militants on the edges of the trans-Caspian region and are anxious to stem the flow of fighters, financial and military resources from Afghanistan and elsewhere to their own separatist movements. Thus Afghanistan, and South Asia in general, has entered the frontline of the struggle between militant Islam and the ruling regimes in the heart of Asia.

Indeed, only weeks before the 11 September terrorist attacks on the US, Moscow and Beijing had consolidated their bilateral security links by signing a wide-ranging twenty-year security pact. The pact, signed in August 2001, proclaimed a shared responsibility for what the parties refer to as the security of 'Inner Asia' (i.e. Central Asia and Afghanistan). The parties expressed the hope that the organisation would be able to expand into an overarching security pact in which some Middle Eastern states would have a major role. Iran's name has been mentioned in this context; it would join an expanded Shanghai 6 structure to form a Eurasian security alliance.³⁰ How Iran's presence in such an overarching Asian security structure might affect the USA's relations with China and Russia remains to be seen. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that it is likely to add to the list of differences between the US on one side and China and Russia on the other over military support for Iran (which the latter two countries provide in abundance) and over the positive role that an increasingly pluralist Islamic state like Iran can play in the wider Asian security environment. At least since the late 1980s Moscow and Beijing have systematically breached America's 'containment' net around Iran. The leaders of Russia and China often remind Washington that they stand to lose much more in economic and security terms, as well as in

terms of geopolitical advantage, from an isolated Iran than they do from engaging this important West Asian power. To the chagrin of the Bush administration, since the terror attacks in September 2001 their arguments with regard to Iran have virtually mirrored those of the other key Eurasian actor, the European Union. The US currently vacillates between the two contradictory positions of regarding Iran as a potential anti-terror target for its opposition to the Arab–Israeli peace process and support for Islamic militants, and as a force for stability in western Asia. The USA's strategy towards the geopolitically important country of Iran will have a lasting effect on the Asian balance of power equation.

Conclusions

The attacks on the United States in September 2001 could potentially redraw the emerging post-Cold War strategic map of Asia, straining some alliances, creating new ones and forcing a restructuring of the remainder. Within weeks of the attacks some dramatic changes did begin to occur. In the course of the crisis Iran nearly found itself allied to the United States; Pakistan emerged as a close security partner of the West; India and Pakistan cooperated to counter the corroding influence of the Taliban in their countries and profited by having their nuclear weapon status accepted; Russia moved closer to the US in an effort to remove the thorn of Islamic fundamentalism from its 'near abroad' in the Caucasus; the Arabian Peninsula states extended their support for the West's international anti-terrorism campaign – which resulted in the severing of the Taliban's lucrative financial and broader politico-religious links with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia; and the United States rediscovered the importance of Central Asia to its Eurasian interests.

The USA's Central Asia strategy in the aftermath of the crisis, and the role that the US assigns for itself, will of course have a dramatic effect on the strategic map of greater Asia. Disengagement is no longer a valid option for the US and analysts in that country are considering the contours of the USA's medium- to long-term presence in Russia and Iran's backyard. It may be years, and several other crises, before we have the final picture, but there are those who believe that the US is presented with an extraordinary opportunity to 'project power for the long term in Central Asia by setting up a pro-Western government in Afghanistan'. The US would then have a base from which to 'oversee a pipeline across [Afghanistan] from the rich Caspian oil fields to ports in Pakistan, and would be perched to react to political changes in volatile Iran. An outpost in Afghanistan would also give America added leverage with Europe and with Russia, which has always had a heavy hand in the region'.³¹

The spreading of American influence to this region, on the doorstep of so many of its competitors in Asia, could be a costly venture. Any real gains by the United States will more than likely accelerate the pace of security

cooperation between China, Russia and Iran, and also stir radical Islamists into a more intensified targeting of the USA's interests and regional allies in the Middle East and Asia. If one throws into the hat the regional impact that the Turkish–Israeli alliance has been having, and India's not inconsiderable weight, it can safely be concluded that new and unexpected trans-Asian alliances may yet emerge to upset the apple cart completely.

With the twentieth century now behind us and the Cold War increasingly a distant memory, a fuller understanding of the impact it had on the strategic map of the vast Asian continent and its dynamic peripheries is emerging. As has been argued, a new era has begun in Asia, which is slowly unfolding in the context of much-changed rules of the game in international relations. The shift from a bipolar international system to one which is fractured and multilayered – multipolar in economic terms and unipolar in terms of military power and international influence – is having a telling effect on the Asian continent and its inherently unstable power relations.³²

The prospect of multiple groupings congregating around two or more of the most powerful states in the system could not be ruled out.³³ In the Asian context today, the argument that a multipolar system is likely to be more stable than a bipolar one is particularly relevant. But if one is considering overlapping power relations, perhaps Rosecrane's arguments might be more appropriate. His argument that a 'bipolar-multipolar system' may be able to avoid the extremes of both bipolar and multipolar systems is quite enlightening in the Asian setting. This model is based on the assumption that 'enough bipolar control of multipolar realms would take place to prevent extremes of conflict', minimising conflict by dissociating 'bipolar interests from outcomes in the area'.³⁴

Kenneth Waltz though would argue that in a multipolar environment the possibility of making and breaking alliances is greater, thus making the entire system quite unstable.³⁵ Such an outcome, in which we would see a system of rapidly shifting alliances, could be quite disastrous for Asia. In Waltz's model it is the 'swing powers', who are not necessarily the most powerful states in the system, who could end up holding the balance of power, perhaps indefinitely. Such swing powers could use their privileged position to break alliances and also to charge 'rent' for their assistance in forging new partnerships. The United States, as the non-resident dominant military power, could call on the services of such states in its hour of need. Asia, unfortunately, is replete with states which have the potential to act as swing powers – Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Turkey at one geographical end, and Indonesia, the Philippines and South Korea at the other – but often end up disrupting the balance. It should be self-evident that more than one of these powers would be able to place itself in a position to exploit its comparative advantage, and profit handsomely from acting opportunistically. In the last analysis, it will probably be the degree of daring one or more of these powers shows in trying to shape the Asian regional environment,

and the United States' perception of the environment, which will influence the direction of Middle East–Asia relations in the twenty-first century. After 9/11 we can be sure of one thing; the race for pre-eminence has already begun.

Notes

- 1 Haifa Jawad (ed.) *The Middle East in the New World Order* (London: Macmillan, 1997), Phoebe Marr and William Lewis (eds) *Riding the Tiger: The Middle East Challenge After the Cold War* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993).
- 2 Michael Scott Doran, 'Somebody Else's Civil War', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 1, January/February 2002, pp. 22–42.
- 3 See his State of the Union Address, January 2002.
- 4 Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945–1995* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 257–8.
- 5 'China's Economic Power: Enter the Dragon', *The Economist*, 10 March 2001, p. 26.
- 6 'China's Confident Bow', *The Economist*, 10 March 2001, p. 79.
- 7 IISS, *The Military Balance, 2001–2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for IISS, 2001), p. 177. The 2002/03 defence budget increased by a further 17 per cent.
- 8 SIPRI, *SIPRI Yearbook 2000: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for SIPRI, 2000), p. 372.
- 9 Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996).
- 10 For a discussion of the concept of 'strategic interdependence' and its consequences for the wider Middle East region, see Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Nuclearisation of the Middle East* (London: Brassey's, 1989).
- 11 To appreciate the potential economic power of China look no further than Trish Saywell, 'China: Powering Asia's Growth', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 2 August 2001.
- 12 Ray Dafter, 'Pricing Paradox Costs Asia', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 April 2001.
- 13 According to reliable estimates, 'between 1987 and 1997, energy consumption in the Asia-Pacific region grew 4.5% annually, compared to a world average of 1.5%. It is estimated that energy demand will grow 3.4% annually from 1997 to 2010. At this rate of growth, [the Asia-Pacific] region will become the largest energy-consuming region in the world by 2010'. See Kim Hak-Su, 'Energizing Asia's Growth', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 November 2000. Equally interesting is his assessment that by 2005, the annual investment requirement of the energy industry in east Asia alone will be 'between \$150 billion and \$200 billion', an astonishing sum.
- 14 It is said that Indian and Chinese demand is likely to climb sharply to between 20 million and 30 million tonnes a year after 2010, and rise more steeply by 2020. 'It's going to be a quick build-up. Really, this is very big consumption', according to the Director of General Affairs at Indonesia's state-owned Pertamina. John McBeth, 'Fuel of the Future', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 September 2000.
- 15 Alkman Granitsas, 'Barrels of Trouble', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 30 March 2000.

- 16 The reasons are: a more competitive oil market in Europe and North America, more diverse suppliers, and the fact that all crude prices are based on what are known as 'marker prices', but the actual prices oil sells for are conditioned by oil quality and transport costs. As a consequence, Asia-Pacific countries buying crude at the 'East of Suez' pricing formulae find themselves currently paying on average \$1.38 per barrel more than European importers and \$1.21 per barrel more compared with US customers.
- 17 Even these estimates are viewed sceptically by many. See Geoffrey Kemp, 'The Persian Gulf Remains the Strategic Prize', *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4, Winter 1998–99, pp. 132–49.
- 18 Kalicki, for example, states that Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field, 75 per cent owned by US oil interests, is worth more than \$10 billion. Jan H. Kalicki, 'Caspian Energy at the Crossroads', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 5, September/October 2001, pp. 120–34.
- 19 Whereas in the Persian Gulf extraction costs fall below \$1 per barrel, in the Caspian the cost is likely to be around or above \$5 per barrel, on a par with the North Sea costs.
- 20 *BP 1997: Statistical Review of World Energy* (London: BP, 1998).
- 21 In March 2000 Iran announced its most effective counter-attack yet: the building of a new \$400 million oil pipeline by a Chinese-Swiss consortium, with French financial backing, from its Caspian seaport of Neka to one of its principal refineries in northern Iran (the Rey complex near Tehran). Under its oil swap programme with the Caspian trio, Iran is hoping to be able to shift as much as 370,000 barrels of Caspian oil a day to its refining network and export an equivalent amount from its Persian Gulf deposits on behalf of its Caspian neighbours. Russia has also been pushing ahead with its own pipeline plans: to complete the 1.3 million barrels per day capacity Tengiz-Novorossiysk oil pipeline, to complete the new line from Kazakhstan and Novorossiysk, and to build a 312 km pipeline around Chechnya to provide a new link between Baku and Novorossiysk. On the US side, only the Baku–Supsa pipeline has been built. Michael Lelyveld, 'Russia: Kremlin Determined to Stay in Race for Caspian Oil', *RFE/RL*, 2 November 1999; 'US Loses Influence Over Caspian Basin Oil', *STRARFOR.COM Global Intelligence Update*, 24 March 2000.
- 22 For a useful discussion of the reserves issue see OECD, *The Changing Face of Energy Politics* (Paris: OECD, 2000).
- 23 The US Secretary for Energy, quoted in Amy Myers Jaffe and Robert A. Manning, 'The Myth of the Caspian "Great Game": The Real Geopolitics of Energy', *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4, Winter 1998–99, p. 112.
- 24 Statement of Counsellor Jan Kalicki, chief government CIS energy strategist based in the US Department of Commerce. Press release, February 1998.
- 25 Quoted in Robert Olson, 'The Turkey–Israel Alliance: Is Iran Now the Target?' *Middle East International*, no. 657, 31 August 2001, p. 24.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Doug Struck and Glenn Kessler, 'Korea Atom Effort: U.S. Knew Early On', *International Herald Tribune*, 19–20 October 2002.
- 28 Susumu Ishida, 'Japan's Oil Strategy in the Gulf without Arms Deals', in Charles E. Davies (ed.), *Global Interests in the Arab Gulf* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992), pp. 179–201; Anoushiravan Ehteshami, 'The Rise and Convergence

- of the “Middle” in the World Economy: The Case of the NICs and the Gulf States’, in Davies (1992, op. cit.), pp. 132–68.
- 29 Michael E. Bonine, ‘Population Growth, the Labor Market and Gulf Security’, in David E. Long and Christian Koch (eds), *Gulf Security in the Twenty-first Century* (Abu Dhabi: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1997), pp. 226–64.
 - 30 Bruce A. Elleman and Sarah C.M. Paine, ‘Security Pact with Russia Bolsters China’s Power’, *International Herald Tribune*, 6 August 2001.
 - 31 James Ridgeway with Camelia E. Fard, ‘The New World Order’, *The Village Voice*, 19–25 September 2001.
 - 32 For a critical analysis of the balance of ‘forces’ debate in the post-Cold War era, see James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, ‘A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era’, *International Organization*, vol. 46, no. 2, Spring 1992, pp. 467–91.
 - 33 Deutsch and Singer argued in this vein back in the 1960s. See Karl W. Deutsch and J. David Singer, ‘Multipolar Power Systems and International Stability’, in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 315–24.
 - 34 Richard Rosecrane, ‘Bipolarity, Multipolarity, and the Future’, in Rosenau (1969, op. cit.), p. 331.
 - 35 Kenneth Waltz, ‘International Structure, National Force, and the Balance of Power’, in Rosenau (1969, op. cit.), pp. 304–14.

2 Russia and the Middle East

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The Russia that has emerged from the end of the Cold War is a very different entity from the former Soviet Union. This difference is crucial for understanding Russian foreign policy towards the Middle East. On a most basic level, the Russian Federation is not the same country as the Soviet Union. It is smaller, both in terms of territory and population, and is physically further away from the Middle East. While the Soviet Union abutted directly onto Turkey and Iran, post-Soviet Russia adjoins a number of independent Caucasian and Central Asian states which are situated between its borders and the Middle East. As well as geographical distance, Russia's power projection capabilities are vastly inferior to those of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was an undeniable military superpower and, though perhaps lacking in other essential attributes of great power capability, Moscow could act as a credible challenge to US hegemony in the region. With post-Soviet Russia's gross domestic product approaching 10 per cent of that of the United States, and with its military forces in disarray, such a balancing role is simply unrealistic. The United States is currently unchallenged as the dominant external actor in the Middle East and Russia is destined to remain a peripheral actor for the foreseeable future.

Russia's domestic constituencies also differ from those of the Soviet Union. In the first instance, post-Soviet Russia is a less Muslim country. Although Muslims still represent around 20 per cent of the population, this is a considerably smaller proportion than when the Soviet Union incorporated all of the Muslim peoples of Central Asia. Over the last decade, Russia has also appeared less than sympathetic to the Muslim world with its wholehearted support for the Serbs in their campaigns against the Muslim Bosniacs and the Kosovar Albanians. Likewise, the two wars against the Chechen people have generated popular anti-Muslim sentiment within Russia as well as strong criticism from the wider Muslim world. The Soviet Union was always relatively successful in presenting itself as a defender of the Arab and Muslim cause; a more nationalist Russia has greater difficulty in being so convincingly pro-Muslim.

Just as Russia has become less Muslim it has also become less Jewish. This is predominantly due to the mass emigration of Soviet Jews (as well as many other Russians with poor or non-existent Jewish credentials) into Israel.¹ Jews from the former Soviet Union represent about 20 per cent of the population of Israel and are a significant electoral community. Their interests generally include a strong desire to maintain links with their former homeland. While in the Soviet period Israel was portrayed as the Zionist and imperialist enemy, the existence of a sizeable Russian-speaking Jewish constituency has mellowed Russian perceptions of Israel and created a significant domestic political force for the improvement of relations between Moscow and Tel Aviv.²

Another factor which distinguishes Russia from the Soviet Union is the role of ideology. The Soviet Union was an ideological power and this ideological commitment influenced its policies in the Middle East, even if much of its policy was driven by pragmatic and geopolitical considerations.³ Post-Soviet Russia has shed this ideological baggage and is now wholly driven by pragmatic interests and geopolitics. The geopolitical dimension of Russian policy has two major elements, which do nevertheless represent some degree of continuity with the Soviet period. First, geographical propinquity determines the degree of national interest in the region on its southern borders. Thus for Russia the territorial integrity of the country is the principal concern, with Chechnya as the most pressing immediate issue; second in importance is the 'Near Abroad' in the south, with Central Asia and the Caucasus acting as critical intervening variables in Moscow's policies towards its neighbours in the 'Far Abroad'. In terms of the Middle East itself, next in order of priority are the countries of the Northern Tier, most notably Iran, Turkey and Iraq. The rest of the Middle East – the Levant and the rest of the Arab world – is of far less significance to Moscow, with an almost complete disappearance of any Soviet-style commitment towards the 'progressive' cause of Arab anti-imperialism.

The second geopolitical factor is that the strategic importance of the Middle East was on the increase during the 1990s. The first Yeltsin administration did not pay much attention to the Middle East and focused most of its energies on the West and the United States. The then Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, took a firmly pro-Western position and provided support, for instance, for the US attacks on Iraq in 1991 and 1993. However, this pro-Western orientation was increasingly undermined by the perception that the West was seeking to marginalise Russia from Europe, most notably through the policy of NATO enlargement. The strategic importance of the Middle East also increased as the West was seen to be encroaching into the Caucasus and Central Asia so as to secure the region's plentiful energy resources.⁴ The elevation of the Arabist Yevgeny Primakov to the position of Foreign Minister in 1996 promoted a more strategically oriented and independent Russian policy towards the region. In particular, Primakov sought regional allies who might mitigate the sense of containment on Russia's southern flank, most notably Iran and Iraq. The increased

engagement with these countries in the mid-1990s had some parallels with Krushchev's embrace of Syria and Egypt in the mid-1950s in order to break out of the anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact.

It is a mistake, though, to define Russian policy towards the Middle East purely in geopolitical terms. A distinguishing feature of Russian policy, which is in contrast to that of the Soviet Union, is the multiplicity of actors influencing foreign policy and the subsequently decentralised and sometimes chaotic nature of decision-making. In particular, powerful economic interests need to be taken into account. Given the importance of oil and gas for both Russia and the Middle East, the policies and actions of the major Russian oil and gas companies are critical components of Russian policy-making. At times this can result in these energy companies contradicting the defined policies of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example the Lukoil involvement in the Western-dominated exploration and production consortium in Azerbaijan.⁵ It should also be taken into account that, from a strictly energy perspective, Russia has no particular interest in stability in the Middle East, as instability increases the demand and the price of its own energy resources.⁶

Other important economic actors include the arms and nuclear energy industries. Both industries have suffered from a drastic reduction of orders from within Russia and have been engaged in an energetic campaign to secure markets abroad. Some of the most lucrative potential markets are states of the Middle East, especially those under some sort of externally imposed sanctions regime. The arms industry has been particularly keen to return to the traditional Soviet arms markets in the Middle East – countries such as Syria, Algeria, Egypt and Iraq. For an entity like the Ministry of Atomic Energy, on whom over a million people and eleven entire cities depend for their livelihood, the pressure to secure overseas sales is as much an issue of human survival as commercial strategy.⁷

Economic factors and economic interests are, therefore, critically important to the articulation of Russian policy towards the Middle East and contribute to, and sometimes come into conflict with, more traditional geopolitical approaches. Taking all these considerations into account, post-Soviet Russia has a very different set of characteristics and forces driving its policy from the Soviet Union. It is thus a mistake to interpret Russian activity within a Soviet prism and, although there are clearly elements of continuity, the nature of Russian relations with the key Middle Eastern actors has changed significantly. To illustrate this, Russian relations with the key Northern Tier countries – Iran, Iraq and Turkey – will be analysed, followed by an assessment of Russia's broader relationship with the rest of the region, including both Israel and the other Arab states.

Strategic relations with Iran

The most significant, and certainly the most controversial, of the relations that Moscow has developed in the Middle East have been with Iran. There is

little historical precedent for a close relationship between Moscow and Tehran. Prior to the twentieth century the Russian and Persian empires were frequently in confrontation, particularly in the Caucasus region, and Russian imperial penetration into Persia in the nineteenth century was much resented. During the Cold War, the Pahlavi monarchy remained a firm ally of the West and developed a close strategic relationship with the United States. Soviet fortunes did not immediately improve with the Islamic revolution, as Ayatollah Khomeini proclaimed the policy of 'neither East nor West' which formally precluded relations with atheist Moscow as much as with the West. It was only after Khomeini's death that the first tentative engagement with the Soviet Union took place and planted the seeds for the more substantive relationship of the 1990s.

Post-Soviet Russia's relations with Iran represent the triumph of pragmatism over ideology. There is little disguising Moscow's distaste for Iran's Islamic ideology and, even if there is talk of a 'strategic' relationship, it cannot hide the absence of a common set of values and the essentially tactical and pragmatic nature of relations. In this regard, Primakov instituted an important distinction between Islamic fundamentalists and Islamic extremists; with the former, he argued, Russia should do business, while with the latter no such involvement was possible. Iran fitted firmly into the category of those Islamist forces with which engagement was a strategic imperative. A clear practical example of this pragmatic accommodation was Russian-Iranian cooperation and sponsorship of the 1997 peace settlement in Tajikistan between the neo-communist government and the Islamist opposition.⁸ Although peace remains fragile in Tajikistan, the settlement is a considerable achievement and represents a successful case of conflict resolution by two powers originally supporting opposing sides in a conflict.

The Tajik case illustrates the more general development of a convergence of Russian and Iranian geostrategic and regional interests. Both post-Soviet Russia and revolutionary Iran suffer from a belief in their own status as victims and a sense that they have been deliberately excluded from their rightful position in international affairs by a Western-engineered containment policy.⁹ While Russia's strategic concerns focus on Europe and NATO enlargement, Iran's focus on the Persian Gulf and the United States. For both countries, the Caucasus and Central Asia have the potential to provide a degree of strategic depth. However, in these regions as well, the West has appeared increasingly active, particularly in relation to the energy resources surrounding the Caspian Sea, with even NATO having a shadowy presence in the form of Partnership for Peace.¹⁰ Iran and Russia have increasingly defined a common set of interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which include both a desire for stability and for the exclusion of too intensive a Western (or Turkish) presence in the region. While in the past the Soviet Union's proximity generated mistrust and suspicion in Iran, now Iran's strategic preference is for the new states of the Caucasus and Central Asia to remain under Russian rather than Western hegemony.

Another factor driving the relationship between Russia and Iran is their common concern about Sunni Islamic radicalism. The paradox is that the Shi'i radicalism of the Iranian revolution has become increasingly estranged from radical Sunni Islamic movements. These movements have in turn assumed a more uncompromising anti-Shi'i orientation. Thus the Taliban movement in Afghanistan was fiercely anti-Shi'i; the murder of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-i Sharif in 1998 led to the mobilisation of Iranian military forces and to the brink of war. While Iran has been protective of its Shi'i protégés in Afghanistan, so Russia supported strongly the non-Pashtun anti-Taliban 'Northern Alliance' under the leadership of Ahmad Shah Masud. The fear in Moscow was that if the Taliban managed to consolidate control of all Afghanistan, there would be a mass exodus of ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks and the further export of radical Islam into Central Asia. The activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which made significant military incursions in Central Asia, shocked the Central Asian governments into strengthening their security links with Russia.¹¹ For its part, Iran has not been able formally to support such an openly anti-Islamist alliance, but in practice its interests lie in the success of such Russian-orchestrated opposition to the expansion of Sunni radicalism around its borders. In particular, Iran's interests have converged with Russia's in seeking to limit Pakistan's role as the principal external sponsor of such Islamist movements.

Russia and Iran also share significant economic interests which consolidate the broader political and strategic relationship. Despite the controversial nature of much of this economic interchange, it should be stressed that in quantitative terms the levels of trade are not high and are surpassed to a significant extent by Russian-Turkish trade.¹² However, in many of the areas in which Russia has sought to trade with Iran it has had to face strong US opposition. Iran remains a critical market for Russia's nuclear energy industry, and the Russian government has strongly defended the 1995 Bushehr nuclear reactor deal. Russian officials argue that the deal breaks no international laws, that Iran is a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that extensive International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections have given Iran a clean bill of health and that, in any case, the reactor is of the same prototype as the nuclear reactor which the United States offered to North Korea.¹³ In practice, the United States downplays the significance of Bushehr as a source of plutonium for a clandestine Iranian programme but argues that Russia's assistance as the sole external supplier of nuclear technology to Iran is crucial for Tehran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons.¹⁴

Similar US claims and Russian counter-claims are found in the dispute over Russian assistance to Iran's ballistic missile programme. While CIA Director George Tenet argued that the 'transfer of ballistic missile technology to Iran in 2000 remained substantial', Russian officials have argued that the degree of support has been much more limited, is restricted to certain 'irresponsible' firms, and is primarily related to the difficulty of

instituting effective export controls.¹⁵ As far as Russian conventional arms sales are concerned, Russia's defence is that it simply seeks to sell defensive weapons. Nevertheless, the decision taken by the Putin administration in November 2000 to abrogate unilaterally the 1995 agreement between Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and US Vice President Al Gore, which promised that Russia would only fulfil its existing arms contracts with Iran and not sign any new ones, was striking.¹⁶ The reasons for this shift include Putin's determination to strengthen arms exports and to regain markets which had been lost over the previous decade. As part of this process he restructured and consolidated the Russian arms industry and brought it firmly under Presidential control.¹⁷ However, a more significant factor was that, by the end of the 1990s and into 2000, Iran simply had more money available for arms purchases, due to a period of high oil prices and success in cutting budget deficits. During the visit by Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev to Iran in December 2000, one member of his team estimated that earnings of \$4 billion from the sale of arms and defence systems to Iran was 'quite realistic'.¹⁸ The visit by Iranian President Khatami to Moscow in March 2001 consolidated this new-found dynamism in the relationship, and the visit was crowned with the signing of a Treaty on the Foundations of Mutual Relations and the Principles of Cooperation.

It was notable, however, that these principles did not make any mention of 'strategic partnership', and that the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister was at pains to state that 'our countries' positions do not coincide to that degree. We have partner-like, neighbourly relations'.¹⁹ This restraint was partly driven by a desire not to present the Russian and Iranian relationship as a specifically anti-US alliance, but it also reflected the reality that there do remain significant sources of tension between Russia and Iran. One example is the continuing dispute between Russia and Iran over the delimitation of the Caspian Sea. While Russia initially supported the Iranian position in favour of a condominium arrangement, Putin's Caspian envoy, Viktor Kaluzhny, has been seeking consensus on a national division of the seabed with a common sharing of the waters.²⁰ Kaluzhny has had some success in obtaining the support of the other Caspian states, but Iran has continued to oppose an agreement that could restrict it to 13 per cent of the seabed, as against a 20 per cent share on the basis of an equal division among littoral states. In July 2001 Iran used the threat of military force to eject a couple of oilfield survey vessels owned by BP from a zone disputed by Azerbaijan and Iran in which they were exploring.²¹

The ideological differences between Russia and Iran also have an impact on their overall relationship. Iran has had a difficult time defending its strategic relations with Russia while Russia has supported the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo, and while Russian forces have been engaged in a self-proclaimed struggle against Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya. During the war in Kosovo, and also during the Chechen conflict, Iran came under strong pressure from other Muslim states to take a firmer line with Moscow,

particularly during 1999 when it was acting as the Chairman of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.²² Similarly, for Moscow, Iran's revolutionary ideology is difficult to support before a domestic audience when the policy prevailing in Moscow, particularly under Putin's administration, has been of struggle against international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism.

Nevertheless, despite the continuing tensions and sources of mistrust, Russia and Iran share enough interests to provide the basis of a significant bilateral relationship. Iran is in desperate need of a regional ally and Russia has incorporated Iran into its multipolar axis with India and China. Moscow is certainly aware that Iran is seeking to obtain nuclear weapons and is developing a ballistic missile capability, but remains unconvinced that this represents a significant threat to regional and international stability. Russian analysts often point to Israel, North Korea and Pakistan as being the most flagrant proliferators in the region. While Russian and Iranian strategic and economic interests converge, Russia is unlikely to be deterred by US attempts to impose sanctions. As a number of analysts suggest, the Russian–US cooperative security programmes remain the most effective means to ensure that Russia continues to be constrained in its weapons technology transfers to Iran.²³

Anticipating the end of sanctions on Iraq

Unlike Iran, Iraq was an important and traditional ally of the Soviet Union. Ever since the Ba'athist revolution in 1958 toppled the pro-British monarchy, Moscow has been one of the closest supporters of the Iraqi regime. Indeed, the extensive personal contacts which this has created can be seen in the longstanding friendship between President Saddam Hussein and Yevgeny Primakov which goes back to the late 1950s when Primakov was the Middle East correspondent for *Pravda*. The decisive rupture in Soviet–Iraqi relations occurred in the Gulf War in 1990–91 when the Soviet Union supported the United Nations resolutions which sanctioned the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait. The post-war cease-fire resolution, Security Council Resolution 678, was also supported by the Soviet Union and set the conditions, including the arms inspection regime, which would secure the ultimate lifting of sanctions. Under the first Yeltsin administration, Kozyrev sought to distinguish post-Soviet Russia's policy towards the Middle East from the past by noting 'Gorbachev's hesitations during the Gulf War' and frequently referring to Russia's support of the UN policy towards Iraq as the litmus test of Russia's stand on the 'civilised, democratic side of the barricade'.²⁴

Russian analysts and leaders never imagined, though, that a decade after the cease-fire had been agreed, the sanctions regime would still be in place. This has created a growing dilemma for the Russian government. Russia has found it difficult to disguise its frustration at its inability to resurrect its lucrative economic relationship with Iraq and to get back some of its \$8–10 billion Soviet-era debt. Russian oil companies are also very keen to enter the

Iraqi market and had manoeuvred to obtain preferential access to exploration and production rights to oilfields in the event of an end to sanctions. In March 1997 Russian companies were rewarded with a \$3.8 billion contract for the development of the West Kurna field.²⁵

By the mid-1990s, Russian policy had begun to diverge significantly from the approach adopted by the United States and its principal ally on the Security Council, the United Kingdom. As well as seeking less stringent conditions for the lifting of UN sanctions, the Russian leadership became increasingly vocal in its condemnation of US and UK attacks on Iraq during their policing of the air exclusion zones in the south and north of the country. Russian diplomacy became active in galvanising the growing alienation of the Arab world to the sanctions regime and in seeking diplomatic solutions to the regular conflicts between Iraq, the United States and the United Kingdom. One of the highlights of Primakov's tenure as Foreign Minister was his success in brokering a deal with Iraq in November 1997, which ended the period of confrontation with the United States following Baghdad's decision to expel the US members of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) inspection team. Primakov hailed this as 'a great success for Russian diplomacy'.²⁶

Russia's dilemma, however, was that it had self-imposed limits to how far it would go in support of Iraqi actions. Support for Iraq was of a lower priority for Russian diplomacy than ensuring the primacy of the United Nations in the realm of international peace and security. Russian advocacy in favour of the UN has grown with Moscow's opposition to the strategic autonomy of NATO, most particularly in reaction to NATO's intervention into Kosovo in 1999, which failed to receive a mandate from the United Nations. Russia is especially concerned to ensure the continued relevance of the UN Security Council where, unlike in NATO or the EU, it has both a voice and a veto. It would thus have been contradictory to its aim of strengthening the UN if Russia were to abrogate the sanctions regime on Iraq which was based on a UN Security Council resolution for which Russia itself had voted. Russian diplomats quibbled over the interpretation of conditions for the lifting of sanctions; they were relatively restrained in their condemnation of the intransigence and the use of force by the US and UK; and they could justifiably be described as acting as Iraq's advocate on the Security Council. However, in the final analysis, Russia consistently demanded that Iraq conform to the demands set out in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Russian diplomats also recognised that some spirit of compromise between the Security Council members was necessary if the Council was not to become as impotent as during most of the Cold War.

One such instance of compromise was UN Security Council Resolution 1284 of 17 December 1999 which sought to resolve the two main issues between Iraq and the United Nations: how to resume UN inspections of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and how to suspend the sanctions that had taken a heavy toll on Iraqi citizens. The resolution envisaged the

creation of a new weapons inspection regime (UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, UNMOVIC) the lifting of ceilings on Iraq's oil exports, and a clear procedure for how and when sanctions would be lifted. Although Russia abstained on the vote, the resolution broadly conformed to Moscow's frequently asserted conviction that Iraq should be offered a clear package deal in which its compliance with UN resolutions would be directly linked to the lifting of sanctions. As Victor Posuvalyuk, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, noted in 1998, 'if we can show that there is light at the end of the tunnel . . . then I think it would be possible to avoid exacerbation'.²⁷

The problem is that despite all Russia's cajoling, including the controversial visit in November 2000 by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz to Moscow, it had no success in securing Iraqi compliance with the resolution. This led to strains in the relationship. Moscow became increasingly frustrated by Iraqi intransigence and Iraq threatened to cancel contracts that had already been concluded with Russian oil companies.²⁸

The end result was that, while there was a failure to resolve the dispute between the UN and Iraq, Russian–Iraqi relations remained at an impasse. The more cynical might note that Russia's energy industry actually benefited from the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq.²⁹ However, this ignores other, extensive, commercial interests that Russia has in Iraq and which can only be realised with the lifting of sanctions. Russia's interest clearly lies with the ending of the status quo and with allowing Iraq to regain its normal standing in the international community.

Turkey: from geopolitical rival to geo-economic ally

The evolution of Russia's relations with Turkey is perhaps the most striking example of how the logic of economic interdependence in post-Soviet Russian policy can potentially overcome traditional geopolitical rivalry. Two events in recent Turkish–Russian relations capture some of this dynamic. In 1992, Marshall Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, Commander of the Commonwealth of Independent States' forces, in response to Turkey's implicit threat to intervene in the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict, declared that 'we may find ourselves on the verge of a third world war'.³⁰ Yet a few years later, in December 1997, Viktor Chernomyrdin made the first visit in twenty-five years by a Russian or Soviet head of government to Ankara. During this visit, all the emphasis was on cooperation and economic gain, with the Prime Minister's main objective being to put his signature to the massive natural gas deal, known as 'Blue Stream', which would bring Russian gas to Turkey through an underwater pipeline in the Black Sea.³¹ At this meeting, economic interdependence assumed primacy over geopolitical rivalry.

A key factor making Turkey so attractive an economic partner for Russia is that, unlike other Middle Eastern countries, it is developing fast, has a

large and growing population and is in need of substantial energy imports. In particular, the Turkish government has forecast that the country's demand for gas will be 54 billion cubic metres by 2010. To this end, it has signed gas contracts with a long list of countries, including Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iraq and Algeria as well as Russia. However, many Western analysts believe that Turkey's needs will fall short of government forecasts and that the priority given to Russia and the 'Blue Stream' project will eventually cut out other potential suppliers.³² This has caused some concern in Washington, as Turkish preference for Russian gas imports could threaten the viability of the gas component of the much-trumpeted, US-supported Eurasian Energy Corridor initiative.³³ As well as gas, Turkey has agreed to import electricity from the Russian electricity monopoly through Georgia.

However energy is not the only form of economic exchange. Turkish companies have built up a significant presence in the Russian construction business, even obtaining the contract to rebuild the bombed-out White House. There has also been a significant amount of informal trade, so-called 'luggage trade' of goods purchased by Russians for re-sale in Russia, which was estimated to be anywhere between \$6 billion and \$10 billion annually during the peak years between 1991 and 1996. According to Turkish figures, official Turkish–Russian trade in 1998 stood at \$3.5 billion despite the onslaught of the Russian economic crisis.³⁴ A further interesting feature is that there has been a remarkable growth in the number of Russian tourists visiting Turkey. Economic cooperation has potentially even moved into the military field. In October 2000 Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov visited Turkey and put in a Russian bid for a \$4.5 billion contract to sell attack helicopters to Turkey through a joint venture with Israel. Kasyanov also gained Turkish assent to a study on the prospects for joint weapons production.³⁵

Such military cooperation indicates how far Russia and Turkey have moved beyond seeing themselves as mortal regional rivals. Certainly the historical and collective memories of enmity and confrontation remain close to the surface. Imperial Russia and the Ottoman Empire fought seven wars, and Russia was the principal external force responsible for the loss of the Ottomans' European territories. During the Cold War, Soviet ideology confirmed Russian imperial ambitions and Turkey became a stalwart front-line NATO member. Turkish fears of Russian expansionism are matched by Russian fears of Ankara's promotion of pan-Turkism. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian fears of Turkish penetration into the Caucasus and Central Asia have at times been almost hysterical, particularly as Turkey has been seen to spearhead US and NATO ambitions to expand in the region. In general, there exists a major difference between Turkish and Russian perceptions of the newly independent states of the former Soviet South. While Russia has viewed them as essentially part of its 'backyard', Turkey has seen them as independent and autonomous actors who should be free to determine their external orientation.

Despite these markedly differing historical and mental mindsets, the Russian and Turkish governments have managed to pursue a reasonably consistent, pragmatic course, in spite of often intense domestic pressure for more hard-line behaviour. Compromise has been reached on some of the most difficult bilateral disputes. Russian objections to Ankara's imposition of restrictions on traffic in the Turkish straits have been defused by Moscow's recognition of the International Maritime Organisation's vindication of the Turkish position in 1999.³⁶ Similarly, a series of bilateral negotiations between Russia and Turkey led to a compromise over the limitations imposed on Russian forces and weapons in the North Caucasian 'flank zone' of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty, which was incorporated into the final draft of the November 1999 summit of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).³⁷ Moscow and Ankara have also shown mutual restraint in not manipulating rebellious minorities in each other's territories. Thus the Russian government refused to give asylum to the PKK leader Öcalan when he fled from Syria to Moscow in 1998, despite an overwhelming vote in favour of granting him asylum by the state Duma. Likewise, Turkey made strenuous efforts to assure Russia that during the second Chechen war it was not providing any formal or informal support to the Chechens, and that the government was committed to the territorial integrity of the Russian state. As a consequence, Russian criticisms of Turkey were considerably less vociferous and frequent than during the first Chechen war of 1994–96.

During the 1990s, therefore, it can be seen that the Russian and Turkish governments went to considerable lengths to construct a pragmatic and interest-driven relationship. They have been aware of the dangers of permitting the geopolitical logic of rivalry to lead them into opposing camps or blocs. Economic interests have emerged as key factors promoting a rapprochement, with Turkish construction companies leading a pro-Russian lobby in Ankara and Russian energy companies, most notably Gazprom, doing the same in Moscow. Geopolitical tensions do still remain close to the surface, but for the moment the logic of the market has assumed predominance over geopolitical rivalry.

Russia and the Arab–Israeli conflict

From time to time, particularly with a right-wing government in power in Israel, there is a nostalgic Arab call for Russia to return to the Middle East to provide some balance to US–Israeli hegemony in the region.³⁸ Arab leaders have, however, tended to return disappointed from their pilgrimages to the Kremlin. Russian policy towards the Arab–Israeli conflict has generally assumed a balanced stance, which in effect follows a median course between the US and the EU positions. For example, in the aftermath of the resurgence of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in late 2000, the Russian response was less critical of Israel than were the statements from

EU leaders at their summit in Nice.³⁹ Likewise, when Arafat visited Moscow a few months earlier, in August 2000, to gain support for a unilateral declaration of Palestinian statehood, he left disappointed.⁴⁰ The Russian leadership has also been fairly passive in its role as co-chairman of the Madrid Peace Conference, and only registered a mild objection to the absence of an invitation to the US-dominated Sharm al-Sheikh summit in October 2000. Moscow has stressed that it is willing to contribute to the peace process if this is requested by the parties to the dispute, but is realistic in recognising that, without any effective economic or political instruments at its disposal, its mediatory role could only ever be secondary to that of the US and EU.

The Putin administration has certainly sought to reactivate relations with the traditional Arab allies of the Soviet Union. This is principally in order to improve trading relations, most notably conventional arms and nuclear energy sales. Repayment by the Middle East of some of its Soviet-era debt has also been high on the agenda. Thus Putin welcomed Libyan envoys to Moscow and formally accepted Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's invitation to visit Libya.⁴¹ Arms sales to Algeria have also been resumed, and consideration has been given to the resumption of arms sales to Syria.⁴² Alongside the burgeoning Russian contacts with Iraq, and the conventional, nuclear and ballistic missile technology sales to Iran, this activity has caused concern in Israel and the US about its implications for regional stability. Israeli analysts are not, in practice, greatly concerned about arms sales to Syria, since Damascus does not have the financial resources to change significantly the strategic balance, except in the unlikely event that it receives large-scale funding from Saudi Arabia. The Russian relationship with Iran is another matter, and Israeli officials have been a powerful force insisting on a tough and credible US response to alleged Russian nuclear and ballistic missile transfers to Iran.

The Iranian issue is certainly the greatest thorn in Russian–Israeli relations. But this aside, the degree to which cooperation and trust between Russia and Israel has grown since diplomatic relations were re-established in 1990 is quite striking. The presence of large numbers of recently arrived immigrants from the CIS countries, who do not have the reflexive anti-Soviet attitude of the earlier Soviet Jewish immigrants, has provided a strong domestic impetus in Israel for improving relations with Russia. There are three Russian parties in Israel and their leaders, such as Natan Sharansky of the Israel B'Aliyah party, make regular visits to Moscow, particularly during election time.⁴³ Other Israeli politicians also increasingly make pilgrimages to the Kremlin during elections, the most notorious being Netanyahu and Sharon's visits during the spring 1999 election campaign. Sharon, who was then Foreign Minister, visited Moscow three times and shocked the Clinton administration by supporting Russia's opposition to the war in Kosovo and calling the Kosovo Liberation Movement an Albanian terrorist group.⁴⁴

Although Sharon's statements represented only a minority view within Israel, Israeli and Russian perceptions of the threat of Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism have increasingly converged. Israel has quietly supported Russia's campaign in Chechnya while Russia is not unsympathetic to the tactics used by Israel against its insurgent Palestinian population. It is unlikely, however, that this will result in a more open anti-Islamist alliance, as Israel does not want to upset the US by too open support for Russia in Chechnya, while Russia does not want to alienate its Arab allies by too close an alignment with Israel. Although while he was in opposition Sharon accused the Barak government of being too dependent on the United States, since coming to power he has done little to create a more balanced Israeli relationship between the US and Russia.

However, the mutual advantages of building an unpublicised but stronger bilateral relationship have become increasingly attractive for both Moscow and Tel Aviv. Many Israeli politicians have argued that Israel could serve as an economic bridge between Russia and the Western world through joint production of high-technology products that Israel would then take to world markets. Israeli–Russian cooperation in the production of KA-50-2 combat helicopters, which Russia has tried to sell to the Turks, illustrates the changing dynamics in economic relations.⁴⁵ The talents of Russia's former citizens now resident in Israel also offer an economic incentive for Russia to develop closer relations. The problem of Iran continues to create a barrier to the rapid enhancement of relations, but Israeli analysts increasingly argue that dealing diplomatically with this issue is more productive than coercive steps such as the imposition of sanctions.

Conclusion

In general, Russian policy can be viewed as more pragmatic, less ideological and considerably less structured and centralised than Soviet policy towards the Middle East. Although geopolitical concerns are still important determinants of policy, economic interests have played an increasingly important role. Russian policy has been keen to define an independent course, which is not subservient to Western wishes for example in Iran, but post-Soviet Russia does not represent the same obstructionist and destabilising threat as its Soviet predecessor.⁴⁶ Russian Middle East policy is strongly oriented to the Northern Tier countries, with whom good relations have been developed – even with historical rivals such as Turkey. The price is Moscow's support for lifting the burden of sanctions on Iran and Iraq, without however recommending any unilateral breaking of UN-mandated sanctions. Although Russian policy towards Iran and post-Saddam Iraq causes concern in Western capitals, its policies towards the Arab–Israeli conflict have been notably balanced and uncontroversial.

The ascendance of President Putin has not changed the principal orientation of Russian policy. What Putin has done is to create a greater degree of

coherence and predictability in Russian decision- and policy-making. Russian influence has been consolidated in the Caucasus and Central Asia.⁴⁷ Key economic actors such as the energy and nuclear industries have been given less freedom of action and have had to conform more closely to the interests of the state. By abrogating the Gore–Chernomyrdin memorandum of understanding, Putin has demonstrated a greater willingness to defy the West in order to promote critical Russian exports. It is highly questionable, though, whether Putin can restore Russian fortunes to the extent that Russia becomes a real hegemonic force in the Middle East. Although some conflicts with the West will be inevitable, the West and Russia have many mutual interests in the region, such as the Middle East peace process, non-proliferation, and dealing with Islamist extremism, drug-trafficking and organised crime. In these areas, the West can certainly expect Russia to be a pragmatic partner with whom cooperation is not only desirable but mutually beneficial.

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 represented a clear turning point in Russian relations with the United States and the West, which had a direct impact on Russian policy towards the Middle East. Up until 11 September, the Russian government had approached the new Republican administration with a degree of caution and some scepticism. In Moscow there was an expectation of a hardening of US policy, particularly in relation to such issues as National Missile Defence, the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and NATO enlargement. US concerns over Russian support for the so-called ‘rogue states’, in particular Iran and Iraq, was also expected to intensify under an administration which had clearly indicated its hard-line attitude to these regimes. Putin’s decision to abrogate the Chernomyrdin–Gore agreement limiting Russian arms sales to Iran a month prior to the inauguration of the new US President indicated that Moscow was not in a mood to make concessions at the expense of its burgeoning economic relationship with Iran. Likewise, the Russian refusal in 2001 to endorse the UK–US plan for a new ‘smart’ sanctions regime against Iraq effectively quashed the initiative and contributed to the widespread perception that the sanctions regime was being undermined, not least by Russia and its allies on the Security Council.⁴⁸

Prior to 11 September, Russian relations with the United States and the West could justifiably be described as ‘partially left in the Cold War era’, with Russia and the US having ‘frozen themselves in a position of being half enemies, half partners’.⁴⁹ Putin was determined that this should change in the aftermath of 11 September. The strategy that he developed to ensure that Russia could escape the vestiges of the Cold War and start a new chapter in its relations with the West contained three distinct elements.

First, Putin’s strong and unreserved support for the United States in the immediate aftermath of the attacks was combined with the constant reminder that Russia had suffered similar attacks, not least from the Chechen ‘terrorists’.⁵⁰ Putin’s clear expressions of sympathy were extended with a personal sense that the policies he had adopted since coming into

office had been vindicated. Putin had assumed power and gained popularity through his uncompromising campaign against 'Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism', which not only included the start of a new war in Chechnya but also a greatly enhanced security presence in Central Asia to counter the military incursions from Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.⁵¹ Putin was not slow in declaring to his Western counterparts that it was Russia, and not the West, which had accurately assessed the dangers stemming from Afghanistan and the radical Islamist groups located there. As a consequence, the Russian government demanded, and obtained, greater Western acquiescence to its military operations in Chechnya and recognition of the critical role that Russia played in the global anti-terrorism struggle. Overall, the events of 11 September strengthened both Putin's international legitimacy and Russia's strategic significance in the changed international security environment.

The second element in Putin's post-11 September strategy was to capitalise on this opportunity to promote a fundamental restructuring of Russia's relations with the West. In essence, Putin sought to make a decisive shift from the foreign policy orientation adopted by Yevgeny Primakov, who had attempted to restore Russia's great power status by constructing a multipolar Eurasian bloc which would counter-balance US hegemony and the presumed threat of NATO enlargement and US plans for National Missile Defence. A number of Russian foreign policy analysts had long argued that Primakov's quest to cement such a countervailing alliance against the United States could only be illusory, and that his campaigns against Western policies such as NATO enlargement and Kosovo had inevitably led to humiliating defeats.⁵² By 11 September, Putin had moved towards accepting this foreign policy outlook, realising that Russia's desperate need for economic modernisation required her to work with, rather than against, the US and that it was more effective, in the words of one Russian commentator, 'to bandwagon rather than to balance'.⁵³ The events of 11 September provided a real opportunity to make a decisive shift in this direction and led Putin to make some significant concessions: permitting the US to establish bases in the Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan, giving up a surveillance base in Cuba, and softening Russian opposition to NATO enlargement. Even when the Bush administration unilaterally withdrew from the ABM Treaty, the response in Moscow was muted.⁵⁴ The reward that Putin obtained was the removal of some of the key obstacles to Russia's integration into the West and a rejuvenated relationship with both the United States and the European Union.

In making these apparent concessions to the West, Putin naturally had to be careful not to appear to be sacrificing any core interests, which could provoke the type of criticism that had brought down Russia's first Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev. The third element in Putin's overall strategy dealt with this concern of particular domestic political significance, and it is here that Putin's pragmatism and commitment to an almost Bismarkian *realpolitik*

is most evident. It was also in the Middle East that the tensions and potential contradictions between the various elements of the strategy were most evident. On the one hand, Putin acted vigorously to support US and Western interests in the Middle East where they coincided with, or at least did not damage, Russian interests. Thus Putin was quite happy to support and legitimate the US intervention in Afghanistan since its strategic objectives were ones that the Russian government had long pursued. In relation to the deteriorating situation in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, Russia declined Arab requests to become a more forceful intermediary, in general strongly supported US initiatives, and was satisfied with its role as a responsible member of the so-called ‘quartet’.⁵⁵ The Russian oil industry was also delighted to welcome US interest in expanding oil exports from Russia so as to diversify US supplies away from the Middle East.⁵⁶

However, there was a strict limit to the extent to which the Russian government was willing to modify its strategic behaviour. In the Middle East context, this included an unwillingness substantively to modify its relations with the two countries in the region over which US and Russian interests had for some time been in conflict – Iran and Iraq. Although certain tensions between Russia and Iran, such as Caspian Sea border demarcation, continued to complicate relations, there was no general weakening of the core substance of the relationship, based as it was on shared geostrategic and economic interests. Intense US and Israeli pressure failed to weaken Russian resolve. Certainly when US Under Secretary of State John Bolton visited Moscow in February 2002 to discuss arms control issues, a simultaneous visit by Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi was cancelled. However his visit was rescheduled for April, when the two sides agreed to a programme of long-term cooperation which included building new reactor nuclear power plants in addition to those at Bushehr.⁵⁷ Russia’s relations with Iraq before the March 2003 war were similarly driven by a concern that strategic rapprochement with the West should not undermine key economic interests. Thus, as the US sought to develop a consensus in favour of a change of regime in Iraq, the Russian government acted as a strong opponent, fearing that a new US-imposed regime would abrogate the lucrative deals that Russia has secured in the years since the Gulf War. As in the past, the Iraqi government viewed Russia as its most sympathetic ally and sought to cement Moscow’s advocacy role by further generous deals. In August 2002 it was reported that Russia and Iraq had signed a five-year programme of cooperation worth between \$40 and \$60 billion.⁵⁸

The potential contradiction between Russia’s new-found respectability in the West and its continued support for countries like Iran and Iraq was exposed by US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. In comments made at Fort Hood army base, he noted that ‘to the extent that Russia decides that it wants to parade its relationships with countries like Iraq and Iran and Libya and Syria and Cuba and North Korea, it sends a signal across the globe that that is what Russia thinks is a good thing to do, to deal with terrorist

states'.⁵⁹ Rumsfeld certainly has a reputation for being blunter than some of his colleagues and generally the US administration has not indicated that the US–Russian rapprochement is threatened by Moscow's economically driven support for countries like Iran, Iraq and Syria. It is, though, a continuing source of tension which constantly threatens to damage the broader relationship.

In general, Putin's post-11 September policies towards the Middle East include as many elements of continuity as change. There has certainly been a significant shift, which has been due to the greatly improved relationship with the United States. However this pro-Western tilt has not come at the expense of the good relations that Moscow has crafted with most Middle Eastern states, including those which have poor or non-existent relations with the US. Indeed Putin has made an art of seeking good relations with all countries, regardless of their ideological hue, so long as they have the potential to provide economic benefits. As such, these relations are an indication that Russian policy towards the Middle East under Putin can be characterised as becoming more pragmatic and predictable, and relinquishing those vestiges of Cold War ideologies and mentalities, particularly evident under Primakov, which had continued to influence Russian policy during the 1990s.

Notes

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- 2 For example, the Russian Duma is now divided between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian members. See Valeria Sychova, 'Who Are You For, the Israelis or the Palestinians?', *Sevodnya*, 14 October 2000.
- 3 For the role of ideology in Soviet policy towards the Middle East, see Roland Dannreuther, *The Soviet Union and the PLO* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998).
- 4 Such beliefs can be found expressed clearly in Aleksei Arabatov, 'Foreign Policy Consensus in Russia', *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14 March 1997. The sources of Russian alienation are discussed in Roland Dannreuther, 'Escaping the Enlargement Trap in NATO–Russian Relations', *Survival*, vol. 41, no. 4, Winter 1999/2000, pp. 145–64.
- 5 Abraham S. Becker, 'Russia and Caspian Oil: Moscow Loses Control', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2000, p. 100.
- 6 Amy Myers Jaffe and Robert A. Manning, 'Russia, Energy and the West', *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 2, Summer 2001, p. 145.
- 7 For a good discussion of the role of these economic actors in the Middle East, see Eugene Rumer, *Dangerous Drift: Russia's Middle East Policy*, Policy Paper no. 54 (Washington: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), pp. 31–40.
- 8 The best account of the Tajik civil war and its settlement is to be found in Olivier Roy, *La nouvelle Asie centrale ou la fabrication des nations* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).
- 9 For the Iranian perception of victimhood, see Shahram Chubin, 'Iran's Strategic Predicament', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1, Winter 2000.

- 10 For a hawkish view of Western engagement in the region, see Stephen Blank, 'Every Shark East of Suez: Great Power Interests, Policies and Tactics in the Transcaspian Energy Wars', *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 81, no. 2, 1999, pp. 149–84.
- 11 In March 2000, a 10,000-man strong military exercise, the Commonwealth Southern Shield 2000, took place, bringing Russian, Uzbek, Tajik and Kazakh forces together in an anti-terrorist operation. See Bruce Pannier, 'Central Asia: Joint Military Exercises Practice Common Defence', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 29 March 2000.
- 12 For example, in 1994 trade turnover was only \$550 million, which contrasted with Russian trade with the US of \$4 billion and trade with Turkey of \$4 billion in official trade and \$4 billion in 'luggage' trade. For these figures, see 'Russia Intends Drastically to Increase Delivery of Weapons to Iran', *Kommersant-Daily*, 27 January 1998.
- 13 Vladimir Orlov, 'What is Profitable for MINATOM?', *Pro et Contra* 2, no. 3, Summer 1997.
- 14 Michael Eisenstadt, 'Russian Arms and Technology Transfers to Iran: Policy Challenges for the United States', *Arms Control Today*, March 2001, p. 20.
- 15 Ibid. p. 18 for US allegations; for Russian claims of innocence, see comments by Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the Presidential Secretary, as quoted in Marina Kalashinkova, 'Iran is our Friend', *Kommersant-Daily*, 27 January 1998.
- 16 Wade Boese, 'Russia to Bow Out of 1995 Deal Banning Arms Trade with Iran', *Arms Control Today*, December 2000, p. 25.
- 17 Ilya Bulavinov, 'Russian Disarmaments', *Kommersant*, 9 November 2000.
- 18 Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, Head of the Russian Defence Ministry's main directorate for international military cooperation, was quoted in *Moscow News*, 27 December 2000.
- 19 Quoted in Aleksandr Shumilin, 'Putin and Khatami Remember Spring', *Izvestiia*, 13 March 2001.
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- 21 Steven LeVine 'BP Suspends Work at Site in Caspian as Iran Claims Sea's Southern Waters', *Wall Street Journal*, 25 July 2001.
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- 44 For Sharon's comments, see *Israel Radio*, 2 April 1999 and *Reuters*, 6 April 1999.
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- 57 Sergei Leskov, '\$800 Million in the Hand, \$20 Billion in the Bush', *Izvestia*, 1 August 2002.
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3 The Middle East and China

Michael Dillon

Introduction

At first glance there seems to be little in common between the People's Republic of China (PRC), governed by an avowedly atheist Chinese Communist Party (CCP) since 1949, and the Middle East, where states and societies are to a greater or lesser extent dominated by Islam and Muslim culture. Barry Rubin goes further: 'The People's Republic of China has neither strong historical ties nor long-standing strategic interests in the Middle East'.¹ The historical ties are stronger than Rubin suggests, particularly for the 20 million strong Muslim population of China which is distributed throughout the country but is concentrated in strategic border areas in the north west and south west. The presence of this Muslim population influences the way the Chinese government deals with the Middle East, and China's Muslims are affected by China's international relations with the rest of the world of Islam.

China's strategic interests in the Middle East may not be long-standing but they are strong and today focus primarily on trade and energy. In 1990, Xinjiang University Press published a book edited by Zhang Baoguo and entitled *Zou xiang Zhongdong: Xinjiang dui Xiya zhuguo kaifang zhanlue yanjiu* (Strategic Studies of Xinjiang's opening to the countries of Western Asia). The book analyses the political and economic situation in the Middle East, a region that the authors see as crucial for developing China's western regions. For this region of China at least, the Middle East is of great strategic interest. During the 1980s, Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia and Shaanxi, the five north-western provinces or autonomous regions, began to approach their western Islamic neighbours for trade and investment as prospects for cooperation with the Middle East seemed more promising than with Europe or Japan, given geographical proximity and shared religious and cultural values. Xinjiang's 'friendship delegation' to Turkey and Saudi Arabia, including Mecca, in July 1985 and the Overseas Economic and Trade Fair in August of the same year were early examples of this approach.

The north west secured funding from the Middle East for religious and cultural development programmes. Through its exchange of personnel scheme,

the Islamic Development Bank gave \$4,060,000 for four projects: the Ningxia Islamic Academy in Yinchuan, the Ningxia Tongxin Arabic Language School, and enhancement of the Xinjiang and Beijing Islamic Academies. Other plans include labour export to the Middle East and exchange schemes to encourage the mutual understanding of economic and political conditions. North western China received regular visits throughout the 1980s of delegations from Islamic and Middle Eastern organisations such as the Islamic League and the Kuwait Religious Foundation.² Ningxia, the area designated as the autonomous region for Chinese-speaking Hui Muslims, clearly hoped to play a leading role in relations with the Muslim world with its new Islamic Academy and secular Arabic Language School, but may have been upstaged by Xinjiang once cross-border trade became a reality.

Historical background

Connections between the Middle East and China date back at least to the sixth century AD. Traders and diplomats from what is usually referred to as Arabia, but almost certainly included the Persian-speaking world, appeared in China as early as the Tang Dynasty (618–907), entering the country by two main routes: overland across Central Asia by what was to become known as the Silk Route and by sea into south-eastern China, now sometimes called the Spice Route as most of its travellers were merchants seeking spices from the islands of South East Asia. Some of these traders settled in the port cities of the south-eastern coast, in particular Quanzhou, Changzhou and Guangzhou (Canton), which all became important commercial centres. The Muslim cemetery in Quanzhou contains hundreds of gravestones with inscriptions in Arabic, Persian and Chinese, marking the final resting place of migrants from the Yemen, Persia and Central Asia who had lived and worked in Quanzhou.³ The Tang dynasty capital, Chang'an, known today as Xi'an and proud of its position as the beginning of the Silk Road in China, had its own resident community of diplomats and merchants from the Middle East and Central Asia.

The composition of the population of China was profoundly affected by the political and social changes brought about by the Mongol conquests of East and Central Asia in the thirteenth century. On their expeditions westward to conquer Central Asia, the armies of Chinggis Khan and his successors sacked major Islamic centres including Bukhara and Samarkand, and transported large numbers of local people, including skilled armourers, craftsmen and enslaved women and children, back to China, where they were settled as servants of Mongol aristocrats. When the Mongols established their Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) to rule in China, they used Central Asians as border guards, tax collectors and administrators, finding them more loyal than the Chinese population they had conquered. In the Mongol perception of society in China, Mongols were the elite, but the Muslims from the steppes of Central Asia came next in the hierarchy and were considered

superior to both the Chinese population and the non-Chinese minorities who lived in south China.

The gradual penetration of Islam into China created communities of Muslims, especially in Xinjiang and the north-western and south-western regions of China proper. They naturally retained an interest in the Middle East and maintained a connection with the region whenever this was possible. This might be through the *hajj*, although the distance from Mecca and the cost of the journey made the pilgrimage difficult for Muslims in China. The links were also maintained by travelling preachers, often Sufis who carried their message across Central Asia into China where it remains influential to this day. Political constraints on Islamic practices have added to the difficulty of maintaining contact with the Middle East, both during the empire when the Muslim community was severely repressed and viewed as constantly threatening to revolt, and in modern times when the CCP has restricted religious practices including Islam to organisations registered with the state.

The People's Republic of China and the Middle East

The newly created People's Republic of China aligned itself completely with the USSR and the rest of the communist bloc. Mao Zedong, Chairman of the CCP, spoke in 1949 of China 'leaning to one side, that is the side of the socialist rather than the capitalist world', and made it clear that there was no alternative third way.⁴ On 14 February 1950, China and the USSR signed a Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance and there was every reason to believe that there was by that time a solid communist 'world' stretching from Berlin to Pyongyang, with the USSR and China as its two dominant players in the west and the east respectively.

However, in reality the alliance was never as powerful as it appeared on the surface. Political, doctrinal and personal conflicts between Beijing and Moscow were apparent as early as 1956 and finally led to a split between the two that was not resolved during the lifetime of the Soviet Union. The split became public knowledge in 1960 and led to armed conflict on the border between the two countries in 1969.

Consequently China's search for allies steered it towards the Third World and, because of the size of its population and land area and the cultural confidence gained from its consciousness of centuries of historical greatness, it came to see itself as a natural leader of those states. The PRC was born in 1949 during the wave of nationalism and decolonisation that followed World War II and the new government of China shared many of the concerns and problems of other emerging states in what was later to be known as the Third World.⁵ From the Bandung Conference of 1955 onwards,⁶ one of the key foreign policy goals of the PRC was to play a leading role among the countries of the developing world.

China's political role in the Third World, including the Middle East, was often determined by Beijing's competition for influence with the USSR. This

Sino-Soviet rivalry was evident in China's relations with Egypt in particular but was also a factor in its dealings with the rest of the Middle East. Mohamed Bin Huwaidin shows clearly how competition between the two communist states determined China's foreign policy options in Saudi Arabia, Iran and the smaller states of the Gulf.⁷

Chinese foreign policy was also governed to a large extent by the seismic shifts in domestic policy to which China was periodically subjected during the first thirty years of the People's Republic. In the 1950s Beijing concentrated on establishing its control over the whole of the mainland of China and foreign policy was devoted primarily to securing this. During the 1960s and 1970s this pragmatic foreign policy, usually associated with Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, gave way to the 'revolutionary diplomacy' of the Cultural Revolution period. Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution in the summer of 1966. He presented it as an attack on bureaucracy and as a way of galvanising the youth of China into furthering the socialist revolution. In fact it was a way of using mass political action to dislodge his rivals in the CCP hierarchy, mainly those who were sympathetic to the gradualist and managerial economic and social policies that had emerged in the USSR under Nikita Khrushchev. The Cultural Revolution and the border clashes with Soviet troops in 1969 finally severed all remaining ties between the two communist powers and China reverted to its links with the developing world and revolutionary diplomacy, the brainchild of Mao and his military deputy Lin Biao. They tried to identify key areas in which this diplomacy could be most effective. The Middle East was judged to be one of these key areas and Beijing encouraged anti-colonial and national liberation movements in the region.⁸ Revolutionary diplomacy was based on Lin Biao's thesis that the villages of the world were the bases from which the cities of the world (that is the advanced capitalist countries) would be overthrown, in the same way as the CCP had used the rural population of China to achieve power.⁹

Lin Biao was killed in 1971 during what may have been an attempted coup d'état. Fears of a possible war with the Soviet Union had led the CCP leadership to seek talks with the United States, and the shuttle diplomacy of Henry Kissinger, which eventually led to the visit of the diehard anti-communist President Richard Nixon to China in 1972, was anathema to Lin. The official accounts state that he attempted to flee to the USSR after a coup attempt failed and that his aircraft crashed over Mongolia killing him and his family, but there is still uncertainty about the veracity of this.

This marked a major turning point in China's diplomatic relations. The veteran statesman Zhou Enlai once again took the helm at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and embarked on a process of 'normalising' China's international relations. Zhou had been ill for some time and died in January 1976, but by then he had turned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into a more professional organisation capable of undertaking the normal tasks of international diplomacy.

This change in the domestic leadership led to a significant change in the international status of the PRC. China was finally admitted to the United Nations in October 1971 after twenty-two years during which the seat had been held by Taiwan. The government of Taiwan was a relic of the Nationalist (Guomindang) government of China in the 1930s and 1940s, which fled to Taiwan after its defeat by the CCP in 1949.

Egypt

The PRC has tended to view Egypt as the most important state in the Arab world because of its size (its population amounts to 35 per cent of the total Arab population), its position on the boundary of the Middle East and Africa, and its revolutionary nationalist tradition under Nasser with which the Chinese Communist Party could identify.¹⁰ Nasser recognised the PRC in May 1956, the first Arab state to do so, shortly before he nationalised the Suez Canal and came into conflict with Britain, France and Israel.¹¹ Zhou Enlai had encountered Nasser at the Bandung Conference and had identified him as an anti-imperialist leader with whom China could do business. China and Egypt signed a bilateral trade agreement in August 1955 and, in the same year, China bought Egyptian cotton after a deal with the West fell through. China may also have been instrumental in brokering an agreement for Egypt to buy arms from Czechoslovakia.¹²

Although Sino-Egyptian ties were close, they were strained as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute because Nasser was also trying to remain on good terms with the USSR. China's calls for a 'people's war' in the Middle East after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War fell on deaf ears. Relations improved after the Cultural Revolution and more so after the government of Anwar Sadat broke with the USSR in the 1970s, but Beijing generally tended to favour more radical Arab groups. As China's foreign policy modernised, trade replaced political rhetoric as its most important component and by 1990 China and Egypt were discussing the joint production of military equipment including missiles. President Mubarak of Egypt visited China in May 1990 and signed bilateral trade agreements and an agreement on direct flights between Cairo and Beijing.¹³

The Palestinian cause

China's membership of the UN was welcomed by many Third World countries and also by national liberation movements in many parts of the world including the Middle East. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) issued a statement declaring that for the first time there was now a chance that the Palestinian cause would be represented properly in the UN.¹⁴ China consistently supported Fatah, the moderate wing of the PLO, although there were more radical groups within the umbrella organisation that were closer ideologically to Beijing. China supplied arms to the Palestinians following a

visit by PLO leader Ahmad Shukeiry to Beijing in 1965 even though this was opposed by several of the Arab states including Egypt.¹⁵ However, this practical support declined after the Cultural Revolution and China mainly paid lip service to the Palestinian cause, although it was prepared to give political support in the United Nations and other international bodies.

The PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat visited Beijing in October 1989 where he met the three most important leaders – Deng Xiaoping, Yang Shangkun the President and the Prime Minister Li Peng. The Chinese side proposed that an international peace conference sponsored by the United Nations be organised to assist in the establishment of a peace settlement in the Middle East.¹⁶ In July 1991, the head of the Political Department of the PLO, Faruq al-Qaddumi, visited Beijing where he met the Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen. Qian outlined China's policy on the Palestine conflict: unity within the PLO, a Middle East settlement in the light of UN resolutions, and recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.¹⁷ This was reiterated when al-Qaddumi travelled to Beijing in April 1994.¹⁸ Chinese policy towards the Palestinian issue had come a long way from its support of liberation movements in the 1960s and it was now determined that it should be seen as a responsible member of the United Nations and a peace broker. Tian Zengpei, the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister, visited Palestine shortly after the establishment of the Palestine National Authority in 1994 and announced that China intended to establish permanent representation there as soon as possible.¹⁹

Israel

Israel was the first Middle Eastern state to recognise the PRC, and discussions on the establishment of diplomatic relations began in Moscow soon after the recognition in 1950.²⁰ Diplomatic relations were not however established for forty-two years, largely as a result of the Cold War and Israel's close relations with the United States. In October 1990 China condemned an Israeli attack on Palestinians in East Jerusalem and endorsed a resolution of the United Nations Security Council criticising Israel.²¹ The first Israeli to make an official visit to China – David Levine, then Foreign Minister – arrived in China in January 1992. Diplomatic relations were established and a joint communiqué was issued. Agreements for cooperation in agriculture, medicine and solar energy were also signed.²² Israel denied that it was selling Patriot anti-missile technology to China.²³

In September 1992, China's Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, made a first visit to Israel. Agreements on scientific and technological cooperation were signed but Israel was criticised for not allowing Palestinians who had been deported to return to their homes.²⁴ Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, visited China in October 1993 and agreements were signed on consular arrangements and civil air transport. Rabin said that China had an important role to play in ensuring that the recent peace accord signed by the

PLO and Israel was effective.²⁵ When Rabin was assassinated by a right wing Jewish extremist in 1995, China was shocked and Prime Minister Li Peng praised his contribution to the Middle East peace process.²⁶

The armaments trade between China and Israel has remained controversial although it is rarely spoken of openly. It is widely understood that Israel supplied the technology to enable China to build Patriot anti-missile batteries during the 1990s, and the Chinese F-10 fighter aircraft has many similarities with Israel's Lavi fighter jet, although that aircraft was never put into production in Israel. Israel planned to supply Phalcon airborne early warning radar equipment to Beijing in 2000 but the US Congress objected on the grounds that this would favour China in the balance of military power with Taiwan. The agreement was suspended when the US threatened to back its opinion by reducing military assistance to Israel. It is estimated that the Phalcon contract would have been worth \$1.5 billion over a number of years and Israel is very enthusiastic about developing its armaments export industries. The arms relationship between the two countries is complex; Israel was critical in turn of China's transfer of armaments technology to Iran.²⁷

Saudi Arabia

During its most radical period in the 1960s and 1970s, Beijing had denounced the government of Saudi Arabia as reactionary and had encouraged radical Arab groups such as the Yemenis in their conflict with Riyadh. When China joined the United Nations in 1971 it moved towards establishing diplomatic relations with the Saudis who had previously only had links with Taiwan. From the Saudi point of view, links with China were a way of restricting the influence of the USSR. Trade developed during the 1970s and contacts at government level are believed to have been influential in the award to China of a development capital loan worth \$500 million by a consortium of European and Arab banks.²⁸

China agreed to supply Saudi Arabia with weapons in 1985 after the United States refused to supply Lance missiles. The Saudis bought at least 25 Dongfeng (East Wind) medium range ballistic missiles from China, with delivery taking place from March 1988. By 1989 both parties had commercial representation in each other's capital and diplomatic relations were finally established in July 1990.²⁹ The Chinese government ruthlessly used its Muslim population as intermediaries in the negotiation. China's Muslims in turn benefited from investment by the Islamic Development Bank, which is based in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis donated one million copies of the Qur'an to the Muslims of China and made funds available for the building of mosques and Islamic educational foundations.³⁰ The Islamic Academy for the training of Imams in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of north-western China was built with money from the Islamic Development Bank and there is a plaque outside proclaiming this in Chinese and Arabic.

Iraq and the Gulf

Diplomatic relations between China and Iraq developed slowly. Iraq recognised Taiwan in 1950, as did the rest of the Arab League, and was part of the Baghdad Pact security alliance with the US and the United Kingdom. When General Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the monarchy in 1958, China saw him as a new revolutionary nationalist leader in the mould of Nasser, but one who was less antipathetic to communism and who would counter Nasser's dominance. Iraq recognised the PRC in August 1958 but did not send its first ambassador to China until April 1960, almost ten years after the foundation of the PRC. This was partly because of Iraqi concern that China may have inspired rioting in Mosul and Kirkuk in 1959 and China's alarm at the way members of the Iraqi Communist Party were persecuted after the riots.³¹

Trade was also at a low level until 1971 when a delegation from Baghdad, led by the Oil Minister, visited Beijing and Iraq was given a \$45 million interest-free loan. The post-Cultural Revolution atmosphere in China made possible a number of agreements for construction and development projects by China in Iraq, such as a prestigious sports hall in Baghdad and a bridge across the river Tigris. Some of these projects were never finished but the Saddam Bridge on the river Tigris at Mosul was completed in August 1984. By April 1986 there were some 20,000 Chinese engineers and workers in Iraq.³²

However, it was the sale of armaments that generated most income for China in its dealings with Baghdad. Arms sold to Iraq by China included battle tanks, artillery and F-7 fighter aircraft, the latter being the Chinese version of the Soviet MiG-21, the workhorse of the USSR's fighter arm throughout the Cold War. China was also supplying armaments to Iran, Iraq's adversary in the war that lasted from 1980 to 1988, and this clearly affected its political credibility in the Gulf region. China and Iraq continued their slow progress in developing diplomatic links when they signed a consular treaty in October 1989.³³ Lillian Craig Harris concluded that at the end of the 1980s, China's political strength in Iraq remained minimal despite strong economic ties.³⁴

When Saddam Hussein's armies invaded Kuwait in August 1990 China condemned the invasion and called upon Iraq to withdraw and restore the independence of the Kuwaiti state. It played an active role in drafting resolutions put to the United Nations Security Council and agreed to cease its business activities in Iraq, including sales of military equipment. However it also expressed its opposition to Western military intervention, being extremely anxious about the consequences of US military involvement in the region.³⁵

In November 1990, while the Kuwait crisis was at its height, the Foreign Minister of the PRC, Qian Qichen, visited Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Iraq to consult with their political leaders on the situation in the Gulf. He

cautioned Saddam Hussein against any further senseless action.³⁶ China's permanent representative at the United Nations, Li Daoyu, called for a peaceful solution to the crisis and reiterated China's opposition to the invasion and occupation.³⁷ When US military operations ceased in February 1991 China welcomed the end of the war and gradually, but cautiously, rebuilt its relations with Iraq.³⁸ The Iraqi Foreign Minister Muhammad Said Kazim al-Sahhaf visited Beijing in August 1994 and China made sympathetic noises about the effect of the UN blockade on Iraq, but in October of the same year Beijing expressed its concern at the deployment of Iraqi troops close to the border with Kuwait and urged Iraq to cooperate with the United Nations.³⁹ Still trying to maintain its balancing act, in September 1996 China criticised US-led air strikes and missile attacks on Iraq and called for restraint.⁴⁰

Iran

Iran under the Shah had been firmly in the Western camp during the Cold War, and although China had been conciliatory towards Iran at the 1955 Bandung Conference, as one large developing Asian nation to another, Iran established diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1957.⁴¹ However, Zhou Enlai visited Tehran in 1965, and in 1970, when China's membership of the United Nations was put to the vote, Iran abstained whereas it had previously voted against the motion.⁴²

Relations between China and Iran are a good example of the triumph of pragmatism over ideology, whether religious or secular. It was commerce, in particular the export of oil and trade in weapons, that determined relations between the states, whether it was the Iran of the Shah or of the Islamic radical Khomeini. The ideological differences between the regimes, in particular the incongruity of Marxist–Leninist China developing military ties with an Islamic government in Tehran, prompted both sides to conceal the nature and closeness of their relationship.

An uneasy alliance was established between China and Iran to counter the influence of the USSR with which both Iran and China had borders. It was uneasy because close links existed between the government of the Shah and Taiwan. In 1971 China and Iran signed agreements on trade and technical cooperation. Direct flights between Beijing and Tehran began in 1974 and in the same year Iran began to export oil to China and to provide technical assistance to China's domestic oil exploration and refining industries. China and Iran continued to trade after the revolution that brought the Islamic Republic to power under Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.⁴³ The year 1979 was also a turning point for China as it was the beginning of the 'reform and opening' policy of Deng Xiaoping, with which he sought to modernise China, and China was open to a range of strategic alliances which had not previously been possible.

China remained neutral during the eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, which came to an end in 1988, but contrived to sell armaments to both sides.

By 1983 Iraq had ordered over 400 F-6 fighters, the Chinese equivalent of the Soviet MiG-19. Arms sales in the 1980s are estimated to have been worth a total of \$5 billion, with more being sold to Iraq than Iran. An Iranian delegation to Beijing in March 1982 agreed to pay \$1.3 billion for tanks, guns and fighter aircraft, some of which were to be supplied via North Korea.⁴⁴

Cooperation between Iran and China on atomic energy projects was confirmed in 1991⁴⁵ and a delegation from the Centre for Strategic Research in Iran visited China in November of that year.⁴⁶ Higher level visits also took place, by the Speaker of the Iranian Majlis (Parliament) in December of the same year⁴⁷ and by Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati in April 1992.⁴⁸ Qin Jiwei travelled to Iran at the end of October 1992 on what was the first visit made by a Chinese Foreign Minister since the 1979 revolution in Iran. He had meetings with President Rafsanjani and the Iranian Minister of Defence.⁴⁹

The Iranian President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, visited China in September 1992 after the Non-Aligned Movement conference in Jakarta. After meeting central government leaders in Beijing and signing a nuclear cooperation agreement,⁵⁰ he met Tomur Dawamat, the Xinjiang regional government chairman, in Urumqi, for discussions on economic, commercial, scientific, technological and cultural exchanges, including talks on joint Xinjiang–Iran projects, rail links via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and a new air route.⁵¹ President Rafsanjani visited Kashghar on Friday 11 September and led afternoon prayers in the Etdar Mosque. Crowds of Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Hui Muslims crowded outside the mosque and when he walked briefly around the square after the service there was tremendous applause from the crowd in spite of massive police presence.⁵² The fact that President Rafsanjani was allowed to visit Xinjiang, and particularly Kashgar, indicates the importance that Beijing attached to its relations with Tehran at the time. Xinjiang is in the north west of the PRC and has a substantial population of Muslim Uyghurs, many of whom support the idea of seceding from China. To bring a leader of the Iranian Islamic revolution to their homeland was a hostage to fortune and presumably a concession to Tehran, which could demonstrate that the Iranian government acknowledged the forgotten Muslims of this remote region.

Arms sales by China to Iran have been controversial. Official Chinese sources have played them down or even denied that they have taken place at all. Foreign Ministry spokesman Wu Jianmin, at a press conference on 4 February 1993, denied US Defense Department claims that China was co-operating with Syria and Iran to develop cruise missiles.⁵³ However there is general agreement that tanks, artillery, surface-to-air missiles, fighter aircraft and a nuclear reactor have been sold.⁵⁴ It is widely assumed that Iran has bought Silkworm missiles from China, and there have been regular reports of visits by high-ranking Iranian military officials to China.

Controversy over China's arms sales to Iran was renewed in August 1993 when the 19,000 ton freighter, the *Yinhe* (Milky Way), en route from China

to Dubai, and suspected of carrying chemicals which could be used in the manufacture of nerve and mustard gas and similar chemical weapons, was shadowed by the US naval destroyer Chandler through the Strait of Hormuz. After refusing at first to allow the ship to be searched, the Chinese authorities changed their minds when it was refused permission to dock in Dubai, and the Yinhe changed course for Saudi Arabia.⁵⁵ The Yinhe was found not to be carrying chemicals as alleged by the US authorities, but Washington declined to pay the compensation for the delay which was demanded by Beijing.

Arms sales worth a total of \$1.6 billion were agreed in March 1995 and the shopping list included Shenyang J 6 aircraft and tanks. The sale of Scud and Styx missiles to Iran was denied by both sides although this denial is not believed to be credible.⁵⁶

Oil has also been the subject of negotiations between Iran and China. The Vice President of Iran, Hassan Habibi, visiting Beijing in August 1994, agreed that Iran would sell 30,000 barrels of oil a day to China and invest in Chinese refineries.⁵⁷ In the spring of 1995 this target was increased to 60,000 barrels a day and the amount of Iranian investment in Chinese oil refining facilities was announced as \$400 million. When Vice Premier Li Lanqing met President Rafsanjani in Tehran in 1997 the level of Iranian oil exports was raised to 100,000 barrels a day, with a longer term target figure of 200,000. The Chinese Foreign Ministry at the same time denied reports that it was cooperating with Iran on nuclear processing.⁵⁸

In a rare critical comment on China's internal affairs, the Iranian newspaper *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Islamic Republic) reported the suppression of disturbances in the Xinjiang city of Yining in February 1997 and criticised China's policies as an attempt to separate Xinjiang's Muslims from their co-religionists outside the country.⁵⁹ However, it is quite clear that the politics of oil and commerce far outweigh the politics of religion on both sides.

Turkey

The opening up of Central Asia after the collapse and fragmentation of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave rise to intense competition by Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia for political, economic and spiritual influence in the region. Because Beijing has encouraged the mainly Muslim countries of Central Asia to invest in or trade with China, it has felt it necessary to demonstrate its tolerance of Islam and to show that its Muslim population is able to live and worship in ways acceptable to the rest of the Islamic world. While Turkey, as a modernising Muslim nation with a secular government for most of its modern history, might be seen as China's more natural ally, the potential threat of pan-Turkism within its borders has led China also to turn to the radical Islamic state of Iran as a countervailing force.

Turkey has maintained normal diplomatic relations with China and held discussions on economic cooperation, but conscious of domestic support for

pan-Turkism and the potential benefits of a wider Turkic community, Turkey has also shown an interest in Turkic minorities in China. Isa Yusuf Alptekin, the most prominent Uyghur emigré leader, whose influence in Xinjiang was feared by Beijing in spite of his advanced age, met Turkey's Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel and other senior political figures on a number of occasions. In 1991, Prime Minister Demirel is reported to have said that he would 'not allow the Chinese to assimilate their ethnic brothers in Eastern Turkestan' and that he would make representations to the United Nations on the matter.⁶⁰ Alptekin was received by President Turgut Özal in 1992, and in an emotional meeting he presented the President with a traditional Uyghur coat and cap and an Eastern Turkestani flag, symbolising his handover of the Eastern Turkestani cause to the Turkish President, because at 91 he was too old to continue himself. President Özal is reported to have said, 'I declare that I have taken delivery of the Eastern Turkestani cause. The Turkic republics under former Soviet rule have all declared their independence. Now it is Eastern Turkestan's turn. It is our desire to see the ancient homeland of the Turkic peoples a free country'.⁶¹ Some of the accounts of these meetings are from emigré Uyghur sources which would obviously wish to emphasise the importance of their organisations, but the Chinese response suggests that they are taking the exiles very seriously.

Alptekin met government leaders again in Ankara in December 1992 to ask them to bring the issue of increased Han Chinese immigration into Xinjiang to the attention of the United Nations, and the Turkish Parliament was also asked to send a mission to Xinjiang to investigate alleged human rights abuses and to report to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.⁶² In response, an article in *People's Daily* in November 1992 apparently claimed that the Turkish President Turgut Özal and Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel openly accepted a Turkic homeland extending 'from the Great Wall of China to the Balkans' and treated Isa Yusuf Alptekin as president-in-exile of East Turkestan.⁶³ Alptekin died in 1995 having 'lived out his last days in Istanbul, in a modest flat overlooking the railway line once used by the Orient Express'.⁶⁴

Qiao Shi, Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, and widely believed also to have been China's most powerful security chief at the time, met Turkish visitors including Dorgan Gures (Chief of General Staff) and Nevzat Ayaz (Defence Minister) to discuss defence links in 1993. Qiao Shi visited Turkey in November 1996, and during talks in Ankara with his opposite number Mustafa Kalemli, made it abundantly clear to the Turkish authorities that the Chinese government was implacably opposed to the activities of separatist movements based in foreign countries including Turkey. He addressed the Turkish National Assembly on 7 November and praised the Turkish government for its non-interference in China's internal affairs and for restricting the activities of Uyghur separatist organisations in Turkey.⁶⁵ The following month, according to reports circulating in Taiwan, Turkey and China signed an agreement on

military cooperation under which Turkey would be able to buy WS1 ground-to-ground missiles and would acquire a licence to produce them in Turkey using technology transferred from China.⁶⁶ Turkish governments have had to perform a delicate balancing act to deal with the incompatible demands of pan-Turkism and trade with China.

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Central Asians were interested in the possibility of following a Turkish model of development. The Presidents of both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan declared their intention to take 'the Turkish route'. Turkey capitalised on this good will and significant resources were invested in linking the newly emerging states with Turkey. Turkish Airlines was one of the first foreign carriers to establish air links with Almaty and the capitals of the other Central Asian states. Turkey provided moral support to the nascent states and offered to educate students from Central Asia, and Turkish television was beamed to the region. Ankara established an agency specifically to coordinate Turkish aid to Central Asia, although in reality that aid was severely restricted by Turkey's relative lack of financial resources. Turkish President Turgut Özal organised a summit of the Turkic nations in October 1992, but political and cultural differences between the states and the degree of Russification that had taken place in Central Asia over the previous century and a half made relations far more difficult than either side had expected.⁶⁷

The Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, Bülent Ecevit, after a week in China in June 1998, expressed a strong interest in developing economic ties, including joint ventures, and announced that Turkey had established a trade and information centre in Shanghai.⁶⁸ Reports from the Taiwanese Central News Agency at the same time claimed that Turkey had granted permanent residence status to about 1,000 Uyghurs who had recently arrived from Xinjiang to join the 50,000 already in the country.⁶⁹

A previously unknown directive from the office of the Turkish Prime Minister was publicised in February 1999 by the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*. It had been distributed to government organisations during the premiership of Mesut Yılmaz, who took office on 30 June 1998, and urged ministers and government officials not to take part in any political activities organised by East Turkestan and Uyghur organisations based in Turkey, as Xinjiang was part of the territory of the PRC and emigré activities were creating difficulties in Turkey's relations with China.⁷⁰ The speaker of the Turkish Parliament, Hikmet Çetin, received Li Peng on 5 April 1999 when he visited Ankara in his capacity as Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, a position regarded as broadly similar to that of Çetin. The official Chinese news agency, Xinhua, reported that Çetin had reiterated Turkey's opposition to separatist activities, and this was reinforced in a meeting Li Peng held with Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit.⁷¹ Thus pan-Turkism was effectively sidelined by new realism in relations between China and Turkey.

Key determinants of China's policy towards the Middle East

China's domestic political situation has profoundly affected its relations with the Middle East. In the radical Maoist period, which includes the Great Leap Forward of 1958 and the Cultural Revolution which dominated the late 1960s and early 1970s, China was isolated and its foreign policy limited to revolutionary rhetoric and aid to selected high-profile national liberation movements. Once the more open-minded approach of Zhou Enlai had taken effect after 1971, China began to build diplomatic relations with the various states of the Middle East. As economic development became China's main domestic priority, this influenced the kind of relationships it sought with Israel, Iran and the Arab world, and commercial and technical agreements replaced political platitudes.

Energy

It is clear from the account of China's relations with individual states of the Middle East that the question of energy, whether oil, gas or nuclear power, has become a major factor. It is likely to be even more important in the future.

China has substantial reserves of oil and gas. Oilfields in the north east were developed during the 1960s and 1970s, but more recently there have been great hopes for fields in Xinjiang, particularly in the Tarim basin, and this is one reason why China is resolutely opposed to any suggestion that Xinjiang ('East Turkestan') might secede. The Chinese government's development strategies for Xinjiang place their main emphasis on the exploitation of mineral and other natural resources and also on border trade.⁷² Petroleum oil, coal, minerals and non-ferrous metals are abundant in the region – although Chinese estimates often tend to be considerably higher than those of Western analysts – and there are oil drilling operations the length of the railway line from Hami to Urumqi.⁷³ Oil exploration began in 1951,⁷⁴ the first well was drilled in 1955, and the output of the Zhungaria, Turpan–Hami and Tarim basins was forecast to reach 18 million tons by 1995 and 30 million tons by 2000. State plans also envisaged an output of 2.3 billion cubic metres of natural gas by 1995, rising to 5 billion cubic metres by the year 2000. Oil and gas are processed locally, with oil refineries at Dushanzi, Karamay (the headquarters of the Xinjiang Petroleum Administration) and Zepu, supported by British and Italian finance and French, Japanese and British commercial cooperation.⁷⁵ Briefings given to Prime Minister Li Peng by oil industry officials in November 1989 suggested that 'the Tarim basin has the largest oil storage structure so far discovered in the world today',⁷⁶ and Japanese cooperation in the Tarim Basin was discussed in September 1992.⁷⁷ The central government plans to use oil, gas, coal and other mineral resources to turn Xinjiang into a major chemical industry base.⁷⁸

China's rapid programme of industrial and economic development has created a heavy demand for energy of all types. China had been self-sufficient

in oil and a net exporter until 1993 when it became a net importer, despite being the fifth largest oil producer in the world. Although energy specialists in China hope that eventually the exploitation of new oil and gas fields will make the country less dependent on imports, according to the State Petroleum and Chemical Administration imports will still account for some 40 per cent of China's overall oil consumption in the year 2010, and China will have to 'strengthen its cooperation with other countries in oil-gas development, so that it can obtain abroad 50 [million] tons of oil and some 50 [billion cubic metres] of natural gas'.⁷⁹

Weapons sales

The trade in armaments and sensitive defence-related technology between China, Iran, Iraq and Israel has been one of the open secrets of the region since the 1980s. Although this trade has been thoroughly documented in the Western press and in reports to the US Congress, it is never referred to in Chinese documents except for the occasional denial. Even in 2001, when greater openness has enabled discussions on many formerly taboo subjects, the subject of arms sales is still not one that can be discussed.⁸⁰

11 September 2001, the 'war on terror' and Iraq

The impact of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on China's relations with the Middle East is still unfolding at the time of writing. Beijing threw its weight behind the US war effort against the Taliban in Afghanistan with unusual alacrity, and the Chinese government has argued that it should be allowed to deal with what it perceives to be a comparable terrorist threat from Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang, who it claims are linked with al-Qaida, without any foreign interference.

China has argued consistently that US and coalition attacks against al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan should not be extended to Iraq. However China did support Resolution 1441 on the disarmament of Iraq, agreed unanimously by the United Nations Security Council on 8 November 2002, which proclaimed that: 'the security council decides . . . To afford Iraq, by this resolution, a final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations under relevant resolutions of the council; and accordingly decides to set up an enhanced inspection regime with the aim of bringing to full and verified completion the disarmament process established by resolution 687 (1991) and subsequent resolutions of the council'.⁸¹

Speaking in Beijing on 8 November, Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan maintained that the Chinese government's stance on the Iraq issue was 'consistent and clear'. 'China firmly advocates peaceful settlement of the Iraq issue through political and diplomatic means and within the framework of the United Nations. China has always required Iraq completely and strictly to implement relevant UN Security Council resolutions, and to

cooperate fully with the UN in thoroughly inspecting and destroying weapons of mass destruction'. He went on to say that China had always believed that to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Iraq issue, the sovereignty, territorial integrity and reasonable concerns of Iraq should be respected, and suggested that the Security Council should consider suspending and eventually lifting the sanctions against Iraq depending on Iraq's response to the 8 November resolution. He explained that China's decision to support the resolution was part of an attempt to achieve a political solution to the Iraq issue and would strengthen the authority of the Security Council. It would also ensure that UN inspectors would be able to return to Iraq and 'carry out their mission smoothly'.⁸²

China held the rotating presidency of the Security Council during November 2002 and Zhang Yishan, the acting Chinese permanent representative to the United Nations, speaking at an open meeting of the Security Council, explained that 'the purpose of the resolution is to achieve the disarmament of Iraq through effective inspections', and added that 'the text no longer includes automaticity [sic] for authorizing the use of force'. The demand for the automatic use of force in the event of Iraqi non-compliance had been dropped by the United States and the United Kingdom under pressure from Security Council members including China. Under the new resolution, only the Security Council would have the final authority to decide whether Iraq had complied with all the relevant resolutions and could be considered to be cooperating fully with the United Nations. The Council would take such a decision after receiving reports from the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Zhang continued: 'We hope [that the resolution] will contribute to preserving the authority of the Security Council, facilitate a political settlement of the question of Iraq, and enable an early return of UN inspectors to Iraq. . . . It is our hope that Iraq will seriously implement the resolution, fully cooperate with UN weapons inspectors and fully comply with its disarmament obligation so as to create conditions for an early and comprehensive resolution of the question of Iraq'.⁸³

In the build-up to war in March 2003, China's position remained therefore that the United Nations should concentrate on the speedy resumption of weapons inspections in Iraq rather than on initiating military action against Saddam Hussein. As the resolution of November 2002 did not produce the result that the UN required, it was to be expected that China would abstain from any subsequent resolution of the Security Council that supported the use of force.

Notes

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- 16 SWB/FE/1058 (29/4/91).
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- 56 Gilks and Segal (1985, op. cit.) p. 145. Bin Huwaidin (2001, op. cit., pp. 184–93) presents further evidence of the scale of China’s weapons sales to Iran.
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- 61 *Eastern Turkestan Information*, vol. 2, no. 2, March 1992. Allowance has to be made for the rhetoric in emigré publications.
- 62 *Eastern Turkestan Information*, Munich, December 1992.
- 63 *Renmin Ribao* [*People’s Daily*], 17 November 1992, cited in *Eastern Turkestan Information*, vol. 2, no. 6, December 1992, p. 3. The edition of *Renmin Ribao* of that date circulated within China does not contain such an article, but it is possible that it appeared in the overseas edition which has not been available for consultation.
- 64 Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled: Ataturk and After* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 284.
- 65 SWB/FE/2765 (9/11/1996).

- 66 SWB/FE/2802 (23/12/1996).
- 67 Pope (1997, op. cit.) pp. 284–9. In September 1994 I made a visit to Almaty in Kazakhstan to collect information on China–Kazakhstan relations, the rapidly developing cross-border trade and the Uyghur and Dungan communities that live in Kazakhstan. I met many members of the Institute of Oriental Studies and Institute of Uyghur Studies of the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences and was struck by the importance attached to relations with Turkey at the time. Many members of the academy and government officials were either in Turkey or were shortly about to visit Turkey.
- 68 Xinhua News Agency, in SWB/FE/3248 (9/6/1998).
- 69 SWB/FE/3248 (9/6/1998).
- 70 SWB/FE/3455 (10/2/1999).
- 71 SWB/FE/3502 (7/4/1999) and 3503 (9/4/1999).
- 72 Commercial Section, British Embassy, ‘Xinjiang Today: The West Opens Up’, in *China-Britain Trade Review*, July 1992, pp. 3–9.
- 73 Personal observation in Xinjiang, March 1991.
- 74 Soviet technicians had drilled for oil in the 1930s and a small amount was produced. See Andrew D.W. Forbes, *Warlords and Muslims in Chinese Central Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 147.
- 75 Commercial Section, British Embassy (July, op. cit.) 1992, pp. 3–9; ‘Onshore Oil and Gas Seminar’ in *China–Britain Trade Review*, October 1992, p. 3.
- 76 Officials of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Corporation, the Tarim Petroleum Prospecting and Exploitation Command Post and the Northwest China Petroleum and Geological Bureau in SWB/FE/0628 (30/11/89).
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4 Present patterns of Islamism in Central Asia

Olivier Roy

The patterns of Islamic radicalisation in Central Asia and Afghanistan show common features and links with the Middle East, but they also represent new trends which are specific to the region, namely the radicalisation of until-recently conservative religious forces (the Afghan Taliban) and the growing influence of supra-national networks which recruit mainly among Middle Easterners who are based outside the Middle East.

We can divide the radical religious movements roughly into two categories: the 'Islamists', whose ideology and social background has until recently been close to that of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the 'neo-fundamentalists', who are rooted in traditional conservative clerical movements, such as the Deobandi school of South Asia. Until the late 1980s, Afghan and Central Asian Islamist movements were heavily influenced by the Muslim Brothers or by their Pakistani counterpart, the Jama'at-i Islami. During and after the Afghan war of resistance against the Soviet army, thousands of Middle Eastern volunteers were dispatched to Afghanistan, mainly through Muslim Brotherhood (MB) networks, with the support of the Saudi and Pakistani military and intelligence services. But during the 1990s, most of the Islamist parties in the Muslim world lost much of their radicalism, either almost to disappear (like the Afghan Hezb-i Islami) or to shift towards a form of nationalism. In Central Asia and Afghanistan, this nationalism is largely based on regional or ethnic identity (the Tajik Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) or the Afghan Jamiat-i Islami). At the same time, some conservative religious movements (the Afghan Taliban or Pakistani Jamiat-ul Ulema-i Islami (JUI) became more radical and anti-Western; they have superseded the Islamist movements as the harbingers of jihad against the Western world. Most of the Arab volunteers going to Afghanistan and Pakistan during the 1990s went through such networks, and their shift in orientation has been boosted by the growing 'Wahhabisation' of Islamic teachings caused by Saudi support for the educational networks in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia.

If the evolution of Islamist parties towards 'islamo-nationalism' is very common in the Middle East, the radicalisation of conservative networks seems to be a feature of the Afghan-Pakistani nexus. But the presence of

thousands of foreign volunteers, most of them Arabs, opened the prospect of a backlash of this new category of radicals into the Middle East. In fact the direction of influence seems to have reversed around 1990. Until that date, influence mainly flowed from the Middle East to Afghanistan and Central Asia; the statutes of the Afghan Islamist parties were simply a translation from the Arabic, while thousands of Arab volunteers poured into Afghanistan to fight alongside the Afghan Mujahedin (including leading figures of the Egyptian Gama'at Islamiyya). After 1990 the trend seems to have reversed. Many founders of the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and most of those of the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) were former volunteers in Afghanistan. Most of the anti-Western actions committed since 1994 seem to be linked to the al-Qaida organisation based in Afghanistan and led by the Saudi Osama Bin Laden. The centre of Islam-related supra-national militancy has shifted from Middle East to Central and South Asia, from Shi'a groups to Sunni radicals.

The crisis of the Islamist movements

What I call 'Islamism' is the brand of modern political Islamic fundamentalism which claims to recreate a true Islamic society, not simply by imposing the shari'a but by establishing first an Islamic state through political action. Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a political ideology which should be integrated into all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy etc.). The traditional idea of Islam as an all-encompassing religion is extended to meet the complexity of modern society. In fact Islamists acknowledge the modernity of society in terms of education, technology, changes in family structure and so forth, and they advocate women's participation in social life and politics as long as they wear the veil. The movement's founding fathers were Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), Abul Ala Maududi and, among the Shi'a, Baqer al-Sadr, Ali Shariati and Ruhollah Khomeini. They had a great impact on educated youth with a secular background, including women. They had less success among traditional ulema.

Islamist movements in Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan include the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami (JI); the Afghan Hezb-i Islami and Jamiat-i Islami; most of the founders of the al-Qaida movement; the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party (created in 1990, it gave birth to the Tajik and Uzbek IRP, and Adolat, which eventually became the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan); and, to some extent, Hezb-i Tahrir. Hezb-i Tahrir is a newcomer to the area, arriving in around 1995, and its history is atypical. A point to note is that the evolution of the different Islamist parties has had little to do with their basic ideologies, which are rather similar. The Jama'at-i Islami and the Tajik IRP (which had initially been a pan-Soviet movement) evolved as nationalist parties with an ethnic basis, while the Arab volunteers and Hezb-i Tahrir stuck to a militant, anti-Western, trans-national pan-Islamism, but became ideologically more conservative.

The Afghan Islamist parties: from militancy to ethnic polarisation

Until the end of the 1980s in Afghanistan, and the mid-1990s in Central Asia, the vanguard of radical Islam was represented by the various Islamist parties. In Afghanistan the Islamist movement dates back to the end of the 1970s. Its formation took place under the influence of professors who had returned from al-Azhar in Egypt (Nyazi, Rabbani) and of the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami, founded by Abul Ala Maududi in the early 1940s. It split along clear ethnic lines between the (largely Tajik) Jamiat-i Islami of Borhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Masud, and the Hezb-i Islami of Gulbuddin Hikmetyar, the latter being largely supported by the Jama'at of Pakistan and the Pakistani authorities.¹ Their Shi'a counterpart was the Hezb-i Wahdat, created around 1989 as a coalition of different pro-Iranian movements in Afghanistan, whose best organised party was the Nasr, and which benefited from the impact of the Iranian Islamic revolution among the Afghan Shi'a Hazara ethnic group.

The split between the Jamiat-i Islami and the Hezb-i Islami occurred during the exile of the Afghan Islamist movement in Peshawar (Pakistan) in the early 1970s. It was both a political split (the Jamiat adopting a more moderate line on issues like political alliances and connections with the traditional ulema) and an ethnic one (the Jamiat being mainly based in Persian-speaking areas, and the Hezb among non-tribal Pashtuns). From the beginning the Hezb benefited from the support of the Pakistani military services, whose policy has been remarkably constant; between 1971 and 2001 they played in Afghanistan a Pashtun fundamentalist card (the Hezb until 1994, and then the Taliban). The ethnic connection was also obvious in the support given by the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan, which has a strong Pashtun basis and whose present leader in 2002, Qazi Hussein Ahmed, who was previously responsible for organising the party's support for the Afghan Mujahedin, is also a Pashtun.

Early in the war against the Soviet troops the Jamiat lost most of its ideological motivation. Its main military commander in Afghanistan, Ahmad Shah Masud, did not care about ideology and was only concerned about getting the support of local ulema. The Jamiat has never been more than a loose association of local military commanders, most of them former university students, without any strong political apparatus. It recruited mainly among Sunni Persian speakers (the so-called Tajiks), although it has always had an Uzbek and Pashtun minority. On the other hand, the Hezb remained a small, centralised political party, where precedence was always given to the political leadership at the expense of more militarily able commanders. The Hezb, along with some local Pashtun commanders like Jallaluddin Haqqani in Paktya, was the principal beneficiary of the dispatching of Arab volunteers.

The war against the Soviets exacerbated the ethnic polarisation which had always been present. In April 1992 Kabul was taken by a loose coalition of non-Pashtuns (Tajiks with Masud, Uzbeks with Dostum and Shi'a Hazaras

under Mazari). This was seen by many Pashtuns as a repetition of the take-over of the capital by the Tajik Bacha-ye Saqqao in 1928, the only example of a non-Pashtun leadership since the creation of the Afghan state in 1747. During the bloody civil war that followed the Hezb-i Islami, despite Pakistani support, was unable to retake Kabul, even if it succeeded in destroying the city. Masud, in charge of Kabul, did little to restore law and order, but did not impose an ideological agenda on the population; female, pro-communist civil servants, including TV anchorwomen and airline stewardesses, were authorised to keep their positions, if wearing the scarf. In 1994, a crowd of Jamiat militants burnt the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul in retaliation for the support provided by Islamabad to Hikmetyar. The Jamiat at that time became an Afghan nationalist party, with a narrower ethnic basis made essentially of Tajiks.

During the Gulf War of 1990, the Hezb was the only Afghan party to support Saddam Hussein, following the example of many Middle Eastern Islamist movements. This led to the withdrawal of Saudi support. Added to its inability to kick Masud out of Kabul, this stance led to growing disaffection among its external supporters. In 1994, when the Taliban movement rose around Kandahar, Pakistan shifted its support from the Hezb to this other Pashtun fundamentalist movement. In 1995, the Hezb headquarters in the vicinity of Kabul were taken and destroyed by the Taliban. That was the end of the Hezb-i Islami: it had lost both its Pashtun constituency and its foreign support to the Taliban.

As far as the Shi'a parties are concerned, they also became more ethnically and less ideologically minded. The Shi'a community in Afghanistan is mostly Hazara. The non-Hazara Shi'a usually joined the Harakat-i Islami, now headed by Anwari who was a close ally of Masud. The Hezb-i Wahdat is exclusively Hazara. Ethnic polarisation is the key factor of Afghan politics, although the Taliban, as we shall see, brought a new ideological dimension.

The Islamic volunteers in Afghanistan: from anti-communist to anti-Western jihad

After 1984, young Islamist radicals were recruited throughout the Middle East and sent to Peshawar in Pakistan. Trained in special camps on the Afghan–Pakistani border, they were dispatched to help the Afghan Mujahedin, especially the most radical among them, Gulbuddin Hikmetyar. The operation was master-minded by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and the Saudi Ministry of Intelligence, headed by Prince Turki Bin Faisal, with the approval of the CIA, which was mandated by the US government and Congress to support the struggle of the Afghan ‘freedom fighters’. But the choice of beneficiaries was made entirely by the ISI, with the help of the Jama’at-i Islami, which provided many advisers and civil servants for the then President, General Zia ul-Haq. The networks in charge of bringing the volunteers to Peshawar were mainly staffed by sympathisers

or members of the different branches of the Muslim Brotherhood. The 'dispatcher' in Peshawar was a Palestinian former Muslim Brother with a Jordanian passport, Abdullah Azzam. This man, who earned great respect among Afghan Mujahedin, died in a mysterious car bombing in September 1989 in Peshawar. He established in this town the 'Maktab ul-Khidamat', or 'Office for Services'. Another important actor was the then-Saudi millionaire Osama Bin Laden.

The goal for the Pakistanis, Saudis and some Americans was to turn anti-Western Islamic fundamentalism against the communist camp. The Saudis were also trying to undermine support for Iran among the Islamists by promoting their own brand of fundamentalism. This conservative Sunni fundamentalism would stress only the shari'a and the *sunna* (the tradition of the Prophet) at the expense of all the revolutionary rhetoric so pervasive among the young militants. Simply put, the idea was to promote an Islamic fundamentalism closer to the Wahhabi school of thought official in Saudi Arabia: strongly anti-Shi'a and socially conservative. The Pakistanis had a further agenda. General Zia used the Afghan war to make Pakistan both a close ally of the US and the new regional vanguard of Sunni Islam. From the beginning of the war he had the feeling that the USSR would withdraw sooner or later and that the Soviet Muslims would become independent. Obsessed by the Indian threat, the Pakistani ruling circles hoped to gain some strategic depth by establishing a new sphere of influence stretching from Kabul to Tashkent. The only common denominator of this area was the Sunni Muslim identity of the diverse ethnic groups living within it. This was also the sole source of legitimacy for Pakistan, which has been created on the basis of being a 'Muslim country'.

Even if most of the militants were close to the Muslim Brothers, the brand of Islam they were promoting was in fact closer to Saudi Wahhabism. As a result the volunteers had a double agenda: to redeem Muslim lands under foreign control (jihad) and to establish 'true' Islam as opposed to local traditions and deviations. They called themselves *salafi* – followers of the ancestors' authentic path. This 'salafi-jihadist' dimension is the main characteristic of the international networks established in Afghanistan under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden.

After the Soviet withdrawal in February 1989 many militants returned home and joined or founded more radical splinter groups. They became known as 'the Afghans'. In Algeria, many 'Afghans' were among the founders of the FIS – Said Mekhloufi, Kamareddin Kherbane and Abdullah Anas (Bujema Bunnua, son-in-law of Abdullah Azzam), for example. They are even more numerous in the radical GIA, all the initial leaders of which were returnees from Afghanistan: Tayyeb al-Afghani (killed in 1992), Jaffar al-Afghani (killed in 1994) and Sherif Gusmi (killed in 1994). The editorialist of the London-based GIA journal *al-Ansar*, Abu Musab (a Syrian), and Abu Hamza al-Misri (the Egyptian Mustafa Kamel) lived for a long time in Peshawar. Mohammed al-Islambuli, brother of Sadat's murderer, went from

Egypt to Afghanistan where he is still living today. Fuad Qassim, Mustafa Hamza and Ahmed Taha, leaders of the Egyptian Gama'at Islamiyya, are also 'Afghans', as is Ahmed al-Zawahiri, leader of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, who co-signed Bin Laden's communiqués in early 1998. So-called 'Afghans' make up the majority of the Harakat ul-Ansar movement presently fighting in Kashmir, whose training camps in the Afghan Province of Khost were attacked by US missiles on 21 August 1998 in retaliation for the bombing of the US embassies in East Africa.

These groups turned anti-Western and anti-Saudi in the early 1990s (although they continued to receive money from private Saudi sources). The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, followed by the collapse of the USSR, made obsolete the anti-communist motivation but not the call for jihad. The Gulf war of 1990–91 revealed the new enemy: the West – specifically the Americans – and the Saudis, who had allowed the desecration of the holy sanctuaries by an infidel army. In February 1993 the World Trade Center in New York was nearly blown up by a team linked to the 'Afghan' networks. Sheikh Omar Abdulrahman, who was sentenced for the blast, had spent years in Peshawar, and two of his sons are still with the Taliban. Abdulrahman was one of the founders of the Egyptian Gama'at Islamiyya. The other defendants, Yussuf Ramzi, a Pakistani educated in Kuwait, and Mohammed Salameh and Ahmed Ajjaj, both Palestinians, also spent some time in Afghanistan. After the death of Azzam these loose networks were reorganised under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden, with the help of al-Zawahiri and Hamza. Early in 1998, they announced the creation of the 'World Islamic Front for the struggle against Jews and Crusaders', which is held responsible for the bombing of the US embassies in East Africa. Since this time the so-called Afghan network has been autonomous vis-à-vis most of its godfathers, with the notable exception of Pakistan.

Central Asia: the Islamic Renaissance Party and the 'islamo-nationalist' movements

The Uzbek and Tajik Islamist movements share a common origin: the Islamic Renaissance Party, created in Soviet Union in September 1990. The IRP, in its ideology and constituency, was very close to the mainstream Sunni Islamist movements such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami. The aim of the party, according to its statutes, was to 'unify the Muslims on all the Soviet territory'.² It opposed ethnic conflict and nationalism. Its discourse and terminology were close to the Islamist vulgate. The party claimed to be a 'social and political organisation' (*ijtema'i wa siassi*). It stressed the need for predication (*da'wa*) among Muslims. It criticised the official clergy for its lack of militancy, and called for the building of a high-level Muslim educational network. It advocated an 'Islamic social justice' based on *zakat* and *sadaqat*. In brief, its slogans and programmes, as well as its terminology,

were identical to those of all Sunni Islamist movements, and showed no Iranian influence.

Intellectuals with a secular background are the main social basis of the IRP.³ The recruitment pattern among IRP cadres is close to that of Egyptian Muslim Brothers or the Pakistani Jama'at: they are young (born in the 1950s) and educated people, mainly graduates in sciences (two of the IRP's Tajik leaders, Molla Nuri and Sharif Himmatzadeh are engineers). But many of these intellectuals are also 'parallel' mullahs. This double identity is especially strong in rural Tajikistan, where there is no real urban elite. While the bulk of the local parallel mullahs were working officially as kolkhozians, some members of the intelligentsia who achieved a secular training in state universities and institutes became 'parallel mullahs' in their district of origin. They received a deep religious education (by Soviet standards) by participating in clandestine educational networks. Nuri and Himmatzadeh attended the courses of Hajji Mohammad Rustamov, alias Mawlawi Qari Hindoustani, an Uzbek who was educated in India before World War II.

But as early as 1992 the IRP split into national branches. Since 1992 the Tajik IRP has been the backbone of an 'islamo-nationalist' opposition, bringing together secularist democrats, nationalists and the Ismaili minority from Gorno-Badakhshan. In such a coalition ideological factors became irrelevant, while regionalist affiliations are the real rationale. At the end of 1992 the coalition, called the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), was forced to withdraw into Afghanistan. It based its headquarters in Taloqan, the stronghold of the Afghan leader Ahmad Shah Masud. When the Taliban took Kabul from Masud in September 1996, the UTO remained in Masud's area and chose to support Masud against the advance of the Taliban. In June 1997 the UTO signed an agreement with the 'neo-communist' government of Dushanbe and since then it has been participating in a coalition government. These events show how the Tajik IRP has lost almost all its ideological references to become more of a nationalist party, advocating the strengthening of the Tajik nation against Uzbek encroachment, and supporting ethnic Tajiks in Afghanistan against the mainly Pashtun Taliban movement.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) made a different choice, under very different circumstances. Repressed by the Uzbek government and deprived of any opportunity to participate in national politics, it based itself in Taliban-held areas of Afghanistan. It launched armed attacks through Tajik and Kyrgyz territories (in August 1999 and 2000), making use of former connections with Tajik IRP commanders in the upper Gharm valley. It also benefited from the support of the Taliban and Afghan-based Arabs. But the IMU has remained a largely Uzbek party with a regional constituency (the Ferghana Valley). Its alliance with radical Afghan and Pakistani groups has been more tactical than strategic. The IMU too is more an islamo-nationalist party than a supra-nationalist movement.

Central Asia: Hezb-i Tahrir

Hezb-i Tahrir (HT) presents a strange case. It was founded in 1953 in Amman (Jordan) as a splinter from the Muslim Brotherhood. Its founder, Sheikh Nabhani, criticised the lack of support from the MB for the Palestinian struggle for national liberation – HT was probably the first ‘islamo-nationalist’ party. The party migrated to Beirut and then to London, where its nature changed. Since then it has recruited mainly among second-generation, up-rooted, young, educated Muslims, and has taken a strongly supra-national stance, advocating the revival of the Caliphate through *da’wa*. It has made a breakthrough in Uzbekistan and among ethnic Uzbeks in northern Tajikistan and southern Kyrgyzstan. Despite the fact that it does not promote armed struggle, its members are prosecuted by the authorities in these countries. It has not had contact with the Afghan Taliban.

Most of the Islamist movements of Central Asia – with the exception of HT, which experienced the reverse trend – have become islamo-nationalist; they cast their policy in a national framework and contribute to the strengthening of national identities by bringing into the political scene groups which were previously excluded. But their main weakness is their narrow ethnic or regional basis, which obliges them to search for coalitions and thus increases their de-ideologisation. Such an evolution is consistent with what I call ‘islamo-nationalism’ in the Middle East and Iran, where most of the mainstream Islamist movements are casting their strategy and identity in a national framework, paying only lip-service to Islamic supra-national solidarity. This holds true for the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as Palestinian Hamas, Turkish Fazilet and Lebanese Hezbollah, and the various branches of Muslim Brothers.

The radicalisation of traditional clerical networks

The Taliban did not come from nowhere when they appeared as a political and military movement in August 1994. They were the product of a network of religious madrassas, established on both sides of the Afghan–Pakistani border, and they also represented the ‘revenge of the Pashtuns’.

Afghanistan and Pakistan are one of the few parts of the contemporary Muslim world where an active development of rural madrassas took place after 1950. The madrassas were not organised into a hierarchical teaching system. Their importance often depended on their director and the money he could attract. Some were linked to small fundamentalist groups like the Ahl-i Hadith movement, but the bulk of them were linked to the Deobandi school of thought, which is dominant in northern Pakistan. This school was established by the eighteenth century Muslim reformist Shah Waliullah (1703–1762), and his sons and grandsons. In 1867 a madrassa was opened near Delhi, in Deoband. Teaching was at the centre of this reformist movement and its basic creed is Hanafi Sunnism. Its advocates do not reject

sufism, but fight against any kind of syncretism and Hindu influence on Islam; they condemn the 'cult of the saints'. They also are strongly anti-Shi'a. The Deobandi school has been firmly entrenched in Pakistani political life since Partition under the banner of the Jamiat-ul Ulema-i Islami, headed by Fazlur Rahman (although there have been at least two scissions, one being led by Senator Sami ul-Haq, a Pashtun who heads the Haqqania madrassa in Akora Khattak near Peshawar, and the most staunch supporter of the Taliban).

There have been many reasons for the extension of networks of private madrassas in rural areas. In Pakistan, the main reason was probably the crisis of the government educational network. In Afghanistan, it was due more to the reluctance of traditional social groups to send their sons to government schools. Historically, Afghanistan never had high-level madrassas. The ulema studied in Bukhara (for the north and until 1917), but more often in India. The Afghan state's endeavour to build modern Islamic institutions around the Shariat Faculty of Kabul University (where the staff were trained in Egypt) drew suspicion from the ulema. They stopped sending their students to India, which became an infidel state after 1947, preferring Pakistan. Linguistic ties between the Pashtuns on either side of the border strengthened ties, but teaching was in Persian, Urdu, Pashtu and Arabic. The biggest madrassa is probably the Madrassa Haqqania. After years of study, students would come back to Afghanistan, either to join an existing madrassa or to found their own. The trans-border ties were perpetuated by the constant movement of Afghan students. In Afghanistan madrassa networks were strong in the area between Ghazni and Kandahar, the cradle of the Taliban. Some were to be found in the northern area (northern Badakhshan). Often the madrassa structure was associated with a local sufi brotherhood (usually Naqshbandiyya).

The war against the Soviets created two new phenomena within the madrassa system: politicisation and 'Wahhabisation'. Most of the madrassas situated in rural areas between Ghazni and Kandahar turned into military 'fronts', often called *jebhe-ye tolaba*. They usually joined traditional Pashtun fundamentalist parties: the Harakat-i Enqelab-i Islami of Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi or Hezb-i Islami of Yunus Khales. Sometimes they moved to more remote areas. The ties with their Pakistani counterparts were extended in order to obtain money and weapons. Usually the Pakistani services (ISI) in charge of dispatching weapons used the 'clerical' networks to identify recipients and to establish links with them. But the war also led to an influx of Arab, and specifically Saudi, money. The Saudis were eager to help the Mujahedin for two reasons: to fight communism, but also to undercut Iranian influence in fundamentalist circles. They played on the traditional anti-Shi'a Deobandi trend. They also introduced a stronger *salafi* (strictly fundamentalist) attitude, for example by campaigning against local traditional Muslim customs (like the flags put on tombs of mujahedin or saints). They offered scholarships for study in the Gulf.

Of course this ‘Wahhabisation’ did not mean that the Deobandi school adopted new ideas and creeds; it is more a question of attitude. The term ‘fundamentalist’ was used by the British to refer to any Islamic reformist coming back from Mecca in the nineteenth century, at a time when the Wahhabis *sensu stricto* were not established in the Holy city. But this emphasis on ‘true Islam’ and criticism of local customs, Shi’a creeds and Western influence, played a role in radicalising an already strict fundamentalism. One notable consequence was the radicalisation of the anti-Shi’a bias, followed by the creation of militant political groups devoted to fighting the Shi’a (such as Sepah-i Sahaba), with support of the JUI.

Another aspect of Saudi involvement was in the political struggle in Pakistan. While the Islamist party Jama’at-i Islami, close to General Zia, had the support of the different Muslim Brotherhood groups in the Middle East, the JUI was opposed to Zia and was struggling to keep in touch with the wave of radical Islam. The Saudis, who had helped the JI in the 1980s, reinforced their support for more traditional groups like the JUI when, during the Kuwait crisis, the JI condemned their call on Western troops.

The Taliban advocate a strict Sunni Hanafi fundamentalism, coupled with a puritanism which has more to do with tribal Pashtun culture than with Islam *sensu stricto*. Complete implementation of the shari’a (as they see it) is for them the sole prerequisite for building an Islamic society. They do not share the political, social and economic agenda of Islamists like the Muslim Brothers. Their conception of ‘Islamisation’ does not provide any specific political framework. They are far from the radical revolutionary movements of Iran or Sudan, which stress the reinforcement of a strong central state. They ‘elected’ Mullah Omar as *Amir al-mu’minin* (Commander of the Believers), the only institution they recognise, but their actual ruling apparatus was light and flexible, well adapted to a tribal and segmented society, which explains why their rule was accepted in tribal areas. Their main problem was with the urban population which saw them (rightly) as poorly educated peasants, unable to deal with the complexity of urban life and administration.

The Taliban also embody an ethnic Pashtun identity. The Pashtun population, which never recognised Hikmetyar as its representative, resented the fact that Kabul fell in 1992 into the hands of non-Pashtuns for the first time since the creation of the country (if one excludes the brief interlude of Bacha-i Saqqao in 1929). The striking fact is that the ‘revenge of the Pashtuns’ took the form of a fundamentalist movement – the Taliban – which, although it is exclusive Pashtun, discarded any ethnic claim and pretended to represent the ‘Afghan Muslim Mellat’ (*nation*). Most of the Pashtun commanders, whatever their ideological affiliation, joined or approved of the Taliban, including the former hard-line communist General Tana’y, the pro-Western Ruhani Wardak, Jallaluddin Haqqani from Paktya, the pro-Iranian Mo’azzen, and the Western-trained diplomat Hamid Karzai for a short period. This Pashtun constituency was the strength and the

weakness of the Taliban: it antagonised the other ethnic groups (Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras) and it created an artificial unity among Pashtuns, although rival tribal affiliations remained as strong as before. It also provided a bridge with the Pakistani Pashtuns or Pathans, who are strongly represented in the Pakistani military apparatus as well as in the neo-fundamentalist movements. As is usual in rural Muslim societies, charismatic movements waging jihad in the name of the Islamic ummah left untouched the traditional segment of society, which inevitably made a comeback.

Foreign connections

The Pakistani Islamic hub

The Taliban and al-Qaida have been closely connected to a kind of radical Islamic 'hub' situated in Pakistan. Members of Islamic opposition groups fleeing their home countries have been indoctrinated in Pakistan, given military training in Afghanistan, and then dispatched to the various jihads of the day – Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kashmir, etc. This hub is linked to Pakistani religious political parties, both traditional (Jamiat-ul Ulama-i Islami) and Islamist (Jama'at-i Islami), to more radical splinter groups (Sepah-i Sahaba), and to predicating religious institutions which have become politically active (Markaz ul-Da'wat wa ul-Irshad, a splinter group of the formerly apolitical Tabligh). All these groups manage hundreds of madrassas and have been closely tied to the Afghan Taliban movement, the Taliban's primary ties being with the Jami'at-ul Ulama-i Islami.

Three elements characterise these groups. First, they combine political and militant jihad against the West with a very conservative definition of Islam, close to the tenets of Saudi Wahhabism. Nowhere is their conservatism more obvious than in their attitude towards women. While the Islamists advocate women's education and political participation (with the condition of wearing a veil and attending single-sex schools), neo-fundamentalists want to ban any female presence in public life. They are also strongly opposed to music, the arts, and entertainment. Unlike the Islamists they do not have an economic or social agenda. They are heirs to the conservative Sunni tradition of fundamentalism, obsessed by the danger of a loss of purity within Islam through the influence of other religions (historically, this fear is understandable because Muslims have been a minority in the Indian sub-continent and lost political power after a failed uprising in 1857 under the Christian British empire). They stress the implementation of the shari'a as the sole criterion for an Islamic state and society. This strict Sunnism also turned very anti-Shi'a. The anti-Shi'a bias was revived at the end of the 1980s as a consequence of the growing influence of Saudi Wahhabism, and gave way to a low-intensity civil war between Shi'as and Sunnis in Pakistan, reflected in Afghanistan by the mass killing of Shi'as after the takeover of Mazar-i Sharif by the Taliban in August 1998. But they

are also becoming strongly anti-Christian and anti-Jewish; in fact, they believe that Israel, the US and Iran are united to destroy 'true Islam'.

While anti-imperialist slogans have been common among Islamist movements from the 1950s onwards, and political anti-Zionism turned into anti-Semitism some time ago among many Muslim intellectual (and not necessarily religious) circles, the anti-Christian propaganda among Sunni movements is rather new. The Islamists were not anti-Christian as such; in Iran during the revolution there were no attacks on churches and the Egyptian Muslim Brothers have not cracked down on the Copts. The idea was that there is some common ground between true believers. Now, however, the term 'religious war' really makes sense.

The second point is that these movements are supra-national. They do not root themselves in specific countries, even if they are based in Pakistan or Afghanistan. The group involved in the bombing of the US embassies in East Africa included Sudanese, Yemenis, Palestinians and one Comorian. The main suspect, Mohammed Howaida, is a Palestinian born in Jordan, trained in Afghanistan, and married to a Kenyan, and he held a Yemeni passport. These movements do not care about borders and national interests. It would, for example, have been in the national interest of the Taliban to expel (not extradite) Bin Laden and then to obtain full diplomatic recognition, but Mullah Omar, their charismatic leader, simply did not care. The borders between Afghanistan and Pakistan have little meaning. Hundreds of Central Asians and Uyghurs are trained in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Of course the supra-national links are sometimes made possible by intra-national ones, such as the common ethnic Pashtun background of the Taliban, the leader of the Pakistani Jama'at-i Islami (Qazi Hussein), the head of one branch of the Jami'at-ul Ulema-i Islami (Senator Sami ul-Haq, from Akora Khattak), and many officers of the ISI (such as Colonel Imad, former adviser to the Taliban). While Islamists do adapt to the nation-state, neo-fundamentalists embody the crisis of the nation-state, squeezed between intra-state solidarities and globalisation. The state level is bypassed and ignored. The Taliban care little about the state: Mullah Omar rarely attended the Council of Ministers or went to the capital.

In fact, this new brand of supra-national neo-fundamentalism is more a product of contemporary globalisation than of the Islamic past. Using two international languages (English and Arabic), travelling easily by air, studying, training and working in many different countries, communicating through the Internet and cellular phones, its supporters think of themselves as 'Muslims' and not as citizens of a specific country. They are often uprooted, either more or less voluntarily (many are Palestinian refugees from 1948, and not from Gaza or the West Bank; Bin Laden was stripped of his Saudi citizenship; many others belong to migrant families who move from one country to the next to find jobs or education). It is probably a paradox of globalisation that modern, supra-national networks and traditional, even archaic, intra-state forms of relationships (tribalism, for instance, or religious

school networks) have been linked in this way. Even the very sectarian form of their religious beliefs and attitudes make the neo-fundamentalists look like other sects spreading all over the planet.

The consequence is that there is little in common between these neo-fundamentalist groups and the mainstream Islamist movements which are now integrated into nation-state politics, with one exception – Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's support for the Taliban's brand of Islam was part of a Pakistani 'great design' to extend not so much Pakistan as such, but the very concept of Pakistan: a land inhabited by Muslims. The Pakistani military used the radical Islamic groups as a tool of regional policy by sending them to fight in Kashmir (Kargil incident in spring 1999) and by turning a blind eye to the militants crossing into Afghanistan to support the Taliban and to get some training. Islamabad strived hard to help the Taliban achieve a full victory in Afghanistan. This policy was reaching its limits even before 11 September. It was creating suspicions about the links between Pakistani ruling circles and anti-Western terrorists, but more importantly it was feared that the 'talibanisation' of Pakistan might simply contribute to the destruction of Pakistan as a nation-state by diluting its borders, bringing foreign militant elements inside, and stirring ethnic and confessional feuds. As usual Islamisation, under the banner of uniting Muslims beyond ethnic and tribal bonds, may actually exacerbate ethnic rifts, because it is seen by minority groups as a tool for imposing the rule of dominant groups (in Pakistan, Pashtuns and Punjabis against Sindhis, Mohajers, Baluchis and Shi'as – many Shi'a being also Punjabis).

Iran's pragmatic policy

Iranian support for militant Shi'a movements abroad steadily decreased from June 1988 (cease-fire with Iraq) until 1998, when the Taliban took Mazar-i Sharif and slaughtered thousands of Hazaras and a dozen Iranian diplomats, thus presenting Tehran with the same dilemma as when Saddam Hussein bombed the Shi'a sanctuary of Najaf in February 1991.

Taken by surprise by the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Tehran kept to a cautious policy in Afghanistan. It was essentially a defensive policy: to ensure the protection of the Shi'a minority and of its own borders (especially against drug-smugglers) and to repatriate as many Afghan refugees as possible. Tehran always acknowledged that any government in Kabul should be Pashtun and Sunni and did not challenge Pakistani supremacy, but rejected Pakistani hegemony. This cautious attitude was challenged by the forward policy of Pakistan, supporting the strongly anti-Shi'a Taliban movement. But after pondering military intervention, Iran decided to keep a low profile. From 2000 onwards it gave strong military support to Masud, whom it had previously shunned. Although Masud was a Persian-speaker, the Iranian policy had nothing to do with ethnicity but was purely

pragmatic – to prevent any Taliban hegemony in order to push the Taliban towards negotiation.

The same pragmatic approach was applied in Tajikistan. Iran supported the IRP during the civil war in 1992, but kept open channels of communication with the ruling regime (the Iranian Embassy has never been closed in Dushanbe). Iran advocated a coalition government of the two factions and worked closely with Moscow to achieve this, even if relations between the two countries have not always been trusting. In June 1997 the agreement on a coalition government illustrated the success of this joint Russo-Iranian approach. There are no longer any ideological drivers in Iran's policy towards Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The impact of radical Islam in Central Asia is mainly linked to the domestic situation (ethnic nationalisms, political repression and localist identities), with little or no direct foreign influence. The fact that the IMU has been based in Afghanistan does not mean that the Taliban were threatening Central Asia. All Central Asian governments, while abiding by the UN-imposed sanctions on the Taliban, advocated negotiations with them. The Taliban did not interfere outside Afghanistan but, by giving asylum to radical Islamists, they enabled the creation of a militant Islamist nexus, whose real centre and command was not in their hands. Its two centres of operation were the Islamist hub in Pakistan and the al-Qaida movement in Afghanistan. As long as these benefited from the tacit support of the Pakistani government, they enjoyed an almost free hand.

Notes

- 1 On the history of the Islamist movement in Afghanistan, see Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). On Central Asia, by the same author, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (London: IB Tauris, 2000).
- 2 The party's programme has been published in several languages. My source is the Tajik journal *Hedayat*, no. 1, June 1990 (no place of publication). All the quotations are from this issue.
- 3 As it is often in other parts of the Sunni Muslim world, see Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

5 The contestation of Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia

A nascent security threat

Shirin Akiner

During the Soviet era, links between Central Asia and the Middle East, in so far as they existed at all, dated from the 1960s and were mostly related to the use of Islam as a tool of Soviet foreign policy. Contacts in this period included the participation of Central Asian clerics in international Islamic conferences and exchange visits of high level delegations. A small number of graduates, nominated by the official Soviet Muslim administration, were sent to countries such as Egypt, Jordan and Libya to perfect their Arabic and to further their religious studies at approved Islamic universities. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the newly independent Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) established formal diplomatic relations with these and other countries of the Middle East. There were some, mostly ephemeral, attempts to promote economic ties, but only Turkey and Israel succeeded in developing a significant commercial presence in the region.¹ The main area of interaction between the Arab world and Central Asia remained that of the shared religion, Islam. Contacts, still very largely regulated by official channels, were mostly restricted to specific activities. However, informal links developed outside the purview of the authorities, leading to the dissemination of new ideas, new interpretations of the faith.

Throughout the seventy-odd years of Soviet rule, Central Asian Muslims were almost entirely isolated from the wider Islamic community. During this period they experienced complex cultural and social transformations. In some ways their history is unique and sets them apart from the rest of the Muslim world. Yet increasingly, as they become more integrated into the international community, so their responses to Islam are beginning to resemble those that are found elsewhere. In particular there are striking parallels with the situation in some Middle Eastern states. Thus there is cooptation of Islam by ruling elites, underpinned by close government control over Islamic institutions. Likewise, leaders draw on Islamic rhetoric and symbolism to validate their regimes. The fiercest opposition to such regimes comes from radical Islamists;² in most cases the latter are subjected to brutal repression, thereby creating a powerful dynamic of action and reaction. A similar model is being created in Central Asia today, where competition between these

forces – government and radical Muslim opposition – has resulted in proliferating outbreaks of militant confrontation. Increasingly, Islam – or more precisely, the contestation of Islam – has become a security issue. This has led to fears that Central Asia will become a new centre of terrorism and that militant Islamists from the Middle East will find a ready welcome here. This chapter examines the Central Asian context.³

Background

Arab armies introduced Islam into the southern tier of the region (present-day Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) in the second half of the seventh century. Thereafter it spread northwards and was gradually embraced by the nomads of the steppes and mountains. Some would argue that the Islamicisation of these peoples was not fully accomplished until the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century, however, the overwhelming majority of the native population of Central Asia was, at least nominally, Sunni Muslim of the Hanafi sect. The main exception was the small and scattered community of Ismailis in Gorno-Badakhshan (modern Tajikistan).

During the Soviet era Islam was severely persecuted and its infrastructure almost totally destroyed. During World War II a state-controlled Muslim hierarchy was re-established and some of the formal elements of religious observance were permitted to reappear. One madrassa (Muslim college) was opened in Bukhara, another in Tashkent; these were the only two official institutions of Islamic education in the whole of the Soviet Union. Yet there was no abatement of the campaign to secularise society and to replace religious belief by ‘scientific atheism’. The result of this constant pressure was that by the 1980s Islam had become more a marker of cultural and ethnic identity than an active spiritual commitment for most Central Asians. Indeed, it was not uncommon to hear people describe themselves as being ‘a Muslim but also an atheist’.

The chief manifestations of allegiance to Islam in this period were the celebration of religious ceremonies connected with rites of passage, such as (male) circumcision, marriage and burial. There was also widespread observance of a number of folk traditions. In popular understanding these were considered to be part of the Muslim tradition, but in fact they were syncretic accretions of various origins. They included pilgrimages to hallowed places (for example, the graves of holy men) and the performance of associated rituals intended to secure divine assistance and protection. Knowledge of Islamic doctrine, of prayers, and even of the basic Muslim profession of faith (‘There is no God but God and Muhammed is His Prophet’) was to be found among a small number of predominantly elderly individuals.⁴

However, in the 1980s Islam began to acquire renewed significance. The impetus for this came from two directions. One was a grassroots movement of Muslim regeneration. It was very small scale, probably embracing no more than a few thousand individuals, and located mainly in rural areas of

Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It mostly took the form of informal circles of disciples who congregated around a local figure respected for his piety and Muslim learning.⁵ The main characteristic of these groups was scholastic conservatism, rooted in the study of traditional madrasa texts. Inevitably, these neophytes soon aroused suspicion. They were dubbed 'Wahhabis' in the Soviet press, a term that hinted at a treasonous link to a foreign power (a link which was not proven and almost certainly did not exist at this period). They were harassed and spasmodically punished by the state authorities.

The other, slightly later, development that encouraged the resurgence of Islam was a change of policy on the part of Soviet officialdom during the period of *perestroika* (second half of the 1980s). The government began to adopt a conciliatory attitude towards the religious establishment as a response to two quite different concerns. One was the need to manage the so-called 'Islamic threat'. The perception of Islam as a potential menace was to some extent inspired by the writings of Western scholars, who frequently stressed that the rapid demographic growth of the Soviet Muslim population would endanger the stability of the Soviet Union and might even bring about its dissolution.⁶ The threat perception was fuelled also by apprehension that 'fundamentalist' movements might be imported into Central Asia from Iran and Afghanistan. The Soviet government's strategy for dealing with this situation in the 1980s was very different from what it might have been in an earlier period: instead of increased repression, there was a concerted effort to work with the official Muslim institutions to promote 'Central Asian' orthodoxy. Much emphasis was placed on the historic tradition of Islam in the region, as witnessed by the works of great medieval scholars such as al-Bukhari and al-Tirmizi. The explicit message was that Central Asians should be proud of their own form of Islam and did not need to imitate others: on the contrary, they could act as exemplars for Muslims in other countries.

The other concern for the Soviet authorities at this time was the urgent need to improve economic performance. The state was suffering a systemic crisis, but the full scale of the problems had not yet become apparent and blame was largely laid on human failings, particularly on corruption. In an attempt to change the moral climate, religious leaders were coopted to help fight these social ills. In Central Asia, as part of this policy, Islam began to be presented in a positive light, with much emphasis on its ethical values. To help spread this message, many mosques were opened (more in 1989–91 than at any time in the previous seven decades) and there was a steep rise in the availability of religious literature and facilities for the study of the Quran. Overt government support gave the official Muslim hierarchy greater public visibility, as well as increased influence in society.

This policy of accommodation towards Islam was marked by the promotion of younger men (several in their early thirties) to leading positions in the official Muslim institutions.⁷ Such men had received a thorough training in Islamic scholarship in the Soviet madrassas, and in religious institutions abroad. They were firmly committed to the twin aims of increasing know-

ledge and practice of Islam among the population at large, and giving the faith a greater public role in society. Some of these new clerics were disciples of so-called 'Wahhabi' teachers.⁸ Moreover, like the 'Wahhabis', one of their priorities was the promotion of 'purist', orthodox Islam, cleansed of the superstition and syncretic accretions that characterised the religious practice of the majority of the population. Thus the interests of members of the official Muslim hierarchy and of the unofficial 'Wahhabis' converged. Working in different spheres, within different organisational frameworks, their efforts were often complementary. Yet any form of collaboration was of necessity surreptitious since the government still regarded the 'Wahhabis' with suspicion and hostility.

It must be stressed that the developments outlined above – the change in government policy, the growing influence of official and unofficial Muslim organisations – were very tentative and lasted little more than a couple of years, from the late 1980s to the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. They were generally welcomed by the public at large, but there was too little time for any real transformation to take place. By the end of the Soviet era there was a widespread consensus that Islam must play a greater role in society, but there was no real concept as to what that role should be. There was also no debate as to how Islamic precepts should be interpreted and implemented in contemporary conditions. In fact, for the overwhelming majority of the population, Islam was still primarily understood (and observed) in terms of tradition and symbol.

Post-Soviet Islam

When the Central Asian states gained independence at the end of 1991 there was much speculation, within the region and abroad, as to the possible impact of the 'Islamic factor' on politics and society. The outbreak of civil strife in Tajikistan in 1992 seemed to many to be proof positive that a wave of rampant 'Islamic fundamentalism' had been unleashed in the region. The opposing Tajik factions were described as 'Islamists' and 'neo-communists', and the conflict was depicted in terms of a religious war. As the situation unfolded, however, a more complex picture emerged. Islam was undoubtedly a factor, but by no means the sole cause of the conflict. Rather, it was an aggravating feature in the struggle for national supremacy that broke out between the different regional groupings as soon as Moscow's grip weakened. Yet despite fears of an over-spill effect, the experience of Tajikistan has not, to date, been repeated in the other states.⁹

Nevertheless, the theory that the 'Islamic factor' is the key to the politics of Central Asia is still widely held. However, any serious debate of the issue is greatly impeded by the fact that very little concrete information is available. In the few instances where field research has been carried out, it has been based on relatively small samples. There are huge regional variations in the historical experience of Islam, as well as in contemporary socio-economic

indicators (for example, levels of urbanisation, demographic increase, educational standards, geographic mobility and ethnic heterogeneity).

To complicate matters further, researchers who have worked in the same area, at approximately the same time, often come to very different conclusions. Given these problems it is virtually impossible to gain a comprehensive overview of the situation. Nevertheless some common trends can be identified, though they vary in scope and intensity from state to state, and also from area to area within a single state. They represent an evolution of the tendencies that emerged in the 1980s, but in a more intense and segmented form. They fall into three main categories; these can be described as 'traditional' Islam, 'government-sponsored' Islam and 'radical' Islam.

Traditional Islam

The term 'traditional' Islam is used here to describe the conservative, rather passive attitude to religion that continues to characterise the outlook of the great majority of Central Asian Muslims. As most observers would agree (including fellow Muslims from abroad), Islam here is still perceived more as an ethnic definition than as a religious allegiance. There is a strong sense of obligation 'to maintain the traditions of our forefathers'. This may be expressed in a variety of ways, encompassing different degrees of religious observance. For a few, it involves a strict performance of the prescribed rituals, but most tend to affirm their Islamic identity in a more cursory, symbolic fashion. Moreover, there is still great attachment to popular practices which, though understood as being Islamic, are contrary to orthodox teachings. Yet whatever the level or form of active participation in religion, the emphasis tends to be on preserving continuity rather than searching for enlightenment, or for a deeper understanding of the faith.

This situation may be changing, albeit slowly. In the immediate aftermath of independence there was a great upsurge of enthusiasm for mosque construction. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, there were only 34 mosques open for worship in 1987, but about 1,000 in 1994; in Uzbekistan, in the same period, the number rose from 87 to 3,000.¹⁰ The same phenomenon was to be observed in the other Central Asian states. Moreover, many Muslim schools and madrassas were opened and courses were provided for children and adults in the study of Arabic, the Quran, and related religious topics.

The physical closeness of places of worship encouraged people to attend services on a regular basis, and in the early 1990s mosque congregations grew rapidly. By about 1994, however, the novelty was beginning to wear off and a marked drop in attendance was to be observed throughout the region. Since then there appears to have been a gradual recovery, particularly in the south (notably the Ferghana Valley and southern Kazakhstan). Some researchers claim that this is happening mainly in villages, among males in the 17- to 25-year-old age group. Others insist that it is more typical of traders and businessmen in urban areas, i.e. the emerging entrepreneurial class.

University students are also said to be showing an interest in the faith. There are no corroborated statistics available on this trend, so it is impossible to judge how strong or how widespread it is, but that there is some shift in this direction seems to be beyond dispute.

Government-sponsored Islam

'Government-sponsored' Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia is a continuation of the attempt to coopt religion to serve the needs of the state that marked official policies towards Islam in the late 1980s. Today, the Constitutions of all the Central Asian countries enshrine the principle of the division of religion and state. Yet throughout the region Islam has been elevated to a status akin to that of a state ideology. This seems to have been prompted by the conviction that unless urgent action was taken to fill the ideological vacuum left by the discrediting of Marxism–Leninism (which possibly had more support in Central Asia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union), anarchy would follow. Consequently, in all the Central Asian states a campaign was immediately set in motion to emphasise the role of Islam as an integral component of the national heritage, and likewise of the ethical foundation of the state. This message was conveyed through the teachings of Muslim clerics, as well as through the pronouncements of senior political figures and editorial or documentary features in the mass media. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan this dual ethical–national significance was made explicit when the Presidents swore their respective oaths of office on both the Constitution and the Quran.

On a personal level, the heads of state (all former Communist Party members who came to power under Soviet rule) have been at pains to establish Muslim credentials. This has included fulfilling at least the 'lesser' pilgrimage (*umrah*) to Mecca. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan at first eschewed such open endorsement of Islam, both in private and in public. However, he too gradually began to adopt an overtly pro-Islamic stance. One indication of this was the inscription on the imposing new mosque in Almaty (former capital of Kazakhstan) proclaiming that the construction was undertaken 'on the initiative, and with the personal support of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan'. More forthrightly still, in an interview in 1999 he explained, 'We are Sunni Muslims and must follow this path'. As one Kazakh commentator pointed out, when the head of state makes such a pronouncement it takes on the force of a political directive – a violation of the principle of freedom of conscience that is guaranteed in the Constitution.¹¹

Since independence, new laws on religion and on religious associations have been passed in the Central Asian states. The law adopted in Uzbekistan in 1998 is regarded as the most restrictive. However, the draft amendments under consideration in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan propose measures that are almost equally severe. Political parties of a religious orientation are

proscribed everywhere except in Tajikistan, where in mid-1999, in the run-up to parliamentary elections, the Islamic Rebirth Party, outlawed in 1993, was again legalised. In all five states religious communities must be officially registered by the authorities. If not, they are likely to be prosecuted, and to suffer personal harassment as well as the confiscation or destruction of community property.¹²

The form of Islam favoured by the Central Asian governments of today is based on the teachings of orthodox Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence. However, the sphere of application is strictly limited. There is as yet little question of introducing elements of shari'a (Muslim canon law) into the legal framework of these states. The main concern, at government level, is to promote 'good' Islam (beneficial to the development of the state) and to banish 'bad' Islam (a threat to stability). To underline this last point frequent reference is made to Tajikistan and Afghanistan where the spread of 'bad' Islam brought misery and destruction.

Yet there is no public debate in any of the Central Asian countries as to where, and on what basis, the dividing line should be drawn between the acceptable and the unacceptable. Thus, men who grow beards (a traditional Muslim sign of piety) are regarded with suspicion, particularly in Uzbekistan (where they run the risk of summary arrest). Why some such manifestations, which are in keeping with orthodox Muslim practice, should be labelled 'extremist', while other aspects of Islamic behaviour should be encouraged, is not discussed. In Uzbekistan, it is President Karimov who has taken the lead in defining Islam, thus subsuming the role of religious authority. Through his writings and public pronouncements, as well as his support for selected cultural-religious institutions and projects, he plays an active role in promoting 'official' Islam. The main thrust of this approach is the re-introduction of fundamental values of the faith, while modernising the practical implementation of specific precepts.¹³ The registration test for clerics includes questions on his publications. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan there is, superficially, more scope for public discussion of Islamic issues. However media outlets in these states are governed by strong censorship (formal and informal), which ensures that such reference as there is to these matters will stay within the bounds of 'acceptable' interpretations of Islam.

The institutional control of Islamic activities in present-day Central Asia largely follows the Soviet model. However, whereas under Soviet rule there had been a unified, overarching administration for all the Muslims of the region (i.e. the Muslim Spiritual Directorate of Central Asia and Kazakhstan), separate national administrations, each headed by a Mufti, were established in the early 1990s.¹⁴ The Muftiat is responsible for administering Muslim affairs within the state and maintaining formal contacts with Muslims abroad. The work of the Muftiat is closely monitored by a Committee or Council for Religious Affairs, a body that serves as the interface between the government and the religious communities (yet another Soviet-era survival). The interests of Muslims as well as adherents of the other 'established' faiths

– notably Orthodox Christianity and Judaism – are officially represented in this body. Followers of ‘non-traditional’ faiths, such as Baha’is, Pentecostals and Jehovah’s Witnesses, are regarded with suspicion and given little opportunity for official representation. In Turkmenistan, the Muftiat and the Committee have virtually merged into a single entity, as the Chairman of the latter body is the Deputy Mufti, while the Mufti is Deputy Chairman of the Committee.

The Muftiat is responsible, amongst a number of other functions, for the formal examination and registration of Muslim clerics. Unregistered preachers are liable to criminal prosecution. The ostensible aim of registration is to disbar unqualified individuals from holding religious posts. This is indeed a serious issue. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, it was estimated that a third of all those who applied for registration in 1999 lacked the most basic level of religious training. At the same time, however, registration also enables the state authorities to keep a close check on the ideological orientation of the religious establishment. Clerics who hold views that do not conform to the official line, or who are felt to be lacking in loyalty to the government, can be excluded from the system.

The most marked example of government control over the Muslim establishment is in Uzbekistan. The last Mufti of the Soviet era, Muhammad Sadyk, who initially enjoyed wide popular support, was forced from office in the wake of accusations of ‘Wahhabi’ sympathies, as well as of financial improprieties.¹⁵ Since then, the official Muslim hierarchy has been relegated to a subordinate role, giving unquestioning support to government policies. Elsewhere in the region state control of the religious establishment is well below the Uzbek level, but nevertheless it has increased noticeably in recent years. In Kazakhstan, for example, in June 2000 President Nazarbayev played an influential, albeit indirect, role in the choice of the new Mufti.¹⁶ In some circles in Kazakhstan, as also in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, there are signs that the re-linking of religious and secular authority is coming to be regarded as an acceptable arrangement.¹⁷ Only Kyrgyzstan has, to date, shown a fairly consistent commitment to maintaining the independence of the religious establishment.¹⁸

Radical Islam

The third trend in Central Asian Islam, here categorised as ‘radical’, embraces a loose grouping of activists who want to purge Islam of the distortions that have been introduced over time. They are collectively referred to as ‘Wahhabis’, a term that today, as during the Soviet era, is a generic expression of abuse rather than a literal description of religious affiliation (a usage that has incensed Saudi visitors, who try to explain that the Wahhabis are the respected, dominant sect in their country). The post-Soviet purging of radical elements from the state-controlled Muslim bodies (especially in Uzbekistan) broke the tacit alliance that existed at the end of the Soviet

period between the radicals and the official religious hierarchy. This left the former in a very vulnerable position. They reacted by adopting a stance that was aggressively antagonistic, railing against both debased folk interpretations of Islam and the compromised government-sponsored interpretation. Meanwhile the official hierarchy was implacably ranged against the radicals. By contrast, the traditionalists were regarded as allies. Thus, in the early 1990s, there was a tactical realignment amongst the Muslims, with the traditionalists and the representatives of government institutions reaching a degree of accommodation, united by their opposition to the radicals.

It is impossible to set a figure either to the number of individuals or to the number of separate groups who espouse radical sympathies. It is equally impossible to gauge how much popular support they enjoy, but to the extent that publicly expressed opinions can be trusted, the prevalent attitude towards them seems to be extremely negative. Names of some of these groups appear in the press from time to time, but with almost no background information. Most seem to be relatively new (scarcely any are mentioned in sources prior to 1994). However, where it is possible to trace the biographies of the leaders of these groups, and likewise the genealogy of their ideas, it is obvious that they emanate from Soviet-era revivalist circles. The great majority of them are Uzbeks. In the 1990s many fled the country and began to operate from bases in Afghanistan and, allegedly, Tajikistan (though the present Tajik authorities firmly reject this accusation). They are active also in southern Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan, where they are said to find support mainly among the Uzbek minorities found in these areas.¹⁹ There are no reports of unregistered Islamic movements in Turkmenistan, which could mean either that they do not exist or that they are suppressed more effectively than elsewhere.

The two groups that are currently mentioned most frequently are the *Hezb-i Tahrir* (transliterated in various forms and translated as either Liberation or Correction Party), and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.²⁰ The former is an international organisation established in 1952/53 in Jerusalem;²¹ it is now active in the Russian Federation and other parts of the CIS. The latter is a local group, based predominantly in the Ferghana Valley (eastern Uzbekistan and bordering regions of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). It is impossible, given the dearth of reliable information, to establish the degree to which they are linked. Initially, they seem to have been quite separate organisations, but there were rumours by the end of the 1990s that some degree of rapprochement had taken place. *Hezb-i Tahrir* seems to be the larger group; such evidence as there is (mostly anecdotal) suggests that it has a regional membership of several thousand (at a rough estimate, around 8,000–10,000). It also appears to have a fairly strong, cell-based organisational structure, an energetic recruitment policy, and a strategic training programme. Literature produced by *Hezb-i Tahrir* is circulated covertly (though how wide a section of the population it reaches is a moot point).²² It is not known how many Muslims from abroad are directly engaged in the activities of *Hezb-i Tahrir* in Central

Asia; rumour suggests that they are few in number, and more likely to be of Pakistani than Arab origin.

The aims and objectives of these two groups are vague. They believe that society – and particularly the government and the government-sponsored Muslim administration – is spiritually bankrupt and ignorant of true Islam. This state of decadence can only be reversed by a full and genuine return to Muslim values, within the framework of an Islamic state modelled on the Caliphate of early Islam (though whether this is a distant vision for the future or an immediate, practical goal is not clear). This has led to accusations that they are plotting to overthrow by force the government and the constitutional system of the country. The evidence that has been produced on this point is ambiguous. Some of the supposedly incriminating documents, especially of Hezb-i Tahrir, indicate non-violent advocacy of an Islamic system; arguably, this falls within the constitutionally permitted limits of freedom of expression in each of the Central Asian states. A less ambiguous violation of the law is the fiercely anti-Jewish rhetoric used by some members of this group;²³ this amounts to incitement to inter-ethnic conflict, which is expressly prohibited.

One of the chief difficulties in assessing current events is that statements from official sources, likewise reports in the mass media, are based on a prejudgement of the situation. The very fact that the so-called ‘Wahhabis’ disapprove of government policies is sufficient to condemn them in the eyes of many. Human rights organisations (Uzbek and international) which have been monitoring developments in the region for some years record that there have been repeated waves of mass arrests in Uzbekistan since 1992. There have also been several reports of assault, of torture of those in custody, and of the unexplained disappearances of Muslim clerics, among them the imams (religious leaders) of some of the major mosques in Tashkent and other cities.²⁴

Terrorism and repression

The main geographic centre of activity has been Namangan, a densely populated Uzbek province in the Ferghana valley with a reputation, even during the Soviet period, for being a bastion of Islam. During the presidential elections of 1991 several peaceful demonstrations were held here calling for the establishment of an Islamic state. A party of Islamic activists called Adolat (Justice) was created that same year, chiefly (it was claimed) with the aim of combating crime. The party received some support from the authorities at this time and there were reports that President Karimov himself was not unsympathetic to their views. Within a few months, however, the main ringleaders had been arrested and put on trial. Most were given long jail sentences.

In 1996 and 1998 there were renewed rounds of arrests in Namangan (well over a hundred cases have been documented). These followed the murders of

police officers and a senior administrator. Namangan is on one of the main transit routes for the narcotics trade from Afghanistan and it is not inconceivable that these crimes were the work of drug traffickers. However, many of those who were detained and subsequently punished were leading members of mosques and religious organisations. Relatives, male and female, of Muslim activists were also arrested. Some of the evidence used to convict the prisoners (narcotics, weapons, illegal literature, etc.) was, according to human rights observers, planted on them by the security forces. There were multiple arrests in other parts of Uzbekistan during these years, but nowhere on such a scale as in Namangan.

On 16 February 1999 there was an attempt on the life of President Karimov in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Within hours of the incident 'Islamic fundamentalists' were being blamed for the outrage. This triggered a renewed onslaught on Muslims who were perceived to be over-zealous in their pious devotions. This time, however, accusations of plotting to kill the President were also levelled at the leaders, now living in exile abroad, of Erk (Freedom) and Birlik (Unity), opposition parties espousing democratic platforms that were founded in the late 1980s. There were many puzzling aspects to the February episode. Official explanations, including a bizarre documentary film of the incident made in Tashkent (presumably with the intention of justifying the actions of the Uzbek government) only increased suspicions that much was being concealed.²⁵ The ensuing show-trials further heightened this impression.

The possibility that the terrorists who carried out the attack were fired by a desire to establish an Islamic state in Uzbekistan should not be ruled out. However, on the basis of the evidence presented so far this does not seem to be a wholly convincing explanation. Moreover, whoever the perpetrators were, the incident was used as an excuse to conduct a witch-hunt against all shades of dissident opinion. According to reports from numerous sources 'tens of thousands of people' were arrested. It is difficult to verify this estimate, but certainly the fear of reprisals caused many Uzbeks to flee across the border into neighbouring states. In private, some Central Asians admitted that such ruthless repression was forging a militant opposition and leading to the very instability that everyone feared. However, in public, the governments of the other Central Asian states supported the Uzbek government and in some cases extradited suspects.

Violent incidents continued to proliferate. The most serious clash to date occurred in August 1999, when armed fighters from Afghanistan crossed into Kyrgyzstan with the aim, according to official sources, of invading Uzbekistan 'in order to establish an Islamic state'. Estimates of the size of this troop vary greatly, but it seems likely to have numbered some 500 men. When the guerrillas reached the border they found Uzbek troops blocking their route; thereupon they retreated into the Kyrgyz mountains, taking with them a number of hostages (including four Japanese geologists). The Kyrgyz army was unable to dislodge them for over two months. The Uzbek govern-

ment, meanwhile, took a unilateral decision to bomb the guerrillas' suspected stronghold. The aircraft misjudged their target and innocent Kyrgyz villagers were killed. Tajik villages were also bombed. The hostages were eventually released in October 1999, reputedly after the Japanese government had paid a large ransom. There were similar armed clashes in the same area in mid-2000, though on a smaller scale. Minor insurgencies elsewhere in Uzbekistan have been reported from time to time in the press.

The August 1999 insurgency was a new departure, an escalation from isolated acts of terrorism to a sustained, relatively large-scale operation. There is no information as to why such an attack was launched at precisely this juncture. Ostensibly, the action was prompted by the Tajik government's decision to expel some 700–1,000 Uzbek guerrillas, allegedly members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, from bases that they had established in Tajikistan. It may, too, have been retaliation for the repression that followed the February bombing in Tashkent. The possibility that field commanders and/or foreign sponsors (international terrorist organisations?) judged that the men had reached a sufficient level of combat readiness for it to be feasible to mount such an operation should also not be excluded.

By some accounts the combatants were armed with sophisticated modern weapons. However, it is far from clear whether they were indeed seeking to establish an Islamic state, or whether they were local mafia barons fighting for control of lucrative narcotic-trafficking routes – or whether these motives were intertwined. There may also have been an element of local nationalism, since there were reports that some of the insurgents carried banners calling for a restoration of the Khanate of Kokand.²⁶ International opinion, at least at government level, was increasingly convinced that these militants represented a genuine threat to regional and possibly global security. Accordingly, in September 2000 the US State Department placed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan on the list of international terrorist organisations to which US citizens are forbidden to give assistance, and whose members are denied entry to the USA.

External influences

It has often been suggested that the Islamic revival in the Central Asian states is inspired and supported by Muslims in other countries. There is an element of truth in this. Some of the finance for the building of mosques and madrassas, and for the restoration of Islamic monuments, has come from abroad, from private sources as well as from government funds. Students from Central Asia have gone in quite large numbers (a few hundred a year) to study in countries such as Turkey, Egypt and Pakistan. Since independence many thousands of Central Asians have performed the pilgrimage to Mecca, some already two or three times. In the early 1990s the travel expenses of several thousand pilgrims were covered by the Saudi monarch, and again in 1999. All the Central Asian states have now joined the

Organisation of the Islamic Conference, hence there are also institutional links with the Muslim world.

The main foreign influence, however, has come from missionaries. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union they flocked to Central Asia from many parts of the Muslim world to preach and to open schools. At first they were warmly welcomed. Gradually, though, the mood in the region began to change. On the one hand the 'traditionalists' – the mass of ordinary believers – objected to being told that some of their most respected customs (for example, those connected with burials) were not authentic and should be replaced by more orthodox procedures. On the other, the state authorities also became uneasy that the missionaries were encouraging independent Islamic thought. Uzbekistan was the first to impose restrictions on Muslim missionaries from abroad. In 1992–93 some 50 Saudi preachers were expelled. Other expulsions followed and since then the activities of foreign Muslims have been very carefully monitored. A similar tendency is to be observed in the other states.

Foreign commentators initially expected that Iran would play the lead role in the re-Islamicisation of Central Asia. In fact, Iranian clerics have been conspicuous largely by their absence. After the collapse of the Soviet Union delegations from Iran began to visit the Central Asian states and to acquire first-hand familiarity with the region. They soon realised that an Islamic revolution along the lines of the Iranian model was not a realistic prospect; this was partly because of the very low level of knowledge of Islam among the population at large but also, and very importantly, because of the lack of trained, independent-minded *ulema* (Muslim scholars). The fact that Iranians represent the Shi'a tradition also placed them at a disadvantage. By contrast, Sunni Muslim missionaries were active from the first years of independence. Turkish Muslims played the most prominent role. They were more numerous than any other ethnic group. For example, according to official statistics, in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 they numbered 55 – a third of all foreign Muslim missionaries in the country; missionaries from Pakistan, the second largest group, accounted for less than 40.²⁷

The great majority of the Turkish missionaries are Nurcus, followers of Bediüzzaman Said Nursî (1876–1960) and of his disciple Fethulla Gülen. The Nurcus opened hundreds of schools and commercial enterprises in all the Central Asian states. They appeared to be propagating a moderate, modernised version of Islam. Their teaching programmes concentrated on scientific subjects and technical skills. However, on a more informal level, through extra-curricula contacts and the distribution of translations into the local languages of the *Risale-i Nur* (The Epistle of Light), the corpus of teachings of Said Nursî, they seem to have been disseminating a more radical message. There are increasing concerns that their ultimate political project is the creation of an Islamic state. They are also accused by some of having a pan-Turkic agenda. Because of such suspicions their newspaper *Zaman* (Time) was banned in Uzbekistan in 1994; several teachers were

expelled at about the same time. In other Central Asian states a similar sense of unease is emerging regarding the activities of this group and consequently their work is now being more closely monitored.²⁸

Another way in which Turkish influence has been significant is in the revival of Sufism. Great Sufi orders such as the Naqshbandiya and Qadiriya were influential in Central Asia in the past, but even before the Soviet era they had for the most part been reduced to the level of 'ishanism' (a syncretic, popular form of mysticism, centred on local, often hereditary, spiritual leaders). In the twentieth century this form of worship continued to attract adherents, but was far removed from the esoteric doctrines and practices of classical Sufism. In the early 1990s adepts from Turkey began to re-introduce Sufism to the region, focusing their efforts mainly on Uzbekistan and southern Kazakhstan. Initially, this was welcomed by the secular authorities in Uzbekistan, who professed admiration for Sufi philosophy. An indication of official approval was that when President Karimov made his first post-independence visit to Turkey, Mukhtarkhan Abdullayev, a self-avowed Sufi, was included in his entourage; Abdullayev, who was subsequently appointed Mufti (1993–97), was formally inducted into the Naqshbandi order on this occasion.²⁹ Later, however, the Uzbek government's attitude towards Sufism changed. It continued to be revered as a historical and cultural phenomenon, but attempts to revive Sufi brotherhoods were firmly repressed; the movement has now been driven underground.

Fears that foreign Muslims were fomenting religious extremism and militancy in Central Asia continued to grow. The enthusiasm for sending students to Islamic institutions in Turkey, Egypt and other Muslim countries was tempered with concerns that, once abroad, they would be exposed to 'radical' ideas. The Uzbek authorities were the first to react to this perceived threat, going so far as to accuse Turkish Islamists of using these students as a fifth column. It was alleged that while in Turkey several of these students underwent 'terrorist training'. On their return home, so it was claimed, they set up cells of activists in villages and towns. Later, other governments in the region also became suspicious of the education offered by foreign Muslims. In October 2000 President Nazarbayev ordered the recall of Kazakh students studying in Islamic institutions abroad.³⁰ Tajik President Rahmonov followed suit in March 2001.

President Karimov has also accused international Islamic organisations of perpetrating terrorist acts in Central Asia. In the aftermath of the Tashkent bombing in February 1999 he claimed that Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed Shi'a movement, had been involved in the incident. Likewise, it is frequently alleged that Osama Bin Laden is funding militant operations in the region. How far any of these claims can be substantiated is open to question, since as yet little concrete evidence has been produced. However, the rhetoric used by the Islamist groups that are operating in Central Asia strongly resembles that of radical Islamist groups elsewhere. In similar vein, they reject the authority of the present ruling elites, both governmental and religious,

characterising them as 'religious hypocrites' (*munafiqeen*) and 'unbelievers' (*kafireen*), living in ignorance of Islam (*jahiliyya*). Likewise, they take refuge in an idealised, ahistoric vision of early Islam, seeing this as a 'golden age' which must be recreated in order to achieve the 'good society'. Thus they make natural partners, sharing common understandings and goals. It is impossible to judge, from the information available, the extent to which these links are already in place, but the potential for a joining of forces to wage a 'righteous struggle' (jihad) undoubtedly exists.

Evaluating the 'Islamic threat'

A factor which must be taken into account in any assessment of the vitality of Islamic movements in post-Soviet Central Asia is the extent to which there is a competition of ideas and influences. These states are no longer as isolated as they once were. Improved communications and information technologies, as well as opportunities to work and study in other countries, are broadening horizons, particularly for the younger generation. Moreover, a variety of faiths and denominations is now represented in the region. Apart from Muslim organisations there are also many dynamic Christian missions, several of which are financially well-endowed.³¹ New faiths such as Hare Krishnaism, Scientology and the cults of various Indian gurus are also attracting followers. At popular level and at government level, the activities of such groups are often greeted with suspicion since they encourage apostasy, a 'crime' that is regarded by many as a betrayal of the community and a threat to the integrity of the nation. Nevertheless, despite such pressures, ethnic Central Asians, particularly Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, are converting to these sects in substantial numbers. Thus there is today a somewhat greater degree of religious heterogeneity than was the case a decade ago.

Yet this diversity is still relatively small scale. The dominant influence remains Islam, both as a belief system and a cultural identity. Moreover, as discussed above, Islam, in various guises, is playing an increasingly important role in society. This process of 're-Islamicisation' is taking place against a backdrop of traumatic dislocation. Under Soviet rule, the level of socio-economic development here was not far below that of many industrialised countries. In recent years, however, large sections of the population have seen standards of living plummet. There is now widespread poverty and lack of access to basic social services; indicators of human development are approaching those of the poorest countries in the world. Corruption has spiralled out of control. The high hopes of the first years of independence have, for many, not been fulfilled. This has created a 'blow-back' of disappointment and frustration. In these conditions it is not surprising that people turn to religion for guidance, certainty and above all, hope for a better future. Much of the appeal of the radical Islamists lies in the fact that they offer simple (and simplistic) explanations and remedies for the ills of society.

The commentary on this phenomenon generally focuses on security implications. Might radical Islam be a threat to stability? Have particular governments exaggerated, or alternatively underestimated, the seriousness of the situation? Is there a potential 'arc of conflict' from China to the Black Sea? Such questions concentrate attention on individual events, but the lack of reliable information makes it impossible to gauge the importance of such incidents with any degree of assurance. Meanwhile, there is little attempt to identify underlying trends. Yet it is these trends that are shaping the future. Arguably, the most significant development of the 1990s in Central Asia was the intensifying politicisation of Islam. This was not solely owing to the activities of radical groups: governments too, especially that of Uzbekistan, engaged in the contestation of Islamic legitimacy. The discourse of opposition was likewise cast in doctrinal terms. Consequently, virtually all forms of political disaffection are now subsumed under the umbrella of 'Islamic extremism'. This has placed Islam in the centre of the political arena. It might have been supposed that this would lead to a dilution of the purely religious content of the agenda. On the contrary, doctrinal legitimacy appears to be assuming an ever more powerful role.

The internal dynamics of the situation point to the likelihood of increasing instability, with an escalation of conflict between government and (Islamist) opposition forces. It is difficult to see how this might be averted. Government resort to the tactics of war is mirrored by the growing militarisation of the opposition. This creates an atmosphere of fear, but also of anger; it creates victims, but also martyrs. This cycle of violence will surely lead to a hardening of attitudes on both sides. A more productive approach, it might be supposed, would be dialogue, peace-building and ultimately the inclusion of dissident voices in government. This is the strategy that is favoured by concerned international observers. However, attempts at power-sharing have had little success elsewhere in the Islamic world and would probably not succeed here. This is, after all, not simply a power struggle: basic principles of belief are at issue, hence there is little room for compromise.

Conflict is not an inevitable outcome. There are factors that might, in the longer term, influence the course of events in a constructive way. Economic recovery would undoubtedly help to alleviate some of the tensions. However this cannot happen overnight. Moreover, it will certainly not be a miracle panacea. It could well lead to greater inequalities in standards of living, greater societal fragmentation; this would surely deepen the crisis. Likewise, political liberalisation might provide a peaceful outlet for the expression of dissident views, yet the cultural and social traditions of the region, as shaped by both Soviet and pre-Soviet experiences, reveal strongly authoritarian, repressive tendencies. Even the Central Asians who currently regard themselves as democrats show little understanding of the principles of liberal democracy. Thus, despite the fact that much lip service is paid to the need for democratisation, in reality, there seems little hope that such a transformation will be achieved in the near future.

A benign momentum might possibly be fostered by the training that is being provided through international aid and development programmes. Such schemes do make a positive contribution to the creation of more open, tolerant societies. Yet they cannot be expected to make a significant impact in the near future. These programmes are mostly small in scope, duration and catchment area. Thus, they will take some considerable time to achieve critical mass. It will also take time for graduates of such schemes to reach positions of sufficient seniority to enable them to influence policy-making. Another factor that could eventually contribute to regional stability and recovery is the support provided by international organisations for projects on conflict prevention and conflict resolution. However, such undertakings tend to be poorly funded and are often hampered by problems on the ground (such as obstructive bureaucrats). Moreover, they are not always well designed, being based on scant knowledge of local conditions, and consequently, they have proved to be of limited value.

Given such constraints, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, at least in the short term, the Central Asian states will continue to experience severe societal stress. Economic collapse is triggering a process of de-modernisation and de-skilling, especially in rural areas (where the great majority of the indigenous population still lives). It is not surprising that in these circumstances people increasingly seek the comfort and reassurance of religious faith. The great majority of the population continues to espouse a passive, traditionalist approach to Islam. On the whole it accepts the authority and guidance of the official religious hierarchy. Even educated Central Asians tend to avoid intellectual engagement with religious issues, revealing little curiosity about modern debates on Islam. The writings of contemporary Muslim thinkers are unknown to all but a very few scholars.

It must be stressed that the radical Islamists are still very much a minority, both numerically and in terms of geographic spread. Since the mid-1990s they have been fanning out from their original base in eastern Uzbekistan (Ferghana Valley) and now have a sizeable presence in the adjacent regions of the other four states. This process may well continue, but it will nevertheless be difficult to win over a substantial mass of the population. The militant element that espouses violence – and by no means all radical Islamists are militant – involves even smaller numbers of individuals (probably hundreds rather than thousands), operating seasonally within a fairly narrow corridor from the Afghan border to eastern Uzbekistan. Doubtless they could expand their activities, especially if funded by drug trafficking and given logistical and ideological support from extremist movements in other parts of the Islamic world. However, they would find a formidable foe in the armed forces of Uzbekistan and the other Central Asian states. There would be no easy victories for the insurgents and although the incidence of violence might increase, it is unlikely that the present balance of power would be significantly altered in the foreseeable future.

Anti-terrorism coalitions

From the mid-1990s onwards, there has been an attempt on the part of the governments of the Central Asian states to develop a regional response to the threat – real or imagined – of terrorism inspired by ‘religious extremism’ (the current euphemism for radical Islam or ‘Islamic fundamentalism’).³² This grew out of efforts to foster regional economic cooperation. The first step was the creation, in 1993, of the Central Asian Union, comprising Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and, slightly later, Kyrgyzstan. A tripartite pact on military cooperation was signed in February 1994; in 1996 the decision was taken to form a joint Central Asian peacekeeping battalion (*Tsentrazbat*), to operate under the aegis of the UN. However, these measures were symbolic gestures rather than part of a coherent strategy. It was only at the end of the 1990s that the Central Asian Union (now augmented by the membership of Tajikistan and renamed the Central Asian Economic Community) placed security concerns high on its agenda. In April 2000, at a summit meeting in Tashkent, a 100-year treaty was signed between the four member states on joint efforts to combat terrorism, extremism, transnational organised crime and other common security threats. These issues were again highlighted at the meeting of the heads of state held in Almaty on 5 January 2001. Particular emphasis was placed on the dangers of ‘religious extremism’. This item remained a priority for the group after its subsequent transformation into the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation in February 2002. No specific measures were taken to mount joint security operations, but there was an increase in bilateral cooperation in this field.

A second regional grouping that highlighted growing security concerns was the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This body developed out of efforts to resolve outstanding issues of border demarcation. China shares long frontiers with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan; in the 1990s several stretches of these borders were either not formally demarcated, or were regarded as disputed territory (a legacy of the ‘unfair treaties’ of the nineteenth century between the Tsarist empire and China). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, China initiated moves to settle these problems through bilateral and multilateral negotiations. One stage of this process was the meeting of the five heads of state in Shanghai, on 26 April 1996, to sign the ‘Treaty on Deepening Military Trust in Border Regions’. Thereafter, the ‘Shanghai Five’ gathered at regular intervals for meetings at Presidential and as well as Ministerial level.

The focus of this body evolved to include broader areas of mutual interest and concern. This was reflected at the fourth summit meeting, held on 25 August 1999 in Bishkek, where a joint declaration was signed on regional security and cooperation, with particular emphasis on practical cooperation to combat international terrorism, narcotics and arms trafficking, illegal immigration and other transnational criminal activities. For all five states these were matters that had a direct impact on domestic stability. On

international issues a more political tone became apparent, with overt emphasis on opposition to some US policies. Thus at the summit meeting of heads of state held on 5 July 2000 in Dushanbe, the group collectively declared its support for Beijing's 'One China' policy, and also for Moscow's actions in Chechnya. UN efforts for a political settlement of the Afghan conflict were likewise endorsed. Uzbek President Karimov, who was present at this meeting, expressed the view that the security interests of his country coincided with those of the 'Five' and he welcomed the contribution of Russia and China to guaranteeing security in Central Asia.

The move from informal forum to formal regional organisation was accomplished in 2001, with the signature of 'The Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation' at the sixth summit meeting of the group, held in Shanghai on 14 June. Uzbekistan's application for membership of the organisation was approved, and President Karimov too became a signatory to the Declaration.³³ The declared aims of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) included the creation of 'a new international and political order featuring democracy, justness and rationality'. The importance accorded to regional security was underlined by a separate Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, also signed by the six heads of state during the June summit meeting. This document provided a legal framework for increased regional cooperation in police operations and intelligence gathering. It was confirmed that an anti-terrorism centre (under discussion since the previous summit meeting) would be created in Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan).

Another security organisation that was established at this time was the CIS Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, which officially came into being on 1 August 2001.³⁴ This body was linked to the CIS Joint Programme to Combat International Terrorism and Extremism. At full strength it was expected to consist of a battalion each from Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Like the SCO anti-terrorist centre, this was to be based in Bishkek. Thus, by the summer of 2001 three of the Central Asian states had joined two separate, but overlapping, regional security organisations. How these two bodies were to interact, either on a political or on an operational level, was not clear.

The moves to institutionalise regional efforts to combat terrorism were prompted by the deteriorating security environment. The civil war in Tajikistan (1992–97) had not triggered the anticipated 'domino effect' of conflict throughout Central Asia, but it did heighten the predisposition to lawlessness and violence. The rise to power of the ultra-conservative, Pashtun-dominated Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan in the mid-1990s added to the volatility of the situation. Radical Muslims from the Central Asian states (especially Uzbekistan and Tajikistan), whether supporters of violent struggle or not, looked to Afghanistan for support and refuge. The country was also a magnet for Islamic militants from many other parts of the world, and in particular became host to a large contingent of supporters of the Arab-led

al-Qaida network. The spread of extremist tendencies within the region was ascribed by many to these new influences. At the same time the trans-border smuggling of drugs and arms increased dramatically. So too did the flows of refugees, with all the attendant social and economic problems. The Central Asian leaders, dismayed by the lack of attention that was being paid to the Afghan crisis, repeatedly called for renewed international efforts to resolve the conflict. The realisation that they must take the initiative in improving regional security led to increased cooperation. It was at this critical juncture that unforeseen developments in a distant part of the world suddenly impinged on Central Asian affairs.

Impact of September 2001

In September 2001 fears about terrorism were realised with unexpected intensity. By June of that year the Taliban had gained control of large parts of Afghanistan (90 per cent of the territory according to some estimates). The Northern Alliance, the chief opposition force, seemed close to defeat. Then, on 9 September, the leader of the Northern Alliance, Ahmad Shah Masud (an ethnic Tajik), was fatally injured in a suicide bomb attack carried out by two Algerians; he died shortly after. On 11 September, terrorist air attacks were mounted against the USA, causing the deaths of thousands of civilians. It was widely believed that al-Qaida was behind both operations. Meanwhile, the struggle between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance continued. On 12 September, the UN World Food Programme ceased supplying vital food aid to Afghanistan as it could no longer guarantee the safety of its staff. Some assistance was resumed at the end of the month, but by this time many areas had suffered serious hardship. In early October a US-led coalition launched the 'War on Terrorism' and commenced military operations against Taliban and al-Qaida bases in Afghanistan. By the end of November most of the fighting was over, and on 5 December the leaders of the various Afghan factions met in Bonn to sign an agreement whereby an interim administration was created. This was later succeeded by a more representative government which, with UN assistance, was charged with the gigantic task of reconstruction of the country.

In Central Asia there was little discernible popular reaction to these momentous events. One reason for this was the paucity of media coverage, which meant that people had little up-to-date knowledge of developments. Another was anxiety that the region itself would be engulfed in war. This helped to quell potential dissent and to consolidate support for the incumbent leaders, since there was an instinctive belief that internal rivalries and divisions would open the way to internecine strife. The signing of the Bonn agreement initially aroused cautious optimism, especially in official circles. It seemed that the main source of regional instability had been eradicated and there were hopes that peaceful cross-border links would soon be re-established, bringing economic and social advantage to all concerned. Yet it

rapidly became clear that such plans were premature. The new Afghan administration was by no means fully in control of the situation; a regional/factional power struggle was still in progress and the possibility remained that this might spread to one or more of the neighbouring states. Also, drug-smuggling, which had diminished significantly in 2000–01, was again on the rise. Soon optimism was replaced by the general perception that the situation on the ground had not, in fact, changed very greatly.

Nevertheless there were some immediate impacts. The first was a humanitarian crisis, as a million or more refugees fled Afghanistan in the autumn of 2001. Most tried to enter Pakistan or Iran, but tens of thousands headed northwards, to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; some also tried to reach Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. There were fears that, concealed among the legitimate asylum seekers, militant Islamists, terrorists and drug-traffickers would come flooding into these countries. Tajikistan, still scarcely recovered from the civil war, was particularly vulnerable to destabilisation.³⁵ In the event the influx of refugees was not as great as had been anticipated. Rather, traffic was in the opposite direction, as the neighbouring states became transit routes for delivering aid to Afghanistan.

Another impact was the destruction of Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) bases in Afghanistan. Many of the Central Asian guerrillas who were fighting alongside the Taliban and al-Qaida appear to have been killed. There were rumours that Juma Namangani, leader of the IMU, had also been killed. However, a year after his supposed death there was still no confirmation of this, and there was a growing suspicion that he was still alive, though possibly abroad (in Pakistan?).³⁶ Whatever the truth of the matter, the IMU was quiescent throughout 2002.

The third impact was enhanced military cooperation with the USA. The Central Asian leaders were quick to express condolences and confirm their willingness to support the 'War on Terrorism'. This was not an unexpected development, since the USA had for some time been providing military assistance to these countries, on a bilateral basis as well as within the framework of the NATO Partnership for Peace programme, to modernise their armed forces. Tajikistan offered access to airports in Dushanbe and Kulyab, and these were used as transit points. Kazakhstan opened its air space to allied aircraft, while Turkmenistan, mindful of its status as a neutral country, provided facilities for conveying humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. However Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan emerged as the key US partners in the region. The US–Uzbek military relationship was already well established, though previously not greatly publicised. In October 2001 US troops began arriving in Uzbekistan; they were stationed at Khanabad, a former Soviet air base, close to the Afghan border. It was announced that the US military was preparing to spend some \$5 million on refurbishing this base; by mid-2002, it was host to an estimated 1,800 US troops.³⁷ Another base was established in Kyrgyzstan, at Manas, formerly the international civilian airport (close to the capital, Bishkek, and only 300 miles from the Chinese border). Within a

few months just under 2,000 troops, mainly US but also units from other Western allies, were assembled there.

The Uzbek and Kyrgyz governments evidently hoped that their willingness to cooperate with the USA would yield benefits, including greater financial assistance and less criticism of their records on such issues as human rights and corruption. To some extent they were rewarded in this way, but this did not satisfy their expectations. Consequently, by 2002, despite outwardly cordial relations, in private there was palpable frustration and resentment. Among the population at large, too, there were mixed reactions to the US presence. It had brought some local economic benefit through increased trade and employment opportunities, but equally there was anger, especially in Kyrgyzstan, over the way in which the bases seemed to be fuelling corruption by the granting of lucrative contracts to highly placed individuals.³⁸

One further impact of the 'War on Terrorism' in Afghanistan was that it raised questions about the role of the two regional anti-terrorist centres that had been created in mid-2001. More broadly, it threw doubt on the usefulness of the parent organisations, namely the SCO and the CIS. Some analysts, Central Asian and foreign, believed that the physical presence of US troops meant that China and Russia had suffered a definitive defeat in the struggle for regional influence. The size of the US bases, and the significant funds that were invested in refurbishment, seemed to indicate a long-term strategic plan. At the time of writing it was too early to draw firm conclusions on this issue. However, there were already signs that China and Russia, while acquiescing in the US presence in Central Asia, were nevertheless seeking to re-establish their respective positions. For China this was a matter of some urgency, since the establishment of US bases so close to its western border could not but be regarded as a direct security threat. However, in public the reaction was muted. Instead, efforts were made to maintain the relevance of the SCO; working meetings proceeded as before, though the planned anti-terrorist centre in Bishkek remained dormant. Bilateral relations between China and the Central Asian states did not suffer, and arguably were strengthened. Relations between Russia and the Central Asian states also were not, in any discernible measure, adversely affected; it was even possible to detect a slight improvement, prompted by a desire to use Russia to counterbalance US influence. The CIS Rapid Reaction Force, based in Bishkek, continued to conduct joint exercises. No active operations were reported, but in early December 2002 Russia announced plans to establish an air unit at Kant, not far from the US base. At full strength, it was anticipated that more than 700 troops and 20 aircraft would be deployed here.

As this brief account of developments in the immediate aftermath of September 2001 indicates, in Central Asia there was a feeling of anti-climax: at least on the surface, there was comparatively little change. Neither hopes nor fears were realised in any significant degree. Rather there was a heightened sense of anticipation, of suspense even, as people waited to see what

the longer-term effects would be. It was obvious that the Central Asian states were for the present firmly placed within the Western, and more specifically US, orbit, yet in many circles, formal and informal, there seemed to be a perception that this was perhaps only a transient state of affairs. Questions regarding the future political and ideological orientation of the region remained open.

Towards an Islamic state in Central Asia?

In so far as it is at all likely that an Islamic state might be established in Central Asia, this would probably happen, at least in the first instance, in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has already emerged as the epicentre of the struggle for and against radical Islam. Developments here have a pivotal significance for several reasons. One is the country's sheer demographic weight: with over 25 million people, it accounts for nearly half the total population of the region; there are also substantial ethnic Uzbek minorities in the neighbouring states. Another is centrality of location: it shares common borders with Afghanistan and with the other four Central Asian states. A third reason is the symbolic significance of this land in the history of Central Asia. Whatever stance Uzbekistan assumes towards Islam in the coming years will very probably have a crucial impact on the region as a whole. This might take the form of emulation: if Uzbekistan emerges as a strong state, it would act as the core of a regional grouping and its policies would be mirrored in neighbouring states. Equally, if it was weak and unstable, one or more of the other states might deliberately establish distance from Uzbekistan by adopting contrasting policies.

It is generally assumed that the establishment of an Islamic state in Uzbekistan could only come about as a result of a *coup d'état* by groups such as Hezb-i Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. On the surface, the Uzbek government appears to be in the vanguard of the fight to protect secularist values. To this end it is using the full panoply of security, defence and law enforcement organs to suppress the radicals. Yet in reality the ideological contest is far from clear cut. As discussed above, the government – or more specifically, the President – has coopted Islam to help legitimise and consolidate the post-Soviet regime. Consequently, the contest cannot be portrayed in terms of an assault on Islam, but must be presented as 'good' Islam versus 'bad' Islam. Punitive repression alone is not sufficient to convey such a message. It requires a 'hearts and minds' campaign to mobilise public sentiment. This is being orchestrated on many levels, including through mosques, the media and local neighbourhood organisations. As a result of such actions, awareness of Islam as an issue of vital public concern has been greatly enhanced. By assuming a decisive role in the adjudication of belief, the government has taken a significant step towards the formal institution of an established faith. If this trend were to be taken to its logical conclusion it would eventually lead to the declaration of an

Islamic state in Uzbekistan (as happened, in somewhat analogous circumstances, in Pakistan). Thus it would be the ruling elite, having run out of ideological options, that would be responsible for the very outcome that it initially sought to oppose.

Even if this drift towards government-sponsored Islamicisation in Uzbekistan (and to a lesser extent elsewhere in the region) were to be halted, it is already difficult to envisage a return to a secular ideal, with a genuine separation of state and religion. It is clear that Islam has become an active political force. The struggle for 'ownership' of the faith – for control of its interpretation and implementation – has now become part of the broader struggle for domination of the state. The situation is not only volatile but also highly unpredictable. Any number of events – from natural disasters to mass influxes of refugees – could precipitate chain reactions that might accelerate or, alternatively, retard the process. The Western-led campaign against the Taliban and al-Qaida might have acted as a catalyst but in fact, as discussed above, it did not. The Central Asian governments, particularly in Uzbekistan, swiftly adopted yet more repressive measures to combat the supposed threat from 'Islamic fundamentalists'; whether or not as a result of such actions, there were no instances of civil disturbance of any size.

At the same time, however, official attempts to promote the 're-Islamicisation' of Uzbekistan were boosted. This was evidenced not so much by public pronouncements but, more importantly and effectively, by actions, notably the generous funding and encouragement supplied to cultural-religious institutions such as the Islamic University in Tashkent and the al-Bukhari Foundation.³⁹ In their different ways, and reaching out to different circles, these bodies promote the role of Islam in society, albeit in accordance with a particular vision of the faith. Better knowledge of the faith allows the lines of demarcation to be more clearly set. Yet, at the same time, such knowledge heightens sensitivities and critical awareness, as a result of which it might well become more difficult to control the responses of believers. Thus it is that doctrinal orthodoxy and legitimacy rather than armed conflict become the chief site of struggle between the proponents of radical Islam and 'official' Islam. The indications are that, openly or covertly, with or without external help, this contestation of Islam is set to intensify.

Notes

- 1 Turkey's involvement in Central Asia has been well documented. See particularly Idris Bal, *Turkey's Relations with the West and the Turkic Republics: The Rise and Fall of the 'Turkish Model'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). The role of Israel is less well known, but also significant. An excellent study of this topic is the MA Dissertation by C. Boucek, *An Impact Greater than its Size: Israeli Foreign Policy in Central Asia* (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1999). See also J. Abadi, 'Israel's Quest for Normalization with Azerbaijan and the Muslim States of Central Asia', *Journal of Third World Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2

- (Fall 2002), pp. 63–88, reproduced in electronic version, *Turkistan Newsletter*, 7 December 2002 (sota@wanadoo.nl).
- 2 There is considerable terminological confusion over the designation of contemporary trends in Islam. The usage followed here is based on arguments set out in Youssef M. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (revised edn, London and Washington: Pinter, 1997), especially p. 122.
 - 3 Parts of this paper have already appeared in print in different publications, notably in S. Akiner, 'Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Contested Territory', in Andrea Strasser, Siegfried Haas, Gerhard Mangott, Valeria Heuberger (eds), *Zentralasien und Islam: Central Asia and Islam* (Hamburg: Deutsches Orient-Institut, 2002), pp. 73–101, where some of the ideas presented here are developed more fully.
 - 4 A thorough study of the Soviet period is provided by Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union* (London: Hurst and Co., 2000). For a slightly different view, see also S. Akiner, 'Islam, the State and Ethnicity in Central Asia in Historical Perspective', in *Religion, State and Society: the Keston Journal*, vol. 24, nos 2–3, June–September 1996, pp. 91–132.
 - 5 The most prominent figure was Muhammad Hindustani Rustamov, known as Haji Domla (1892–1989). Born in Kokand, he was educated in Bukhara before the Bolshevik revolution; subsequently, he travelled to Afghanistan, India and Mecca before returning to Tajikistan, eventually to end his days in Dushanbe (see further A. Muminov, 'Traditsionnye i sovremennye religiozno-teologicheskie shkoly v Tsentral'noi Azii', in *Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz*, no. 4 (5), 1999, pp. 77–83).
 - 6 See works by Alexandre Bennigsen, Enders Wimbush, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Michael Rywkin. A similar approach was used in Western broadcasts to Central Asia (see further I. Belyayev, "'Islamskie igry" protiv Sovetskogo Soyuza', in *Argumenty 1988* (Moscow: Pol. literary, 1988), pp. 103–27, especially p. 118).
 - 7 These included Muhammad Sadyk to head the Muslim Spiritual Directorate for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Akbar Turajonzade the Tajik branch, Ratbek Nysanbai-uly the Kazakh branch and Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah the Turkmen branch.
 - 8 Muminov, 1999, op. cit.
 - 9 See further S. Akiner, *Tajikistan: Disintegration or Reconciliation?* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2001).
 - 10 D. Trofimov, 'Friday Mosques and their Imams, in the Former Soviet Union', in *Religion, State and Society: the Keston Journal*, vol. 24, nos. 2–3, June–September 1996, pp. 193–219. By 2000, the number of mosques in Uzbekistan was said to have fallen to 1,700. However, all such estimates are approximate and should be treated with caution.
 - 11 K. Togizbaev, in the Almaty-based newspaper *451° po Farengaitu*, 9 July 1999.
 - 12 The Keston Institute, based in Oxford, gives regular coverage of cases of religious persecution in the region (see website: <http://www.keston.org>).
 - 13 President Karimov has not as yet produced a coherent account of his understanding of Islam. His comments are fragmentary and often made in response to particular incidents. In his book *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Curzon, 1997), pp. 85–94, he sketches out his thoughts on 'The revival of spiritual values and national self-awareness'. His short tract *Allah is in*

Our Souls, Our Hearts' (*Oллоh qalbimizda, yuragimizda*) (Ozbekiston, 1999) is more illuminating as to the direction of his thoughts. Also interesting are his efforts to encourage the parallel study of secular subjects and Islam, as for example in the new Islamic University in Tashkent.

- 14 In Tajikistan the Muftiat was replaced by the Council of Ulema in 1996. The chief Muslim official is the Chairman of this body.
- 15 In 1993 he went into voluntary exile. He later returned to Tashkent as a representative of the World Muslim League (Rabita al-Alam al-Islami), but has since kept a very low public profile.
- 16 The former Mufti, Ratbek Nisanbai-uly (1990–2000), who was removed from his post following allegations of corruption and incompetence, had at least received some training in Islamic scholarship. By contrast, the new Mufti, Absattar Derbesaliev, had little formal religious education. After studying Arabic for a few years at the Oriental Institute in Moscow, he followed an academic career in Almaty until his appointment as Counsellor in the Kazakh embassy in Saudi Arabia.
- 17 The idea that the President should combine religious and secular authority has been voiced to the author on several occasions in informal discussions with Muslims in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In Turkmenistan this seems to be official policy, as witnessed by references to the President as 'The Vice-regent on Earth of the One, Great, All-Powerful God' (see, for example, *Neitral'nyy Turkmenistan*, 12 August 2000).
- 18 This appeared to falter in December 1996, when covert government pressure resulted in the ousting of Mufti Kimsanbai-aji Abdurahman uulu (elected in 1993). However, he was later re-instated and it seemed that the incident had been mostly caused by in-fighting among regional and ethnic cliques.
- 19 See, for example, S. Sagnaeva, 'Religiozno-oppozitsionnye gruppy v Kyrgyzstane: Khizb-ut-Takhrir', in *Religiozniy ekstremizm v Tsentral'noi Azii* (Proceedings of a conference organised in Dushanbe on 25 April 2002, by the Mission in Tajikistan of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), pp. 63–71.
- 20 Other groups include the Akromiya (named after their founder, Akrom Yuldashev), also known as the Iimonchilar (Believers) or Khalifatchilar (Caliphate Supporters), the Tawba (Repentance) movement and Islom lashkarlari (Soldiers of Islam).
- 21 The founder was a leading Palestinian, Sheikh Taki al-Din Nabhani (1909–78), who, prior to partition, was a judge in the Shari'a court, Haifa; he later moved to Nablus. The party was banned almost immediately. Originally based in Jordan, it soon attracted members elsewhere in the Muslim world.
- 22 The party's journal *al-Wa'i* (Consciousness), as well as leaflets and books, in Arabic and in Kyrgyz or Uzbek translations, have been circulating in recent years. Several underground printing presses have been discovered. Confiscated titles include *Islom Nizomi* (The Islamic Order), *Hizbut-Tahrir Tushunchalari* (Concepts of Hezb-i Tahrir) and *Siyosat va Khalqaro Siyosat* (Politics and International Politics). Distribution is mostly covert: typically, copies are scattered in public places under cover of night, or handed out by casual hired labour (G. Warning, 'Propaganda und Prozesse gegen Hizbut-Tahrir', *Erk info* (email distribution), 25 February 2001; Uran Botobekov, 'Hizb at-Tahrir Challenges the Central Asia Ruling Regimes', *Times of Central Asia*, vol. 3, no. 9, 1 March 2001).
- 23 Rumours in common currency in Tashkent in recent years claim that President Karimov and/or his wife are Jewish; these insinuations are believed to have

- originated with members of Hezb-i Tahrir. Before this period there was almost no anti-Jewish sentiment in Central Asia.
- 24 Amnesty International regularly publishes reports on such cases and mobilises protest actions.
 - 25 A book on this incident by Israeli (émigré from Uzbekistan) journalist Oleg Yakubov, *The Pack of Wolves: The Blood Trail of Terror* (Moscow: Veche Publishers, 2000), was similarly sensational.
 - 26 The Khanate of Kokand was one of the three main states of the southern tier of Central Asia in the pre-colonial period; it was annexed by the Tsarist empire in 1876.
 - 27 Personal communication by N. Shadrova, Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz State Committee on Religious Affairs, Bishkek, September 1999.
 - 28 For a study of Nursi's life and teachings, see Şerif Mardin, *The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursî: Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989). Said Nursî and Fethulla Gülen have had close links with some Turkish politicians but have been regarded with suspicion by others, including the military. On Nurcu activities in Central Asia, see B. Balci, 'The Nurcu Movement in Central Asia', in *Religion, State and Society: the Keston Journal*, forthcoming 2003.
 - 29 Th. Zarcone, 'Les Soufis à l'assaut de l'islam', in *Les Cahiers de l'Orient*, deuxième trimestre 1998, N°50, Paris.
 - 30 Yet in 2002 a few hundred Kazakhs were still reportedly studying in foreign religious institutions.
 - 31 In Kyrgyzstan in 1999, for example, there were 402 registered Christian missionaries, more than double the number of registered Muslim missionaries; well over half the Christians were from Korea (personal communication by N. Shadrova, Deputy Chairman of the Kyrgyz State Committee on Religious Affairs, Bishkek, September 1999).
 - 32 This section draws on S. Akiner, 'Regional Cooperation in Central Asia', in Patrick Hardouin, Reiner Weichhardt and Peter Sutcliffe (eds), *Economic Developments and Reforms in Cooperation Partner Countries: The Interrelationship Between Regional Economic Cooperation, Security and Stability* (Brussels: NATO Economics Directorate, 2001), pp. 187–208.
 - 33 Pakistan (with Kyrgyz backing) had also applied for membership, but admission was deferred.
 - 34 The Central Asian states joined the CIS in December 1991, on the eve of the formal disintegration of the Soviet Union. In May 1992, four of these states (minus Turkmenistan) signed the CIS Collective Security Treaty; in April 1999, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan agreed to prolong their membership for a further five years, but Uzbekistan withdrew from the alliance.
 - 35 In autumn 2001 thousands of earlier refugees were still encamped along the river Panj, and on a mid-stream island, waiting to cross into Tajikistan. Despite great pressure from the international community, the Tajik government refused to accept them, regarding the country as too fragile to cope with this new burden.
 - 36 Juma Namangani (Jumabai Khojiev or 'Tajibai') was born in 1969, in the Namangan province of Uzbekistan. After serving with the Soviet army in Afghanistan 1988–89, he returned to Uzbekistan and became an active member of the Islamist movement. He fought in the Tajik civil war, undergoing a brief spell of military training in northern Afghanistan, then in Pakistan; he also

visited Saudi Arabia. In 1997 he reportedly became 'commander-in-chief' of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.

- 37 *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 July 2002 (<http://www.csmonitor.com2002/0710/p07s02-wosc.html>).
- 38 There are persistent allegations in the press that Adil Toigonbayev, President Akayev's son-in-law, is making a fortune out of preferential deals tied to the supply of fuel and other commodities to the US base; see, for example, the article 'Prezidentskii biznes', in *Vechernii Bishkek (Evening Bishkek)*, 4 November 2002 (<http://www.vb.kg/cgi-bin/forum>).
- 39 The original aim of the university was to train civil servants to work effectively in and with Muslim countries. Today it attracts large numbers of young people who are motivated by a personal desire to study Islam. On a visit to this institution in mid-2002 the author noted that several female students were wearing the *hijab* (Muslim headscarf). A few years earlier this would have been unthinkable (see D. Frantz, 'Persecution Charged in ex-Soviet Republic', *New York Times*, 29 October 2000, p. 6). The al-Bukhari Foundation is a dynamic new organisation that undertakes such activities as the organisation of conferences on religious topics and produces popular as well as learned works on Islam.

6 Economic relations between the GCC and South and South East Asia

Rodney Wilson

Trade and movements of people, and to a lesser extent investment flows, between the Gulf Arab states and South and South East Asia have become increasingly significant since the 1970s. The relation is asymmetric in the sense that there has been more dependence of South Asia, and to a lesser extent South East Asia, on the Gulf Arab economies than vice versa, the dependence mainly involving oil and remittances from migrant workers.

It is of course misleading to generalise about relationships between vast geographical regions. Here the focus is on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) economies – Saudi Arabia and its five smaller Gulf Arab partners, South Asia, comprising India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and ASEAN, the Association of South East Asian Nations, where Malaysia with its Muslim majority, and perhaps surprisingly the largely Christian Philippines, have perhaps the most intensive economic relations with the GCC.

The economic links across the Indian Ocean will undoubtedly increase as the global order changes, but much will be dependent on developments in the Indian sub-continent and ASEAN regions. For these countries the GCC, despite its limited population size of around 30 million, is an open and attractive market. At present, however, the Indian sub-continent has relatively little to offer the GCC in exchange for its oil, apart from migrant labour, which may have a limited future as the pressures build for the private sector in the Gulf to employ local nationals. ASEAN countries can offer the GCC goods produced by the subsidiaries of Japanese multinationals, but this typifies the dependence of both the Gulf and the Indian Ocean countries on economies external to the region.

Since the pace of economic change in India has been much slower than in China, all that can be envisaged is the latter replacing Japan and the European Union, and perhaps ultimately the United States, as the dominant force ultimately shaping the economic future of the Indian Ocean region including the GCC. India is the natural hub of the region, but in the twentieth century its role was well below its economic potential. Whether this will remain the case for the twenty-first century remains to be seen.

The determinants of trade are largely market driven, oil and gas exports from the GCC to the Indian sub-continent being explained in terms of vent

for a surplus theory,¹ while exports of manufactured products in the reverse direction can be explained by comparative costs and acquired and competitive advantage.² Movements of peoples and funds are also partly explained by financial returns, but political factors including perceptions, orientations and allegiances also explain labour movements,³ and to an even greater extent the movement of capital.⁴

Historical perspectives

The relationship between the Gulf and South and South East Asia is not merely an opportunistic response to the growth of oil economies. Rather it has a long history, as the Indian Ocean has always been a conduit for commerce and the movement of people rather than a barrier.⁵ Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula to the Indian sub-continent and onward to the Straits of Malacca into what is today Indonesia and Malaysia.⁶ The Gulf Emirates and Sheikdoms were controlled during the years of British ascendancy from New Delhi and Simla rather than London. The Indian rupee was the main medium of exchange in the Gulf before the introduction of national currencies.⁷ Prior to the discovery and development of oil the pearling industry in the Gulf was dependent on the trading connections with Bombay, where the precious pearls were graded, polished and prepared for the ultimate retail markets.⁸

The emergence of oil changed the orientation of the Gulf Arab economies, as the United States, through the participation of its oil companies in ARAMCO, the Arabian American Oil Company, was to become the dominant economic power in Saudi Arabia.⁹ Although the United States was concerned with the free flow of oil for much of the twentieth century, the major preoccupation was the flow westward to the industrialised countries, not the flows to South Asia and beyond, where oil consumption was modest until at least the last quarter of the twentieth century.

For Britain, with Indian independence, its dependencies in the Gulf were directly served from London, a development facilitated by the advent of jet travel in the 1950s. As India and Pakistan became more internally preoccupied and pursued policies, especially in the case of the former, of inward orientated development, links with the Gulf declined. Although the demise of the British Empire ended the Indian Ocean links, Bahrain and later Dubai emerged as transit centres for air routes to Singapore and Australia, before even longer haul flights became possible in the 1980s, and the ending of the Cold War resulted in the opening of more northerly routes between Europe and the Far East.

Institutional links

Most dialogue between the GCC governments and those of South and South East Asia has been bilateral, as there are no regional institutions including

all the states. The GCC as a regional organisation has an ongoing relationship with the European Union under the framework of the EU–GCC Cooperation Agreement of 1988,¹⁰ but there is no similar framework for relations with ASEAN. The South East Asian members of ASEAN have a trans-Pacific economic forum for their relations with the United States, Canada and Mexico – APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Community. With the GCC orientated westward, and ASEAN eastward, the Indian Ocean tends not to be viewed as an economic entity. As there is no regional institutional framework for the divided Indian sub-continent with which there could be a GCC economic dialogue, the prospects for multilateral initiatives are even more limited and remote than with ASEAN states.

The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) is the only major body with complete GCC coverage and selected Asian coverage, the Asian members outside the Middle East being those countries with Muslim majorities: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.¹¹ This has provided a forum for the discussion of political and economic issues of mutual interest since the 1970s. In 1973 Finance Ministers from the OIC countries agreed at a meeting in Jeddah to establish the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which started operations in 1975. The Bank's mission was to promote economic development in the Muslim world by providing concessional interest-free lending.¹² Most of the initial capital of the IDB was subscribed by the oil-rich GCC states, the major Asian beneficiaries being Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia who received trade financing to help pay for oil imports as well as longer-term project finance.

Four of the GCC states are members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.¹³ Oil pricing and production issues are discussed on a regular and ongoing basis with Iran and Indonesia as the Asian, non-Arab members. In practice the dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran is crucial for OPEC policy-making, but Indonesia is rather on the periphery of most discussions, partly a consequence of its recent confused political situation, and its somewhat limited oil production despite its substantial offshore reserves.

The GCC countries are all members of the Arab League, which potentially provides an alternative orientation to the Indian Ocean (although they could act as a bridge between the Mediterranean Arab states and South and South East Asia). In practice the Arab League has never proved successful as a political or economic forum, and the organisation has minimal funding.¹⁴ Nasser's ambitious plans for an Arab Common Market never achieved much as inter-Arab trade remained limited, largely because of the protectionist policies pursued by many Arab states and controls on the movement of capital and labour.¹⁵ The GCC states refused to join the Arab Common Market, partly because of political differences with Egypt dating from the Nasser era, but also due to a preference for Asian trade, as goods and services could be provided at more competitive prices by South East Asian nations, and they were usually of superior quality.

The balance of economic power

An economy's size can be measured by gross domestic product (GDP), although large economic size does not necessarily imply economic strength, since that has to take account of development sustainability. Size nevertheless equates with command over resources, including military resources.

India, with its population of almost one billion, is not surprisingly the dominant economy in the Indian Ocean region, but Saudi Arabia, with a population of under 21 million, has an economy comparable in size to Indonesia, as Table 6.1 shows. The UAE, despite its population of under three million, most of whom are expatriates, has a greater GDP than Bangladesh, which has a population of almost 130 million. The GCC countries, which historically were mere dependencies of British India and the Ottomans, have emerged as major regional economic powers, largely thanks to their substantial oil resources.¹⁶

As oil surplus economies in the second half of the twentieth century, the GCC states were in a position to support convertible currencies and to accumulate substantial financial resources, which provided economic muscle. They were also able to spend relatively more on defence, as Table 6.2 shows, with Oman devoting over one-quarter of its GDP to military expenditure annually, while for Saudi Arabia the figure approaches 15 per cent. In contrast India, despite its dispute with Pakistan, spends less than 3 per cent of its GDP on defence, which means that despite the size of its GDP, its defence expenditure is lower than that of Saudi Arabia.¹⁷ Admittedly, to some extent defence expenditure is a means of employment creation for local citizens in the GCC, and some of the high technology weapons may not represent good value for money, but it is evident that economic power has been converted into military power, despite a continued reliance on the United States for defence against Iraq.

Table 6.1 Economy size

<i>Country</i>	<i>GDP (billion \$)</i>	
	<i>1990</i>	<i>1999</i>
Bahrain	4	5
Kuwait	18	30
Oman	11	15
Qatar	7	9
Saudi Arabia	105	139
UAE	34	47
Bangladesh	30	45
India	316	447
Pakistan	40	58
Indonesia	114	142
Malaysia	44	79

Source: World Bank, 2001.

Table 6.2 Military expenditure

<i>Country</i>	<i>% of GDP</i>
Bahrain	10.3
Kuwait	7.5
Oman	26.1
Qatar	10.5
Saudi Arabia	14.5
UAE	6.9
Bangladesh	1.4
India	2.8
Pakistan	5.7
Indonesia	2.3
Malaysia	2.2

Source: World Bank, 2001.

Income and wealth disparities

Historically, the GCC economies were the poor relations of the Indian sub-continent, with even the rulers enjoying relatively modest amounts of income and wealth in comparison to India's landlords, wealthy urban traders and nobility. In the second half of the twentieth century, with high rates of population growth in South Asian economies, accompanied by at best modest advances in agriculture and the development of largely inefficient state-run industries, the economies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh failed to provide rising living standards for the majority of their populations. In contrast the GCC economies took off as a result of their substantial oil revenues, and although there was waste and inefficiency, much was achieved in building world-class infrastructure facilities and utility provision, as well as viable energy-related industries that could compete in international markets for petrochemicals and other products. The economies of South East Asia fared better than South Asia, in particular Malaysia, which was transformed from being an economy dependent on rubber and palm oil into an export location of choice for Japanese multinational companies manufacturing consumer electrical products and other modern, if not the highest technology, goods.

The gross national income per capita in the UAE is the second highest in the Indian Ocean region after Singapore, and is greater than that of Israel and southern European states such as Greece or Spain. The figures for the UAE are calculated with respect to the total resident population rather than citizens only, which would make the figure significantly higher. Saudi Arabia with its much larger population has a significantly lower level of per capita income, which means it can be classified as a middle income country, comparable to Malaysia as Table 6.3 shows, although the latter is a much more diversified economy.

Table 6.3 Income and investment indicators

<i>Country</i>	<i>GNI per capita, 1999 (\$)</i>	<i>GDP per capita growth, 1990–99 (%)</i>	<i>Gross domestic investment (%)</i>
Bahrain	11,550	0.8	6.0
Saudi Arabia	6,900	–1.1	19.3
UAE	18,870	–1.6	25.5
Bangladesh	1,530	3.1	22.2
India	2,230	4.1	22.9
Pakistan	1,860	1.3	15.0
Indonesia	2,660	3.0	23.7
Malaysia	7,640	4.7	22.3

Source: World Bank, 2001.

The GCC countries have exhibited declining GDP per capita growth figures for almost two decades, partly reflecting stagnant or declining oil prices since the boom of the 1970s (despite the brief price shock that accompanied the 1990–91 Kuwait crisis), but more importantly a consequence of population growth, which exceeded 3 per cent per year for most of the period, but has now slowed down significantly to around 2 per cent.¹⁸ South East Asian countries fared better in terms of per capita GDP growth, with Malaysia averaging around 4.7 per cent during the 1990s despite the setback of the Asian crisis of 1997. The performance of South Asian economies in the 1990s was mixed, with India experiencing the highest growth and Pakistan performing worst, partly as a result of political instability and low investment for most of the period.

The disparities in income between the GCC countries and the other states on the borders of the Indian Ocean are reflected in social welfare provision. Infant mortality rates in Bahrain and the UAE are amongst the lowest in the world, while India and Pakistan, with their poor health provision for rural areas, both suffer from high infant mortality rates. Only Malaysia, with its relatively greater resources, can equal the best GCC states in successfully lowering infant mortality as Table 6.4 shows. Better health provision in the GCC is one factor attracting migrant labour from South Asia, but higher wages remain the greatest incentive, especially as many migrants do not bring their families who still have to rely on what health facilities are available to them in South Asia.

In the GCC education has become universal, with virtually all children attending primary school and most attending secondary school, illiteracy largely being confined to older people, especially women.¹⁹ In contrast, in Pakistan and Bangladesh female illiteracy is widespread, even amongst the younger generation, reflecting limited resources and gender discrimination. Before 1970 the countries that constitute the GCC lagged behind their Asian neighbours in terms of education and female emancipation, but this has been reversed in recent decades. In the GCC the challenge is now to find work for school leavers and university graduates, with the unofficial

Table 6.4 Health and education

<i>Country</i>	<i>Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)</i>	<i>Female illiteracy (% population aged 15+)</i>
Bahrain	8	18
Kuwait	11	21
Oman	17	40
Qatar	16	17
Saudi Arabia	19	34
UAE	8	22
Bangladesh	61	71
India	71	56
Pakistan	90	70
Indonesia	42	19
Malaysia	8	17

Source: World Bank, 2001.

unemployment figure in Saudi Arabia exceeding 18 per cent. In these circumstances demand for manpower from South and South East Asia looks set to decline, as pressures mount to replace foreign workers with local nationals in the private as well as the public sectors.

Economic openness

The economies of the GCC are very open in comparison with most developing countries, with free currency convertibility for international payments and no restrictions on the movement of capital, except with regard to foreign ownership of upstream oil resources and banks. Trade is high in relation to gross domestic product in the smaller GCC states as might be expected, but even in the case of Saudi Arabia the ratio of exports to GDP is high, reflecting its oil, and to a lesser extent petrochemical, trade. In contrast the economies of South Asia are much more internally focused, with exports accounting for 15 per cent or less of GDP as Table 6.5 shows. Malaysia is

Table 6.5 Trade in relation to gross domestic product

<i>Country</i>	<i>Exports /GDP (%)</i>	<i>Imports /GDP (%)</i>
Bahrain	115	79
Kuwait	47	37
Oman	49	39
Saudi Arabia	40	28
UAE	66	65
Bangladesh	13	19
India	12	15
Pakistan	15	20
Indonesia	35	27
Malaysia	122	97

Source: World Bank, 2001.

even more open, however, than the GCC states, despite the size and diversity of its economy. Although it imposed some restrictions on capital movements in response to the Asia crisis in 1997, payment convertibility for traded goods remains – unlike the position in South Asian countries, including India, which despite some liberalisation still maintains significant currency controls.

Although most GCC trade is with East Asia (notably Japan, China and South Korea) and the European Union, trade with its Indian Ocean neighbours has been increasing in recent years. India is a significant supplier of imports for Saudi Arabia, with goods worth around \$1 billion annually as Table 6.6 shows, treble their value in 1990. Indonesia and Malaysia are also important suppliers to the Saudi Arabian market, and even the Asia crisis and the oil price falls in 1998 did not seem adversely to affect this trade; indeed the devaluation of South East Asian currencies in 1997 seems to have given these economies a competitive advantage. Saudi Arabia is India's fifth largest import supplier, and the UAE and Kuwait are also important.

Most of Saudi Arabia's imports from the UAE are Asian re-exports through Dubai, and although most of the goods originate in Japan and China there are some coming from Malaysia and other ASEAN countries, and to a lesser extent the Indian sub-continent. Malaysia mainly exports electronic equipment and consumer electrical goods. India's share of world exports has increased by over two-thirds since the economy was opened up in the 1980s and this is reflected in its trade with the GCC, Dubai being its major point of entry. There are a number of joint business ventures involving India and GCC states, an example being the Oman India Fertilizer Company that is constructing an \$800 million plant to produce ammonia and urea for fertilizer at Sur in Oman. The output of 1.6 million tons of urea will be exported to India from 2003.²⁰

In contrast to India, imports to the GCC from Pakistan and Bangladesh are virtually stagnant, reflecting the state of these economies. Dubai is, however, the main transit centre for goods from Pakistan, including goods

Table 6.6 Saudi Arabia's GCC and South and South East Asian trade, 1998 (million riyal)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>
Bahrain	1,018	849
Kuwait	315	1,872
UAE	1,842	3,001
Bangladesh	41	33
India	3,058	891
Pakistan	477	469
Indonesia	1,696	321
Malaysia	814	197

Source: United Nations Direction of Trade Statistics, 2000.

originating in Central Asia such as carpets. Pakistan's exports to the UAE are worth around \$500 million annually, and even Bangladesh exports goods valued at \$15 million annually through Dubai.

Dubai's role in Asian trade

Dubai's role in the trade of South Asia has increased since it became the shopping capital of western Asia. Links with Bombay are stronger than ever, with at least ten flights a day bringing not only migrant workers but also wealthy Indians for weekend shopping breaks and businessmen engaged in both selling and buying. There is a steady stream of visitors to Dubai from Pakistan and even Afghanistan, indicating how significant it has become as a magnet for the wider region. Dubai has become not only a transit stop for visitors to India and the Indian Ocean islands taking two-centre holidays, but also a tourist destination because of its numerous four and five star hotels.

In many respects Dubai's role as a commercial centre for the Gulf and western Indian Ocean mirrors Singapore's role in the eastern Indian Ocean and ASEAN, although it is Bahrain which has the banking function rather than Dubai. Many multinational companies have service operations in Dubai, the duty-free zone at Jebel Ali being the major centre. The Internet and Media City in Dubai hosts major high technology companies including Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, IBM, Lucent Technology, Cisco Systems, Hewlett Packard and Oracle, with engineers and technicians who service computer hardware and software throughout the Gulf and western Asia.²¹

The managers of Dubai Internet City have exchanged information with the Malaysian Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia, which is responsible for the multimedia super-corridor linking Kuala Lumpur with Malaysia's international airport, and the two parties have agreed to cooperate rather than compete with each other.²² This is realistic, as most of the companies involved want a presence in both South East Asia and the Gulf. There is also no real competition for specialist staff, as Malaysia has its own appropriately skilled and qualified people, while Dubai, by paying higher tax-free salaries, can draw workers from Bangalore, the centre for information technology in southern India.

Movements of people

Data on international arrivals include foreign migrant workers, business visitors, tourists and, in the case of Saudi Arabia, Muslims undertaking *hajj* pilgrimages. As Table 6.7 shows, the numbers arriving in Malaysia and Indonesia far exceed the annual arrivals in the GCC states. In the case of these ASEAN countries the arrivals are mostly tourists, with the island of Bali benefiting most in the case of Indonesia, rather than the much more populated island of Java. Only Dubai has a comparable tourist industry, but

Table 6.7 International visitors

<i>Country</i>	<i>Receipts (million \$)</i>	<i>Arrivals (thousands)</i>	<i>Aircraft departures (thousands)</i>
Bahrain	366	1,991	13
Kuwait	207	77	17
Oman	104	502	22
Qatar	N/a	451	13
Saudi Arabia	1,462	3,700	107
UAE	607	2,481	44
Bangladesh	50	173	6
India	3,036	2,482	181
Pakistan	76	429	65
Indonesia	4,045	4,700	135
Malaysia	2,822	7,931	165

Source: World Bank, 2001.

there the visitors tend to stay for shorter periods, and therefore spend less. Aircraft movements also give some indication of the movement of people, and it is interesting to note that departures from the UAE greatly exceed those from much more populated countries such as Bangladesh, while those from Saudi Arabia exceed departures from Pakistan.

A breakdown of arrivals and departures for Saudi Arabia is shown in Table 6.8, with most of the movements to and from the Indian sub-continent representing migrant workers rather than *hajj* pilgrims. India is the major source of labour, although Pakistan is more heavily involved in relation to its population and labour market size. The numbers of workers arriving from the Indian sub-continent as a whole exceed those from Arab countries, although Egyptians are the largest single group in the foreign workforce, with over one million arrivals and departures each year.

Table 6.8 Arrivals and departures from Saudi Arabia
by nationality

<i>Country</i>	<i>Arrivals</i>	<i>Departures</i>
Bahrain	1,070,871	985,974
Kuwait	954,806	928,670
Oman	65,794	52,755
Qatar	304,802	293,377
UAE	97,293	86,092
Bangladesh	200,667	159,847
India	695,631	716,620
Pakistan	503,275	527,621
Indonesia	170,125	164,961
Malaysia	68,297	67,479

Source: Saudi Economic Survey, Riyadh, 12 April 2000, p. 12.

More Egyptians work in the public sector, notably education, where the employment of local Saudi Arabian nationals has increased most rapidly.²³ In contrast, those from the Indian sub-continent tend to work in the private sector, where it is much more difficult to bring about the employment of local nationals. Non-Saudis account for the overwhelming majority of the workforce in manufacturing, construction, and wholesale and retail trade, but Saudis dominate in the military, public administration, public utilities and, most recently, banking.²⁴ The number of Jordanians and Palestinians in Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries has declined markedly since the Kuwait War; indeed the number employed from the Philippines now exceeds the number from Palestine and Jordan. Workers from South and South East Asian countries are often preferred by GCC governments, as their inability for the most part to speak Arabic and integrate with the local population means they are less likely to be a socially or politically disruptive influence.

Financial links across the Indian Ocean

Capital flows from the GCC to South Asia and ASEAN involve remittances, financial aid and development assistance on an informal bilateral and official multilateral basis, inter-bank transactions, and portfolio investment by private citizens of high net worth. Most of the remittances are transmitted through informal moneychangers rather than through banking channels, which means they are not officially recorded and cannot be reliably estimated. Those from Bahrain alone, where the Monetary Agency is more effective at monitoring movements than other central banks, amounted to more than \$1 billion in 2000,²⁵ of which about two-thirds goes to South Asia and the ASEAN countries, notably the Philippines. Total remittances from the GCC to South Asia and ASEAN probably exceed \$7 billion annually, an amount that boosts significantly the spending power of the beneficiaries even if it is not officially recorded in the balance of payments statistics. Transfers of funds by the moneychangers rarely coincide with deposits as most moneychangers maintain substantial cash balances. Once a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia requests that a transfer is made to Pakistan, the money-changer telephones, faxes or emails the agent in Pakistan who arranges disbursement from existing funds, usually in the local currency. The riyals or dollars never actually move, which reduces transaction costs and enables the moneychangers to offer more favourable rates.

There has been government-to-government support from the GCC states to South Asia since the 1970s. Pakistan has been the major beneficiary, with much of the assistance being to support the military, although the GCC states have been reluctant to get involved in the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India.²⁶ As Pakistan and Iran have vied for influence in Afghanistan, the GCC countries have made financial contributions to support Pakistan, a tendency that is likely to be intensified in the aftermath of recent political developments involving Afghanistan.

Multilateral development assistance to the Muslim countries of South Asia and ASEAN is channelled through the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank and a number of national funds such as the Saudi Fund for Development or the Abu Dhabi Fund. The name of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development was shortened with the word 'Arab' omitted after the Kuwait War, the focus subsequently being more on assisting non-Arab Muslim countries, as there was a degree of disillusionment with many Arab countries felt in Kuwait, especially countries such as Yemen and the Sudan which refused to join the allied coalition against Iraq.

The Islamic Development Bank has supported numerous projects in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia, all of which participate in the capital of the institution.²⁷ Most involve infrastructure provision such as road construction or assistance with utility development, with the IDB often engaged in co-financing with other institutions. Islamic finance involves interest-free funding, but where traded commodities are financed on a *murabaha* (risk-sharing) basis a mark-up is applied. *Ijara* or leasing is also extensively used by the IDB, and involves rental payments by the beneficiary of the funding. In practice IDB financing costs are in line with those of other development assistance agencies, but as the lending is denominated in Islamic dinars, an accounting unit with a parity with the International Monetary Fund's special drawing rights, there is a foreign exchange risk in relation to both the dollar and the currencies of the Asian countries receiving funding.

A number of major Asian banks maintain branches and offices in Bahrain, which serves as the major financial centre for the GCC. The Habib Bank of Pakistan maintains a full branch and an offshore banking unit on the island, the branch providing retail services to the local Pakistani community, while the offshore unit is concerned with raising funding for projects in Pakistan and securing trade finance.²⁸ The National Bank of Pakistan, the Muslim Commercial Bank of Pakistan and the State Bank of India also maintain offshore banking units in Bahrain, and in 2001 Malaysian Banking Berhad (Maybank) opened an offshore unit for its GCC business.²⁹ Leading multinational banks with a significant presence in South and South East Asia also maintain offshore banking units in Bahrain, notably the Australian and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ), Standard Chartered Grindlays Bank and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC). The latter owns a 40 per cent stake in the Saudi British Bank that it acquired when it took over the British Bank of the Middle East.

There are also a number of relatively small banks in Bahrain that specialise in financing trade and promoting investment flows between the GCC and South and South East Asian countries. These include the Arab Asian Bank and the Kuwait Asia Bank, both of which usually attempt to put deals together in cooperation with other larger GCC or South East Asia-based banks. Some of the Islamic banks operating in Bahrain also have strong links with Pakistan and to a lesser extent Bangladesh and Indonesia,

notably the Shamil Bank of Bahrain, formerly the Faisal Bank, and the al-Baraka Banking Group. The leading Iranian banks provide full banking services in Bahrain, notably Bank Melli and Bank Saderat, but these are provided on a conventional rather than an Islamic basis, the latter only applying to domestic operations within Iran.

Future prospects for trans-Indian Ocean economic links

As in the recent and more distant past, both market forces and political developments are likely to shape the nature and intensity of economic relations between the GCC and South and South East Asia. The determinants are external rather than pan-regional, as future developments in the global economy and financial markets are likely to be of significance, as well as the political relations of all the parties with the United States in the aftermath of the incidents of 11 September 2001. As the GCC countries and Pakistan are all directly involved in post-11 September US policies, and as movements of both people and finance between these states and Afghanistan have been implicated in the attacks, the repercussions are likely to be profound.

Increased international financial monitoring to prevent fund transfers that support terrorist activity is taking place, as financial intelligence is a vital tool for anti-terrorism. Hitherto, the main preoccupation has been with the protection of bank depositors, but banks in the GCC and South Asia are under pressure to 'know their customers' and act on money laundering, with the Bank for International Settlements playing a key role.³⁰ The Bahrain Monetary Agency and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency have good reputations for financial monitoring, but the position in the United Arab Emirates has been much less satisfactory, with a long history of money-laundering from the time the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) – the largely UAE-owned, but Pakistani-run bank – collapsed.³¹ More recently, in 1999 the Dubai Islamic Bank ran into difficulty as a result of internal fraud.

Increasing compliance with international rule-based systems is not easy in the GCC or Indian Ocean states where there has often been a much more relaxed attitude to regulation. All the GCC states, apart from Saudi Arabia, are members of the World Trade Organization, which also encompasses the countries of South Asia and the ASEAN nations. Membership of the International Monetary Fund is universal, even though the South East Asian states and Malaysia object to many aspects of its structural adjustment policies. Nevertheless a unified Indian Ocean move to change international economic policy-making through fora such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development is unlikely, and such bodies have only marginal influence on international economic decision-making in any case.

Although there is much scepticism in the GCC over the economic viability of Pakistan, there is likely to be an expectation in the United States

that Saudi Arabia and the other GCC states should play a positive role in financing reconstruction and stabilising its economy. Pakistan has been undertaking yet another economic reform programme with World Bank assistance, part of which involves strengthening the National Accountability Bureau, which by the start of 2001 had already recovered \$500 million in corruptly misappropriated funds.³² In July 2001 the World Bank made \$130 million available for drought relief in Pakistan but it is expecting help from the GCC states for the Afghan refugees. The UAE, which bowed to American pressure to cut off diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime,³³ responded by financing the Red Crescent Society's efforts in Pakistan to help with relief supplies of foodstuffs, medicines, water, tents and blankets.³⁴ Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi have felt compelled to act.

There are also indications that Saudi Arabia will provide financial assistance to Pakistan. The Prudential Commercial Bank, an institution with significant Saudi Arabian financial involvement, got into financial difficulties in March 2001 which resulted in a run on deposits. The State Bank of Pakistan was forced to suspend the bank's operations and freeze deposits. On 15 September 2001 the governments of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia agreed that the bank should be taken over by their jointly owned Saudi Pak Industrial and Agricultural Investment Company, that would subsequently be known as the Saudi Pak Commercial Bank.³⁵

Financial assistance from the GCC governments may become to some extent a substitute for remittances, as pressures mount to employ more local nationals and fewer from the sub-continent. Private investors in the Gulf may be wary about becoming too involved in Pakistan or South Asia more generally, their focus being more on Malaysia with its more developed and efficient business infrastructure. Yet it would be simplistic to believe that those seeking to diversify their financial interests away from the West could potentially invest more in Kuala Lumpur and ASEAN countries as these economies are also bound up with the United States. The only real long-term hope of diversification lies in Japan coming out of recession, and China continuing to develop into the third, and eventually the second major global economic power, with potentially beneficial effects for the Indian Ocean periphery as far as the Gulf.

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7 India and Pakistan's military and security relations with the Middle East

Ben Sheppard

This study looks in detail at the key military and security links between India and Pakistan and the countries of the Middle East, and the implications these could have for regional stability. It examines five key areas: India's special relationship with Israel; regional rivalries in Afghanistan; Pakistan's relationship with the Middle East; Islamabad's indirect assistance to Iranian and Syrian ballistic missile programmes; and finally, the 'Islamic bomb' and its ramifications for the two regions. The section on Afghanistan assesses the relationship between India, Iran and Pakistan and their support for the United Front and the Taliban prior to the military engagement of the US-led coalition following the 11 September terrorist attacks.

India's special relationship with Israel

One of the most intriguing developments in India's relations with the Middle East is the emergence of a strong Indo-Israeli partnership. Political and military relations have changed almost beyond recognition since 1990. Back then India had minimal diplomatic relations with Israel; New Delhi was one of the strongest supporters of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel only had one consulate in India, located in Bombay. In addition India was one of the first nations to accord diplomatic status to the PLO. Although India recognised the state of Israel in 1950, it was not until 1992 that bilateral diplomatic ties were developed under then Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Narasimha Rao's administration and the next two United Front governments continued to be circumspect in their dealings with Israel.¹ It took the electoral victory of Atal Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1998 for Israel and India to develop close bilateral relations in the political, economic and, significantly, military arenas. Vajpayee wanted to break free from New Delhi's traditional ties with Arab states, nurtured by succeeding governments for fear of disrupting oil supplies from the Middle East. A year after the BJP took office the Defence, Home and External Affairs Ministers made official visits to Israel, and in the period 1992–2000 bilateral trade reached approximately \$1 billion. India has purchased Israeli

defence equipment since the early 1990s and the two countries have forged close ties to counter Islamist terrorism through intelligence sharing and increased military cooperation. There are two main strands to this partnership: first Israel looks upon India as a cash cow in need of arms, and second there is a symbiotic relationship, with both sides working together to counter what they see as 'Islamic terrorism'.

India: a cash cow

With much of India's military equipment nearing obsolescence, Israel views New Delhi as a lucrative market. Arms agreements with Israel have included the purchase of fast attack craft (Super Dvora Mk II) from Israel Aircraft Industries (IAI) in 1996 and a programme to upgrade India's ageing MiG-21s: India's Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is upgrading 125 Indian Air Force MiG-21s with Israeli, Russian and French help at a cost of \$500–700 million.

The Kargil crisis of 1999, which saw fighting between Indian and Pakistani forces, brought home to India the need to purchase advanced weapon systems. India sees Israel as the ideal source for readily available, reliable and sophisticated military equipment. This is reflected in the arms agreement India signed with Israel in October 2000 to receive \$200 million worth of defence equipment over five years. The Indian shopping list includes advanced avionics and early warning radar systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and naval air defence and anti-missile systems. In addition, India publicly confirmed in July 2002 that it had acquired two Israeli Green Pine radar systems as part of its improved air defence network. Green Pine is likely to be used with the Russian Antey-2500 SAM ballistic missile defence system (export variant of the S-300VM) which New Delhi ordered in mid-2001.² This will provide India with a limited missile defence capability against Pakistan's ballistic missiles. As part of the upgrading of its air defence capabilities New Delhi announced in April 2002 its intention to purchase long-range Aerostat Programmable Radars from Israel for the Indian Airforce.³ The sensors are mounted on blimp-like large balloons tethered to the ground with long cables, and are designed to work alongside the Airborne Warning and Control (AWACS) system to bolster India's airborne early warning capabilities.

Overall, India's strategy is to purchase advanced Israeli weapon systems to mount on existing platforms, many of them Russian-built. For instance the agreement of October 2000 includes supply of 1,000 fire control systems for the Indian army's Russian-built T-72 tanks, and Lightning navigation and targeting pods for Indian Air Force fighters, many of which are Russian designs. Although Moscow still remains the main arms provider for India, as demonstrated by a \$3 billion arms agreement signed in October 2000,⁴ Israeli equipment has the appeal of reliability and quality. Many Israeli defence components are tried and tested and stem from US technologies, although publicly the Israelis play this down in an attempt to emphasise

their indigenous research and development capabilities. A large part of the agreement with Russia entails delivering platforms that could be fitted with Israeli systems. These include 140 Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighters, the purchase of 310 T-90 battle tanks, and the acquisition of the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov.

The Israeli–Indian relationship has not been without its problems. A controversial part of the October 2000 arms agreement is the proposed sale of the Israeli Phalcon AWACS. It is understood that India has ordered one Phalcon system at a cost of \$250 million, with options for two to three more. India has been looking for an AWACS after a locally built prototype crashed in January 1999. The Indian Air Force is considering placing the Phalcon radar on the Russian-built Ilyushin Il-76 ‘Candid’ transport aircraft. The US had concerns over the deal, fearing it could escalate tensions in South Asia and upset the fragile balance of power between New Delhi, Islamabad and Beijing. Earlier in 2000, the then Israeli Prime Minister Barak cancelled the sale of the Phalcon plane to China under US pressure. After two years of negotiation, Washington approved the Indo-Israeli deal in January 2002⁵ and the deal is expected to be closed by the end of 2003.⁶

Regardless of the outcome of the Phalcon deal, the Israeli–Indian military relationship looks set to deepen. There is a growing view among Israeli defence officials that strained relations between Beijing and Washington during the early part of the Bush administration could prove beneficial for Israeli defence sales to India, a strategic rival of China. An Israeli defence official is quoted as saying ‘We expect US policies to be more liberal in terms of defence transfers to India, not only with regard to Israeli exports, but also with regard to sanction legislation’.⁷ During the same period the Bush administration warmed to New Delhi, gradually lifting sanctions originally implemented by the Clinton administration following India’s nuclear tests in 1998. The rapprochement gained pace after 9/11, with the US recognising the need to keep India on side in its war on terrorism. The new geostrategic climate following 9/11 may lead Washington to allow further sales of sophisticated Israeli military equipment (in many cases partly funded and jointly developed with the US) to India. However, relations between India and Israel go deeper than arms transfers – they also share common security concerns.

A symbiotic relationship

India and Israel have developed a strong symbiotic relationship based on a shared belief that they are surrounded by potentially hostile countries and battling against a common enemy: ‘Islamic terrorism’. Israel’s logic is that it is a Jewish country surrounded by unfriendly states, while India is a predominantly Hindu state that sees itself as surrounded by hostile nations – some Islamic like Pakistan – with the additional complication of the Kashmiri problem. Then there is the extension of Pakistan – Afghanistan – which has

been an irritant to both Israel and India, as this war-torn country has trained Islamic militants from the Middle East and Pakistan to fight in Kashmir. Israel believes these Islamic militants have links to those attacking its own country. Although the fall of the Taliban and the US-led efforts to attack al-Qaida forces have led to the destruction of many training camps, al-Qaida and Taliban fighters and sympathisers remain in Afghanistan.

To the south of India is Sri Lanka, where in 1987–90 India deployed a 50,000 strong Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF), and ended up fighting the main Tamil guerrilla faction, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), costing New Delhi nearly \$1 billion and 1,000 troops killed. There is a large Tamil population in southern India, with ethnic and cultural links to the Tamils of Sri Lanka, which could potentially develop into an internal security problem.

Indo-Israeli security relations were openly consolidated in mid-2000 during visits by senior Indian officials to Tel Aviv, which included India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra meeting Mossad and other Israeli security personnel. A key aim of the talks was to forge closer ties between the two countries' intelligence agencies, in particular to combat 'Islamic terrorism'. A joint ministerial commission was established to provide what has been called a 'functional mechanism' for talks on counter-terrorism. The commission meets biannually in alternate capitals. Prominent Indian officials, full of admiration for Israel's no-nonsense tactics in dealing with terrorists and believing they could benefit from adopting the same strategies, are pushing for a deepening of Indian–Israeli ties. This was demonstrated in January 2001 when Interior Minister L.K. Advani toured the electronic anti-intruder fence along the Lebanese border and witnessed a demonstration of Israeli Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. India is keen to utilise these technologies on its de facto Kashmir border. Following 9/11, Israel emerged as one of India's closest military allies and intelligence partners, offering New Delhi considerable support in counter-terrorism operations. Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, during a three-day visit to New Delhi in January 2002, stated that the two countries were 'cooperating on security and intelligence matters because we have a common enemy: terrorism'.⁸

Closer relations between the two do face some constraints. The problems over the Phalcon defence proposal demonstrate the hold that Washington has on Israeli arms transfers to New Delhi, which Israel cannot lightly ignore given its financial dependence on the US. Washington therefore has de facto power of veto over certain Israeli defence exports to countries deemed 'inappropriate'.⁹ On India's side, New Delhi is reluctant to risk old, financially beneficial relationships with Arab countries.¹⁰ The Indian government has shown itself to be sensitive to accusations of neglecting these ties made at home and abroad. The Arab lobby in India became annoyed with their government's close ties with Israel during the uprising in Palestinian areas in late 2000. Pakistan successfully took advantage of anti-Israeli

sentiment at the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit in November 2000, devoting part of its agenda to what was referred to as the 'growing Indo-Israeli axis', and the OIC stated that it would send an envoy to Kashmir. India was said to have taken offence at this 'interference' and embarked on a charm offensive through diplomatic channels in order to repair its image.¹¹

Although India is in a sense moving away from the Arab world, there is one other Middle Eastern relationship that New Delhi is fostering, and that is with Israel's adversary, Iran.

Afghanistan and regional rivalries

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon brought into focus the involvement of Middle Eastern and South Asian nations in Afghanistan's long-running civil war. The speed with which Washington developed an alliance to attack chief suspect Osama Bin Laden and his hosts, the Taliban, may have seemed impressive, but closer examination reveals that the US and its Western allies tapped into a pre-existing anti-Taliban coalition. This coalition had steadily grown, and become increasingly desperate, as regional powers sought to avert the capitulation of the United Front (UF) of anti-Taliban forces operating in northern Afghanistan, which would allow the Taliban to gain complete control of the country.¹² Among those nations at the forefront of efforts to coordinate policy were India and Iran. In the mid- to late 1990s Tehran and New Delhi joined a long line of nations, including Russia, pulled together with the common goal of curtailing the Taliban's activities in Afghanistan by providing material and diplomatic support to the UF. The Taliban movement arose in mid-1994 under the direction of Mullah Mohammed Omar, in reaction to widespread lawlessness in the south of Afghanistan. By late 2000 the Taliban controlled more than two-thirds of the country, although in many areas this control amounted to little more than a small armed presence in major towns.

This section provides an overview of India and Pakistan's support for opposing factions in Afghanistan prior to the US military action in late 2001. Assessment of Pakistan's key role in the Taliban's rise to power provides an insight into the problems Islamabad faced following US demands to support its 'war on terrorism' and the internal discord Pakistan experienced in the wake of US attacks on Taliban forces.

Tehran and New Delhi viewed containing the Taliban as essential to their national security interests. Besides India's determination to contain Taliban-trained terrorist groups that they believed were fuelling security problems in Kashmir, New Delhi was concerned about the spread of the Taliban into Pakistan. Were the Pakistani regime to collapse, India was concerned that 'the Mullahs' might come to power, backed by the Taliban, and that they might gain control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. The prospect, albeit remote, of the Taliban getting their hands on nuclear weapons and long-

range ballistic missiles was something to be avoided at all costs. India also feared that a radical Islamist government in Pakistan would destabilise the Indian sub-continent, with the risk of full-scale war breaking out – possibly involving the use of nuclear weapons. Fortunately the prospect of the ‘talibanisation’ of Pakistan, or the coming to power of Islamic extremists, was and remains slight. Despite the unease felt in Pakistan about siding with the anti-Taliban coalition, any attempt to establish a radical Islamist government would encounter the problem of a lack of widespread support. Prior to the events of 11 September Anthony Davis, a leading commentator on Afghanistan and Pakistan, wrote:

Traditionally, political Islam in Pakistan has been neither united nor, in electoral terms at least, popular. Riven by doctrinal difference and personality squabbles, it covers a broad spectrum of belief from Sufi-influenced reverence for local saints to the harsh purism of sects espousing Wahhabi reformism from the Arabian peninsula. Since the death of thinker Abdul Ala Maududi in 1977, Pakistani Islamism has failed to produce any commanding leaders of the stature of Sudan’s Hassan al-Turabi or Algeria’s Abbasi Madani.¹³

In October 2001 India admitted that, in an attempt to contain the spread of the Taliban, for two years it had covertly assisted the UF, providing technical assistance, defence equipment and medical aid. India’s involvement began shortly after the hijacking of one of its domestic airliners by Pakistani-backed terrorists in December 1999. With 155 passengers and crew on board the plane was forced to fly to Kandahar. In a humiliating deal with the Taliban, India secured the release of the hostages and aircraft in exchange for three Kashmiri terrorists held in an Indian jail and an undisclosed sum of money. For over a year the Indian army had been running a field hospital near Farkhor on the Afghan border south of Dushanbe, where UF commander Ahmad Shah Masud died. India also reportedly supplied the UF with high-altitude warfare equipment worth \$8–10 million through Tajikistan. A handful of Indian defence ‘advisors’ were reportedly based in Tajikistan to assist the UF in operations against the Taliban, and helicopter technicians from the secretive aviation research centre operated by the Research and Intelligence Wing, India’s overseas information gathering agency, helped repair the UF’s Soviet Mi-17 and Mi-35 attack helicopters.¹⁴ India also purchased Russian helicopters from Moscow to pass onto the UF. There were unconfirmed reports of Indian Special Forces assisting the UF forces¹⁵ and New Delhi providing cash grants to the UF via its embassy in Tehran.

Indian–Iranian cooperation against the Taliban was codified during Indian Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee’s visit to Tehran in April 2001 with the signing of a new strategic pact. Had it not been for US military involvement in Afghanistan in October 2001, India was expected to provide further

assistance to anti-Taliban forces via Iran, and to fight Taliban-sponsored insurgents operating in Jammu and Kashmir. Remnants of the Taliban and al-Qaida are understood still to be active in Kashmir, the northern tip of which borders Afghanistan.

The Taliban's treatment of Hindus provided further motivation for Indian actions against them. From May 2000 until their fall, the Taliban ordered all Hindus in the areas they controlled to wear a piece of yellow cloth to, as they put it, protect them against Taliban religious police tasked with ensuring that Muslim men attended the mosque and did not cut their beards. Hindus and Muslims were prohibited from sharing the same house. These practices, observers argued, were similar to the German Nazi party's treatment of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s.

The Taliban had been a serious concern for Iran since they appeared in 1994. Iran initially feared the Sunni force was a Western-backed enterprise intent on ridding Afghanistan of the Shi'a – the branch of Islam that is dominant in Iran. After the Taliban's success in taking Herat in 1995, Iran commented that they had been 'conceived by America, funded by Saudi Arabia, and logistically supported by Pakistan' – effectively saying that the emergence of the Taliban was a US, Saudi and Pakistani plot to crush the Shi'a in Afghanistan in order to contain Iran.¹⁶ Iran was at the forefront of efforts to provide weaponry to anti-Taliban factions. In 1998 the two countries came to the brink of war following the murder of Iranian diplomats and journalists during the Taliban's seizure of Mazar-i Sharif. In September, Iran mobilised around 200,000 troops along its border with Afghanistan, leading to minor skirmishes. Relations thawed in November 1999 with the reopening of the border, but Iran continued to provide military assistance to anti-Taliban factions. Assistance extended to airlifting freshly trained troops from Iran to neighbouring Tajikistan.¹⁷

In addition to their common efforts to counter the Taliban, Iran is understood to have sought India's assistance to expand training of its own warship and missile boat crews and to provide simulators for ships and submarines. In April 2001 India's Ministry of External Affairs stated that India needed to enhance ties with Iran, including defence ties, to ensure 'a safe supply route of energy needs from the Middle East'.¹⁸ This statement was probably referring in part to New Delhi's interest in concluding an agreement with Tehran to construct a lucrative oil pipeline that would pass through Pakistan to ship natural gas from the Caspian Sea region. India may need to be cautious over how close its relationship with Iran becomes when considering its relations with Israel. The Israelis are unlikely to be happy about India providing training to their strategic rival. India has a delicate balancing act to play if it wishes to keep on good terms with both parties.

Prior to Washington's military involvement in Afghanistan in late 2001, Moscow was the principal coordinator of the anti-Taliban coalition that included Iran, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and China. Russia believed that the Taliban were training and sheltering guerrillas fighting for independence

in Chechnya and was intent on preventing the spread of these forces and their way of thinking to its Central Asian neighbours. At the forefront of efforts to coordinate the response of regional states to 'Afghan terrorism' was the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov, who held talks with Iran, India and China on ways to work together. In addition, an India–Russia working group was established in October 2000 following President Putin's visit to India. The group meets regularly to coordinate strategy.

Prior to 11 September the proxy war in Afghanistan looked set to escalate, with the regional powers becoming increasingly involved in an attempt to prevent the fledgling UF collapsing, and Pakistan continuing to play a crucial role in the Taliban's military campaign. The assassination of the UF leader Ahmad Shah Masud on 9 September 2001 threatened the survival of the fragile alliance of rival factions Masud had succeeded in creating only months before. Masud's attempt to mount an effective opposition to the Taliban had been complicated by political differences among the Shi'a factions. By early 2001 a political accord between Afghanistan's Shi'a forces had been reached and an anti-Taliban United Front, led by Masud until his death, established. Masud was succeeded by General Muhammad Fahim, who faced a tough battle to keep the alliance together and avoid defeat at the hands of the Taliban.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September significantly changed the strategic landscape. There was a sudden increase in the number of countries willing to join the campaign to see the Taliban defeated – although some nations, including Iran, refused to support US-led military action against the Taliban. The prospect of the Americans becoming militarily involved in Afghanistan gave General Muhammed Fahim's UF an immediate and unexpected incentive to remain united. In addition to the prospect of military involvement by the US, the Taliban lost the backing of its key regional ally, Pakistan. This marked a dramatic change in Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan. An analysis of the depth of Pakistani involvement in Afghanistan prior to 11 September reveals the dilemma the country faced in making the decision to side with America in its war against terrorism.

Pakistan's military support for the Taliban was the key reason for their striking military success during the 1990s. Islamabad maintained and operated many of the Taliban's aircraft and tanks, and provided the Taliban with training, planning, advice, weapons, ammunition and logistical support. Military advisors attached to Islamabad's Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate gave assistance.¹⁹ Pakistan's assistance was critical in the Taliban's July–August 1998 defeat of the opposition Jonbesh-i Melli Islami (National Islamic Movement) headed by rivals Rashid Dostum and Abdul Malik.

The Taliban benefited significantly from the flow of volunteers from Pakistan's madrassas. Hard-line Pakistani Islamic organisations were keen to provide personnel to fight alongside the Taliban in their fight against Indian and Iranian-backed anti-Taliban forces. From the Taliban's inception in

1994, the Pakistan-based Jamiat-ul Ulema-i Islami (JUI) organisation and its madrassa network provided thousands of generally ill-trained youths to be deployed in assault roles, with Afghan Taliban moving in later to secure areas.²⁰ By mid-2001 it was estimated that around 30 per cent of the Taliban military comprised Pakistani and Arab units.

There appeared to be no shortage of Pakistanis willing to fight for the Taliban, nor of finances from abroad to fund the madrassas supplying these fighters. Iftikhar Malik, writing in *Asian Survey*, noted that Pakistan's predominantly youthful population is vulnerable to the appeal of fundamentalist madrassas because 'extreme economic and social pressures have been pushing these young people to the extremes'. He added that 'The unemployed and disillusioned youths have become their willing recruits and the madrassahs have been offering a quick fix in the name of Islamization and a Taliban-led Afghanistan'.²¹ The popularity of the religious madrassas is also due to the fact that many rural areas lack public schools. Madrassas are located throughout Pakistan and provide their students with a free education, food, housing and clothing – attractive for those living in poor areas. Madrassas are understood to be partly funded by non-governmental organisations in the Persian Gulf States. Jessica Stern writes in *Foreign Affairs* that while the business of 'jihad' continues to attract foreign investors, mostly wealthy Arabs in the Persian Gulf region and members of the Pakistani diaspora, it will be increasingly difficult for Pakistan to shut them down. Without state supervision, madrassas are free to preach a narrow and violent version of Islam.²² Pakistani officials estimate that 10–15 per cent of the country's tens of thousands of madrassas encourage their graduates to fulfil their 'spiritual obligations' by fighting against Hindus in Kashmir or against Muslims of other sects in Pakistan and Afghanistan.²³ The jihad mindset is partly a hangover from the Afghan war against Soviet occupation. During this time the US and Saudi Arabia, with Pakistan's assistance, supported the jihad in Afghanistan with considerable success. Reining back the madrassas' support for the Taliban was never going to be easy.

Pakistan's close relationship with the Taliban created security problems within Pakistan. The Taliban's interpretation of Islam encouraged hostility towards Shi'a Muslims in Pakistan and the rise of militant anti-Shi'a groups. Sunni groups such as Sipah-i Sahaba and Lashkar-i Jhangvi, which are active mainly in the Punjab, have strong links with the Taliban. The movements share madrassas, camps, bureaucracies and operatives. Both groups are responsible for terrorist attacks against Shi'a in Pakistan. Islamabad has followed a contradictory policy, with the armed forces aware of the presence of these groups but condoning their actions, while the Interior Ministry has tried to combat terrorism within Pakistan. While General Musharraf recognises that the madrassas are partly responsible for sectarian violence, it is difficult to espouse jihad in Kashmir without inadvertently fuelling internal strife.

Prior to the attacks on New York and Washington, Pakistan insisted it would not go along with what it saw as a Western campaign against the

Taliban. Pakistan also argued that the UN sanctions imposed against the Taliban after their refusal to hand over Osama Bin Laden should not affect 'religious volunteers' fighting alongside the Taliban. Islamabad's reluctance to comply with UN initiatives was made stronger by what it perceived as preferential treatment granted by the US and its allies towards India. Washington's closer ties to New Delhi, together with the lifting of many of the sanctions imposed on India following the 1998 nuclear tests, did not instil an appetite for cooperation in Islamabad. Many in Pakistan resented the West's perceived double standards. At the very most, Pakistan's role in Afghanistan looked set to become more covert, but Islamabad seemed unlikely to walk away from the major investment that it had made since 1994. It took a major event, 9/11, for Pakistan officially at least to end its support for the Taliban in return for the lifting of US sanctions and provision of much needed economic aid.

Before 9/11 there was a fear that the proxy war in Afghanistan would spiral out of control and drag regional countries like Iran, India and Pakistan deeper into the conflict, fuelling internal strife in Pakistan as hard-line religious madrassas committed acts of sectarian violence. A complete victory for the Taliban would threaten internal instability in Pakistan, and there were concerns about the spread of Taliban thinking throughout the region. Although the Taliban may now be defeated, pockets of their supporters and of al-Qaida are believed to remain in Afghanistan, and many fled across the porous border to tribal areas in neighbouring Pakistan. While the need for India and Iran to provide military support to counter Taliban forces has declined significantly since the UN- and US-led coalition defeated the Taliban, they will retain a strong interest in Afghanistan's future in view of their own security concerns.

Questions surround Iran's long-term strategy towards Afghanistan in view of the fact that Tehran, now deemed part of an 'axis of evil', has little reason to wish Washington's endeavours well and could turn to covert support for factions destabilising Afghanistan.²⁴ Some analysts saw the return of the Afghan radical Gulbuddin Hikmetyar from Iran to Afghanistan in mid-2002 as a sign that Tehran was attempting to influence developments. With a proven capacity for organisation and planning that sets him apart from the reclusive, semi-educated Mullah Omar, Hikmetyar has long believed in shortcuts to power by means of coups involving allied elements within Kabul rather than a protracted military strategy from without.²⁵ He was involved in coup attempts in 1974, 1975, 1990 and 1992. There are also unconfirmed reports that following the fall of the Taliban there was Iranian infiltration in southern and western Afghanistan, with the governor of Herat, Ismail Khan, purportedly turning to the West for financial and military aid.²⁶ Added to this is the prospect of US policy in the region causing Tehran to feel increasingly uneasy about its own security. With the US now in Iraq, Iran faces US forces on both its western and eastern borders, a situation in which Tehran could be excused a degree of paranoia.

Pakistan's relationship with the Middle East

Pakistan's has no one ally in the Middle East to compare with the close political and military relationship India has with Israel. Pakistan's military relations with Middle Eastern countries are for the most part more peripheral, involving small arms transfers, joint training, bilateral economic agreements and no shortage of rhetoric, with fellow Muslim countries issuing joint statements on Kashmir and the Palestinian issue (economic ties are discussed in Chapter 6). Key military links include Saudi Arabia's interest in purchasing the Agosta 90B submarine built in Pakistan under licence, and reports of Qatar being interested in purchasing the midget submarine made in Pakistan with French assistance. In addition Pakistan has trained Jordanian pilots, and during the 1980s Pakistan had two divisions of troops based in Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani Navy sends a taskforce to the Persian Gulf annually as part of a goodwill visit to a number of countries and it conducts exercises with the Saudi Arabian Navy. On the diplomatic front, Pakistan has had good relations with Middle Eastern Muslim countries since its creation in 1947. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry views relations with these nations as a cornerstone of foreign policy.

Pakistan is closest to Saudi Arabia, with which it has a strong social and political bond. Many Pakistani migrant workers are employed in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. Successful Pakistani entrepreneurs working in the Middle East have returned to invest their money in Pakistan. Millions of dollars flow each year from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, both directly and indirectly.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are said to have cooled shortly after General Musharraf's coup in October 1999. This was not due to Saudi disapproval of a military regime toppling a democracy: the last military government led by General Zia ul-Haq in the 1970 and 1980s was supported whole-heartedly by Saudi Arabia. Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted by General Musharraf, has a very close personal relationship with members of the Saudi Royal Family, in particular with Crown Prince Abdullah.²⁷ This was highlighted when Nawaz Sharif and his family went into exile to Saudi Arabia in December 2000 under the pretence that Sharif required 'medical treatment'. By allowing Nawaz Sharif to flee to Saudi Arabia, Musharraf succeeded in removing a major source of opposition, since effective leadership of Sharif's Muslim League was likely to be lacking at least in the short run. These pressures on Saudi-Pakistani relations have not prevented the two countries continuing with joint naval exercises.

Pakistan's relations with Iran have been undermined by their backing of rival groups in Afghanistan and by Tehran's growing ties with New Delhi. This is in contrast to the 1970s when, in the days of the former Shah of Iran, Tehran permitted Pakistan to station fighter aircraft in its territory in order to provide Pakistan with 'strategic depth' by keeping Pakistani

aircraft out of reach of an Indian surprise attack. This agreement is no longer in existence. In December 1999 Musharraf visited Iran in an attempt to improve relations. Both sides outlined a desire to lessen the threat of conflict in the region by urging the establishment of a broad-based, multi-ethnic government in Afghanistan. In September 2000 Iran and Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding calling for an intensification of the fight against drug-traffickers, decisive action against bandits and terrorists, full implementation of the agreement on the extradition of criminals, and a swift opening of border markets. Relations between Tehran and Islamabad did warm post-9/11. Tehran was one of the capitals visited by President Musharraf en route to the US and UN in the second week of November 2001. As Iran was supporting UF and was one of the 'six plus two' nations discussing the composition of a post-Taliban government this visit was very significant. One important outcome was the creation of a joint commission to develop a framework for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The low-key nature of Islamabad's relations with the Middle East by comparison with India's could be seen in General Musharraf's visit to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan during his tour of the Middle East in January 2001. Pakistan signed several agreements with each state to promote bilateral cooperation in agriculture, trade, science and technology, information and culture. In the military sphere, agreements were concluded for the sale of Pakistani medium and light arms and ammunition, but there was nothing on the scale of the Phalcon radar systems that India plans to purchase from Israel.

One reason for the absence of large-scale arms transfers is that Pakistan and her Arab allies do not have that much to offer each other. Pakistan's Arab allies lack the advanced military industrial complex that Israel possesses and can offer only the machine guns, rifles, anti-tank rockets, mortars and ammunition which Pakistan can produce itself. Many Arab countries have traditionally been reliant on external sources for their heavy arms such as aircraft, tanks and ships (historically, principal suppliers have included Washington, Moscow and, for the Persian Gulf states, France). Israel is unique in its development of a significant indigenous arms industry, partly made possible by the large number of sophisticated joint US–Israeli defence programmes through which Israel can export technologically advanced military equipment.

The advanced weapon systems Pakistan has developed – ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons technology – cannot be exported without the risk that the international community will implement crippling economic sanctions and ostracise Islamabad. Pakistan has publicly stated that it intends to adhere to international treaties and agreements prohibiting the transfer of nuclear and missile-related technologies. This is not to say that there is no demand for such material among Pakistan's Arab allies. Syria at least would like to procure Pakistani-built ballistic missiles to augment its existing short-

range missile systems. Despite Pakistan's policy of not exporting missile-related technologies to the Middle East, Islamabad may inadvertently be assisting Middle Eastern missile programmes, in particular those of Iran and Syria, through its close links with North Korea.

Islamabad's indirect assistance for Iranian and Syrian ballistic missile programmes

Although Pakistan is not believed to be exporting missile-related technologies directly to the Middle East, it has worked closely with North Korea on the development of the medium-range Ghauri ballistic missile, which has probably led to Pakistani test data and technological know-how entering the Middle East via North Korea. Pyongyang has played a major role in the development of Iranian and Syrian missile programmes. Both the Iranian 1,300 km range Shahab-3 missile and Pakistan's three variants of the Ghauri missile are based on North Korea's 1,500 km range Nodong missile. The three Ghauri variants are the Ghauri I/Hatf V (1,500km range tested in April 1998 and May 2002), the Ghauri II/Hatf VI (2,000–2,300 km range tested in April 1999), and the 3,000 km range Ghauri III which went through static engine tests in late 1999 and is reportedly ready for flight testing. Arguably Iran, North Korea and Pakistan may have an undeclared multinational missile programme, with countries like Syria and Libya on the sidelines occasionally acquiring a share of these technology transfers.

This situation benefits all parties concerned. North Korea can officially adhere to its moratorium on missile testing while at the same time testing its missile systems overseas. Meanwhile countries like Iran and Pakistan gain a tremendous boost to their missile programmes that would take years longer to develop without external assistance. The occasional missile flight tests by each country are not enough to warrant international pressure (sanctions or diplomatic isolation) but are still enough to advance their respective missile programmes at a steady pace.

Pakistan's engine test of the Ghauri III missile may incorporate North Korean Taepodong rocket technology – the long-range missile that North Korea launched in August 1998 under the pretence that it had tried to launch a satellite. Considering that North Korea's Nodong missile technology has been advanced by Iran and Pakistan, Taepodong technology may have already found its way into Pakistan and could shortly reach Iran, if it has not already done so. Tehran's development of a space launch vehicle for satellites would benefit from Taepodong technology. While Iran may be legitimately developing a satellite launch vehicle for peaceful purposes, the technology could also be used to develop a long-range missile. With no missile defence system in place to protect western Europe, Iran's possession of long-range missiles capable of striking key western European cities could prove a powerful tool for political manipulation in the event of a crisis erupting between the West and Tehran.

Although it is hard to say to what extent missile technology transfers among Pakistan, Iran, Syria and Libya via North Korea have taken place, it is generally recognised that missiles based on North Korean designs are in the possession of these countries.²⁸ By April 2001 Pakistan's continued use of North Korean technology to develop ballistic missiles came under question as Musharraf wished to concentrate the country's scarce resources on the solid-fuel Shaheen (Chinese-based missile) programme and not the liquid-fuel Ghauri (North Korean-based) programme. The Shaheen missile (of which there are two variants, the 700–800 km range Shaheen I/Hatf IV, successfully flight-tested in April 1999, and the 2,500 km range Shaheen II/Hatf VII) is seen by the government and military as more flexible and reliable than the Ghauri. Unlike the liquid-fuel Ghauri missiles, the solid-fuel Shaheens do not require a number of hours of preparation for launch, and they are easier to maintain once deployed in the field.²⁹ In addition solid-fuel missiles are relatively easy to move, thus making them simpler to hide and shelter from a pre-emptive attack. Once liquid-fuel missiles are fuelled up they have to be fired within a short time-frame, otherwise the fuel corrodes the missile, rendering the system useless. Off-loading liquid fuel is not a practical way to avoid corrosion. The Shaheen missiles, however, already contain the fuel and do not suffer from rapid corrosion. It is suspected that Pakistan only sought North Korean missile assistance, following then Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's visit to Pyongyang in December 1993, as a stop-gap means of procuring intermediate range nuclear-capable ballistic missiles until such time as the Chinese-based missile programme came to fruition.

A gradual movement by Pakistan away from North Korean missile technology could slow down the pace of test/development data supplied by Islamabad to Pyongyang, and in turn slow down the undeclared North Korean multinational missile programme (for instance the Iranian Shahab-3 missile, based on the Nodong). Countries like Iran and Syria still have access to limited Chinese and Russian missile technology and therefore systems based on these designs are unlikely to be affected.

The 'Islamic bomb': repercussions for the two regions

Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests were greeted by Middle Eastern countries as an achievement not only for Islamabad but for the Islamic countries as a whole. Among the first to congratulate Pakistan was Iran's Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi, who flew into Islamabad within days of the test to hail Pakistan's development of an 'Islamic bomb'. In many countries across the Middle East the fact that a Muslim country had successfully developed a nuclear weapon was welcomed in newspapers and sermons. Initially Pakistan talked about its achievement as an 'Islamic bomb', but according to some commentators it was quite different by the turn of the century, with Islamabad viewing its nuclear capability primarily as a weapon to deter India. For

Pakistan, the nuclear weapon is vital to compensate for its inferior conventional capability vis-à-vis India. Islamabad refuses to sign up to India's proposed no-first-use of nuclear weapons pact since this would undermine the strategic benefit Islamabad's nuclear capability provides in the face of the conventional imbalance between the two.

It is believed that behind the warm welcome Middle Eastern countries gave to Pakistan's nuclear tests there was a feeling of jealousy or nervousness, particularly in Iran.³⁰ There were reports of irritants in Iran–Pakistan relations, and the Iranian press expressed envy, but any rivalry between Iran and Pakistan is political, not military. It is unlikely that Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons is spurring Iran, or any other Middle Eastern country, to develop their capability beyond any aspirations they already held. One country which is particularly concerned about the arrival of the 'Islamic bomb' is Israel. The possession of an operational nuclear capability by an Arab state or Iran could drastically alter the Middle East's military balance.

Conclusion

An assessment of India and Pakistan's key military and security links to the Middle East assists our understanding of how these two regions function and in some cases foster strong relations among unusual bedfellows. India's close military and security relationship with Israel eclipses that of Pakistan and her Arab allies not because the latter lack political will, but because India and Israel, as technologically advanced countries, have more to offer each other. Israel's advanced intelligence-gathering network and extensive arms industry, combined with India's need for sophisticated weapon systems and intelligence to counter 'Islamic terrorists' operating in Kashmir, has led India to move closer to Israel at the expense of its relations with the Arab states.

The need to prevent the Taliban gaining complete control of Afghanistan threatened a deepening India–Pakistan proxy war. The sudden involvement of the US-led coalition forces following 9/11 averted the prospect of the Taliban gaining complete control of Afghanistan, and with it the urgent need for India and Iran to pool resources in order to stave off the collapse of the UF. Nevertheless Tehran, New Delhi and Islamabad are likely to maintain a strong interest in Afghanistan in view of their security concerns.

Although the Pakistani government probably did not intend it, Islamabad is linked into an undeclared, multinational missile programme involving Iran and Syria, with North Korea at its centre. Despite uncertainty as to whether Pakistan will ultimately jettison the liquid-fuelled North Korean-based Ghauri missiles in favour of the Chinese-based Shaheen systems, Islamabad – at least for the near term – looks set to continue inadvertently to aid Iranian and Syrian missile programmes. Aside from Pakistani ballistic ambitions, Islamabad's links to its Arab allies revolve around joint military

exercises and the provision of light and medium arms. The countries maintain strong political relations, although these have at times been under pressure (for instance Saudi Arabia's unhappiness with the ousting of Nawaz Sharif by General Musharraf). Pakistan has one major card to play in its relations with India, Iran and Afghanistan, and that is the proposed Indo-Iranian land-based oil pipeline. Pakistan stands to collect millions of dollars in transit fees and could use the project as a bargaining chip in political relations with these regional countries.

The patchwork of South Asia–Middle East relations provides a fresh perspective from which to study the two regions. Studying their interconnected workings could assist policy-makers and analysts to devise solutions to security concerns. It is an approach that could also be of great value when applied to other regions of concern.

Notes

- 1 'India's Middle East Quandary', *Borneo Bulletin*, 22 October 2000.
- 2 'India Buys Green Pine Radars for Missile Defence', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 July 2002, p. 2. Israel originally developed the Green Pine radar for its Arrow ballistic missile defence system. Although there have been reports of India being interested in purchasing Arrow, New Delhi is likely to use the Green Pine system with the Russian anti-tactical ballistic missile defence system Antey-500 SAM (an export version of the S-300VM). The Indo-Russian Antey-500 contract was signed in July 2001. The Antey-500 is understood to be capable of intercepting missiles with a range of 2,500 km.
- 3 Rajat Pandit, 'India to Get Israeli Radars', *The Times of India*, 4 April 2002 (www.timesofindia.com)
- 4 The substantive part of the Indo-Russian strategic partnership signed in October 2000 was a \$3 billion arms agreement that included the licensed production in India of 140 Sukhoi SU-30MKI fighters, the purchase of 310 T-90 battle tanks, and the acquisition of the Russian aircraft carrier *Admiral Gorshkov*. According to the Russian newspaper *Vremya Novostei*, the Russian defence industry was negotiating contracts with India worth \$5–7 billion that would include air defence systems, rocket and conventional artillery, more aircraft, cruise missiles and other arms.
- 5 Rahul Bedi and Steve Rodan, 'US Government "Not Opposed" to Sale of Phalcon to India', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 January 2002, p. 5.
- 6 'India Buys Green Pine Radars for Missile Defence', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 10 July 2002, p. 2.
- 7 Barbara Opall, 'Israel Sees US–China Tensions as a Boon for Indian Defence Sales', *Defence News*, 23 April 2001, p. 4.
- 8 *Jane's Sentinel South Asia Security Assessment*, April–September 2002, p. 211.
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8 Muslim South East Asia and the Middle East

C. W. Watson

I shall be arguing in this chapter that strong as their commitment to Islam is, the Muslim states of South East Asia – Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei – rarely translate that commitment into anything but nominal support for international Muslim positions, and that their membership of the Organisation for the Islamic Conference and their links with the Muslim Middle East betoken more gestural and symbolic politics than anything substantive. Where the governments of the countries are likely to take Muslim issues seriously is in their immediate implications for domestic politics – which in fact often means playing down international commitments for fear of encouraging potentially destabilising fervour at home – or in the local context of neighbouring South East Asian states – for example the Philippines – when they feel they can play a positive role in helping their fellow ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) members to resolve matters they regard as essentially internal to those countries. The argument is not a new one,¹ but it is worth reiterating and it still holds good today. However, while stressing continuity it is important not to be misled into assuming that policy-making and the thinking underlying it have remained static. There have been major changes in the attitudes of the governments of Muslim countries in South East Asia to the place of Islam in the polity. Consequently, the general description of continuity requires some modification.

In this context two points need to be made immediately: first, there is now far greater scope for gesture politics than there has been before – in terms of cultural exchanges and educational initiatives, not to mention experiments in Islamic financial institutions; and second, globally spread images and institutions have led to a greater visibility of Muslim cultural phenomena in civil society, ranging from the adoption of new dress codes for women through a proliferation of prayer and study groups to the establishment of new legal institutions and more exposure of Muslim ideas in the media. It is tempting to regard this greater visibility of Islam as an indication of a rising level of Muslim political awareness which must inevitably have ramifications for South East Asia's links with the Middle East, hence casting doubt on the thesis of continuity. This temptation must be resisted since, as I suggest below, it ignores the enduring influence of the specific character of the

historical development of Muslim practice in the region, and fails to understand that what drives the politics of the countries of South East Asia is local and regional issues not larger global ones, at least not unless they have immediate economic consequences. To appreciate these points we need to see Muslim institutions in South East Asia in historical context.

The background

There exist numerous excellent short accounts of the nature of Islamic society in South East Asia.² The information they provide is too detailed to summarise here but it is worth extracting some salient points, especially in relation to Indonesia and Malaysia. It is generally agreed that the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam, which had become entrenched throughout the archipelagic world of South East Asia by the end of the seventeenth century, had originally been brought to the region by Indian Muslims – merchants and itinerant scholars being the 'vectors'³ – in the thirteenth century, and had gradually spread over an area reaching from Burma in the west to pockets of Cambodia and the Philippines in the east. It used to be common to speak of Islamic beliefs and practices being layered upon pre-Islamic culture and custom or syncretically commingling with the latter. Modern scholarship tends to reject those interpretations, predicated as they are on implicit metaphorical tropes which actually obscure the process by which Islamic beliefs and cultures became established, and instead prefers to regard what has taken place, and indeed is still taking place, as the gradual accretion of new practices and the creative development of new ways of thinking about theological and moral concepts.

Whatever interpretative schema one adopts, it is generally acknowledged that from the time of Islam's first reception into the region the question of what constitutes Islamic orthodoxy has been a matter of dispute among its followers. For example, from the very beginnings of the spread of Islam in the archipelago there have existed several Sufi brotherhoods, each with its distinctive ritual practice. Even more clearly visible, however, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, have been the rifts arising from clashes between a succession of reformist movements – often drawing their inspiration from Arabic example – proclaiming their own orthodoxy and taking issue with those co-religionists whom they have regarded as superstitious or ignorant. The subsequent confrontations among the various groupings have characterised the development of Muslim institutions in the region, and indeed continue to colour the nature of Muslim society in South East Asia even today. Thus one finds, as in almost all other Muslim countries of which I am aware, that it is diversity rather than homogeneity which strikes the observer. The apparent uniformity of religious celebrations and calendrical rituals belies variation in individual practice and belief.

This diversity finds expression in everyday culture and politics. For example, there are numerous educational institutions operating at all levels,

primary up to university, run by Muslim organisations of different persuasions and inclinations. This is most obviously the case in Indonesia where religious schools range from those following advanced science and technology curricula to those which teach the rudiments of ritual prayer and practice. It used to be claimed that the former type of academic institution was confined to the establishments of the urban-based Muhammadiyah organisation, which was first set up in Java in the second decade of the twentieth century and now has a strong network of modernist establishments throughout the archipelago, making it the most significant non-political Muslim organisation in the country.⁴ Although this characterisation is still largely accurate, recently it has been acknowledged that many of the rural institutions of higher education in Java, even those associated with exclusive observance of the orthodoxy of the Shafi'i school – which are often loosely clustered into the Nadhlatul Ulama (NU, Association of Ulama) – have also made strides in teaching a modern curriculum, and the divisions are not so hard and fast as they were. However the old rivalries between supporters of the two persuasions remain deeply embedded.⁵

Divisions of opinion within the *ummat* (Muslim community) find their most tangible expression in the formation of different Muslim political parties. In the present Indonesian political scene there are about twenty official parties. In Malaysia there is only one confessional party but there are several political organisations, and in the Philippines there are major divisions among the Muslim groups in the south. When speaking of such differences in political affiliation it is important to bear in mind – and again this seems to be characteristic of all Muslim societies today – that the political culture of Muslim parties has developed alongside a secular nationalism to which many devout Muslims have subscribed in preference to joining a confessional party. The principal political figures in both Indonesia and Malaysia immediately following independence, for example, preferred to take that path.⁶ More relevant to our discussion of foreign policy and international relations, however, is the point that in addition to individual politicians making this choice, and arguing strongly for it, the civil service, in particular its upper echelons, has largely been staffed by people who, even though they regard themselves as devout Muslims, share the nationalist perception that the principles which determine policy should be the pragmatic ones of national interest rather than abstract theocratic positions or an ill-defined notion of Islamic politics. In short, although Muslims, and indeed Muslim political parties, may have Islamic agenda in relation to the institutionalisation of Islamic moral and legal principles, the political culture of the state (not to mention that of its guardians, the armed forces) in most arenas, and especially in those relating to foreign policy and economic development, has been pragmatic and nationalist, and this orientation has by and large been endorsed by the electorate.

The rock-solid nationalist culture of the state needs, however, to be balanced against the Muslim colouring of several civil organisations, particularly student organisations, which are increasingly making demands of the

state. In general the demands are voiced vaguely, in terms of making the nation more Islamic without any programmatic detail of what that might entail. Sometimes, however, the demands are couched along the lines of the need for greater solidarity with other Muslim nations and hostility to the West. How the state can appear to respond sympathetically to those demands but in practice maintain its nationalist orientation is the subject of this chapter.

Political relations between South East Asia and the Middle East

When the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was first established in 1972 Indonesia was a lukewarm participant in its affairs. Indeed it attended the opening conference not as a full member or signatory.⁷ The reason for its reluctance to commit itself to the new organisation arose from a number of considerations, some driven by concerns of senior policy-makers, some by the collective position of the armed forces towards what they regarded as Islamic militancy and its threat to internal stability. The armed forces distrusted the intentions of Muslim political parties in Indonesia as a consequence of having had to deal with a series of rebellions in the 1950s led by Muslim leaders demanding the establishment of an Islamic state, and also because of the complicity of senior Muslim politicians a few years later in regional rebellions directed against central authority. It was a distrust which Sukarno seemed to share and he was quite happy to exclude the modernist-reformist party, Masjumi, from further participation in the political arena. On Suharto's accession to power in 1966 Muslims had expected to be rehabilitated, but their hopes were frustrated since Suharto and his senior advisers in the military continued to distrust the older generation of Muslim politicians.⁸ Only in the mid-1980s did Suharto shift his stance – and that was largely because he was seeking allies in his escalating confrontation with the army. Coincidentally a younger generation emerging at that time from within the army was also prepared to take a more relaxed attitude to Islam, with the result that there appeared to arise with the ranks of the armed forces a split between those who were allegedly 'green' (the colour of Islam) and those who were 'red and white' (the colours of the national flag). This is, however, a relatively recent development. At the time of the formation of the OIC the armed forces were united in their opposition to the perceived Islamic threat. What the armed forces feared was that any apparent shift on the part of the government in the direction of a more sympathetic position towards Muslim ideology – and signatories of the OIC spoke of themselves as Muslim states – might resuscitate the dormant ambitions of those who still wanted to campaign for the establishment of an Islamic state. The same fear affected the politicians. A hard-fought battle over precisely this issue had taken place around the time of independence in 1945, and although it had been won by those who, mindful of the concerns of the sizeable non-Muslim minority, had argued that Indonesia should be a

religious state but not an Islamic one,⁹ echoes of that battle continued to rumble.

A further issue also concerned the politicians. From its earliest existence as an independent state the foreign policy which Indonesia had adopted was one of neutrality and non-alignment,¹⁰ which reached its high point in the famous Asia–Africa conference in Bandung in 1955. It is true that as the Cold War developed Indonesia seemed to be moving rapidly to the left and into the arms of first the USSR and then China, though it could be argued that this was a product of American hostility to non-alignment rather than a systematically thought-through policy. It is also true that after the accession of Suharto there was a dramatic shift of alignment to the West, which was strongly endorsed if not engineered by the military and which the electorate – in the absence of the left opposition which had been wiped out in the massacres of 1965/66 – welcomed. Despite this swing in the political pendulum, however, the policy of neutrality, non-alignment and independence continued and continues to be a guiding principle determining foreign policy: Indonesia wants to maintain friendly relations with states of whatever religious or political persuasion, its only criteria for friendship being that the other party should refrain from critical comment on matters internal to Indonesia, and that it should not expect Indonesia to refrain from engaging in a similar way with any other party.¹¹ Seen in this light the decision to remain somewhat aloof from the OIC is very clear. Indonesia wished to preserve its neutrality.

This did not preclude it playing any sort of role in the OIC, but it sent the clear message that it regarded itself as in no way bound to an OIC position and that its scope for operating in other arenas – in ASEAN for example or in the bloc of non-aligned nations – would in no way be constrained by participation in the OIC.¹² On the other hand, as the OIC has developed over the years Indonesia, while not playing a leading role, has found that it can play a useful part, especially in regional South East Asian affairs which have an Islamic dimension. For example, it currently chairs the OIC sub-committee responsible for negotiations between the Moro liberation movement and the government of the Philippines, a role which it seems to be playing very effectively.¹³ At a personal level, former President Abdurrahman offered to mediate between the hard-line MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) and the government.¹⁴ In addition Indonesia regularly supports the statements of the OIC condemning Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Overall, however, as far as Indonesia's political relations with the Middle East are concerned the OIC is a less important forum than OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries), where it is prepared to play an important role, taking on the chairmanship of that organisation, for example, and participating vigorously in the international discussions. It might well be argued that Indonesia has in fact carefully calculated that it is capable of playing a more significant role in negotiations with its Middle Eastern allies by working through OPEC than through the OIC.

Malaysia, on the other hand, has always looked more positively at the impact which the OIC could have on global politics and on its own role within it.¹⁵ In addition to hosting meetings and drafting statements, Malaysia has found ways of using its relations with member nations of the OIC to its own immediate advantage. In the early 1970s Malaysia was facing a challenge from the Philippines in the form of the latter's claims to the territory of Sabah in east Malaysia on the island of Borneo. This was a difficult issue and risked escalating into armed conflict. The Secretary General of the OIC at the time was the former Malaysian Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman.¹⁶ It has been alleged that using his position he approached the governments of Libya and Saudi Arabia and won their material support for the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which indirectly brought advantage to Malaysia since the Philippine government was thereafter deflected from its claim to Sabah and compelled to devote all its energies to dealing with the MNLF. Subsequently, the issue of the southern Philippines became a regular item on the agenda of the OIC. This led to the Tripoli Agreement of 1976, as a result of which the Philippines was forced to enter into negotiations with the MNLF, and to the threat of an oil blockade in 1980 (after the Philippines appeared to be renegeing on earlier agreements) under which it was forced to make further concessions.¹⁷ The OIC has thus played a significant part in attempts to resolve the problems in the southern Philippines and given its constructive support to the Moros through brokering agreements with successive governments of the Philippines. Major problems persist;¹⁸ the OIC keeps a watching brief on developments and remains heavily involved.¹⁹

Recently, however, Malaysia must have felt that it had reaped a whirlwind where it had sown since the OIC's encouragement of the Muslims of the southern Philippines has led to serious divisions within that community. Although, for example, the Ramos government in 1996 had appeared to make a breakthrough in negotiations with the MNLF (again brokered by the OIC),²⁰ the agreements reached led to the strengthening of the resistance of the MILF (a breakaway faction of the MNLF) to any compromise with the Philippine government. In July 2000 the MILF reportedly received \$3 million dollars from Osama Bin Laden for weapons it intended to purchase from North Korea.²¹ Furthermore, other factions have emerged, such as the Abu Sayaff movement which seem to have no compunction about using terrorist tactics – to the point of taking Malaysian Muslims hostage and menacing Malaysian tourist resorts – to achieve their aims. Most observers recognise that despite their claims to be fighting on behalf of an Islamic cause the Abu Sayaff are less Muslim militants than piratical terrorists. Nonetheless they have succeeded in extracting \$15 million from Malaysia and Libya.²²

Although it is the religious dimensions to these issues which gain international publicity, it would appear that a major factor contributing to the discontent of Muslims in the southern Philippines is the dire economic

situation and high level of youth unemployment. In such circumstances young men provide a potential pool for recruitment into organisations which appear to be able to provide for their economic security at the same time as offering them a cause to fight for. It is exactly this scenario which sends shivers down the spines of Malaysian and Indonesian governments and frequently leads them to scrutinise the possibility of systematic linkages between militancy in the Middle East and their own problems. It is well known that many Malaysians and Indonesians have studied and lived in the Middle East for long periods before returning to take up positions of influence as Muslim teachers in their local communities. This pattern of educational migration has become established over centuries. In the nineteenth century the Dutch colonial government of the East Indies was so worried about the potential for the returnees to stir up rebellion against the government that they commissioned Snouck Hurgronje to write a report on the Malay-speaking community resident in Mecca – he reported incidentally that the colonial government's fears were much exaggerated. The same fear stalks present-day governments of the region, and occasional incidents such as the attack on an arsenal in northern Malaysia in 1999 and capture of weapons appear to justify the fears.

In Indonesia, the possibility of Middle East-trained dissidents leading terrorist attacks, which featured regularly in the scare scenarios disseminated by the Suharto regime, has recently become very real. Violent inter-faith conflict has broken out in an unprecedented way since 1997, especially in the Moluccan islands and in central Sulawesi, and from these troubled waters it would appear that individuals are emerging who at least claim to have Middle Eastern support. One example is Ustad Ja'far Umar Thalib, the leader of the Laskar Jihad, a militant movement which in 2000 recruited and trained Muslim youth in Java and sent them off to the Moluccas to defend Muslims there against alleged attacks by Christians, and which seemed at one point to have the support of Amien Rais (Chairman of the upper house of the Indonesian Parliament). According to reports²³ after dropping out of the Mawdudi Institute in Pakistan Ustad Ja'afar fought with the Mujahedin in Afghanistan in 1988–89, and he is a charismatic figure to his followers. Because the rumours of a massacre of Muslims by Christians have gained such wide currency in Indonesia, the Laskar Jihad has a surprising amount of popular support even among the influential Muslim middle classes, and there has been no concerted attempt to outlaw the movement for fear of a widespread backlash. (As a postscript here it should be noted that Laskar Jihad was disbanded in October 2002.)

The situation is clearly worrying for the Indonesian government. While the problem remains confined to individuals and their local followings it can be contained. In the same way, but with much lesser forces ranged against them, the Dutch and the British dealt with rebellions in the nineteenth century. But the danger is that these Muslim dissidents will win substantial, on-going support from powerful Middle East groups or individuals, either

because they manage to persuade the latter that they are indeed fighting a holy war against Christians, or simply because those groups or individuals want to destabilise a government which they see as sympathetic to the US. There have been diplomatic efforts to prevent such developments. Missions, including representatives of Indonesian human rights organisations, have been sent to the Middle East and Europe to dissuade potential backers from supporting any of the factions in Indonesia. At the moment there seems to be no evidence of systematic financial support being provided from outside Indonesia, although that may simply be because nothing has yet come to light. My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that individual dissidents and militants are very unlikely to succeed in winning the necessary logistical support from Middle East contacts – as opposed to any support they may obtain from within Indonesia itself – to fight a sustained campaign against the Indonesian government, although that does not rule out occasional incidents of terrorist bombing and other acts of violence.

Religious, economic, cultural and educational links with the Middle East

Although the Malaysian and Indonesian governments are concerned that the seeds of future Muslim militancy are inevitably going to be found among those who go to the Middle East each year, there is no attempt to prevent traffic between South East Asia and the Middle East. On the contrary, religious, economic, cultural and educational links are encouraged, since they demonstrate to the ummat at large that Malaysia and Indonesia welcome better relations with the Middle East and are encouraging Muslim solidarity at this level.

The primary means by which the Muslim populations of South East Asia learn about the Middle East is the hajj pilgrimage, which annually attracts large numbers from throughout the archipelago, to the extent that even in the remotest villages individuals are bound to know at least someone who has been on the pilgrimage and to have heard stories about the course of events.²⁴ From my own observations and discussions with returned pilgrims it seems clear that the whole experience is spiritually and emotionally uplifting and very often has lasting consequences for their ritual and religious behaviour. The title *haji* (one who has completed the hajj) continues to be a source of status in the community – returned pilgrims in villages make a point of wearing the clothes worn during pilgrimage as their daily wear to demonstrate that status. One should note, however, that conversations about the hajj frequently phrase the description of events in terms of a tourist experience – reference is made to food, accommodation, sights and smells, airport lounges, medical facilities – and the different experiences from year to year are a source of endless comparative anecdotes. South East Asian governments now monopolise the administration of the pilgrimage – ostensibly to protect the best interests of the pilgrims and to prevent them being

cheated by private entrepreneurs – and although there were occasional complaints in the past about the services provided, present arrangements seem very satisfactory.²⁵ However, the organisation of the pilgrimage is packaged in such a way that as a learning experience it is very different from what it was even fifty years ago. Now everyone travels by plane and the pilgrimage lasts only four weeks from beginning to end. The opportunity to take in new experiences, mix with fellow Muslims from other parts of the Islamic world and participate in general religious and political discussions is drastically curtailed, since pilgrims remain largely confined within their own regional and national groups.

Despite the fact that the drama of going on the pilgrimage is perhaps less awesome and less formative than it once was, the hajj remains the single most important institution through which the populations of South East Asia organise their perceptions and understanding of the Middle East. Saudi Arabia stands iconically for the region; a country's dealings with Saudi Arabia, in particular in relation to the smooth administration of the pilgrimage, are an important measure of whether it is fulfilling its obligations to the Muslim community. The governments of South East Asia are acutely conscious of how critical an issue this is: provided they continue to administer the pilgrimage well from year to year, they hope they can ignore with impunity the issues that a more politically sophisticated Muslim constituency among students and intellectuals may raise about, say, Palestine or Baghdad.

The only other arena in which the majority of the population is likely to have much direct or indirect experience of the Middle East – and this applies principally to Indonesia and the Philippines²⁶ – is that of migrant labour. As far as economic and commercial relations are concerned, there is some trade between South East Asia and the Middle East, but despite regular trade missions, as Piscatori²⁷ has shown, it is not a significant amount. The issue of migrant labour is, however, one which regularly makes headline news and again is a common topic of discussion in the villages. For the most part the opportunity to work in the Middle East is welcomed as a lucrative source of income and a means of helping one's family through regular remittances. However, although the Indonesian government tries hard to ensure the well-being of this migrant labour force – a large percentage of whom are women, known throughout Indonesia by the acronym TKW (Female Labour) – there has been a steady stream of cases of abuse and traumatic incidents which has received widespread publicity. Such reports have inevitably created a certain disenchantment with the Middle East, which resonates with the occasional currents of anti-Arab feeling which have circulated in the archipelago since at least the beginning of the twentieth century. I mention them here simply to draw attention to the way in which popular attitudes to the Middle East and to Arab society, far from being predicated on a reverential assumption that as the cradle of Islamic civilisation the Arab world is to be respected and imitated, are often more solidly anchored in empirical perceptions and experiences. Intellectuals, too, will happily draw a clear distinction

between Islam and Arab culture. It was in this spirit, for example, that some years ago Abdurrahman Wahid caused controversy by suggesting that Indonesian Muslims need not use the Arabic greeting *assalamualaikum*, and that the Indonesian *selamat pagi* (good morning) was more appropriate. Negative sentiments towards Arab culture are therefore an additional factor encouraging government policy-makers to feel that they need not worry unduly about the strength of international Muslim solidarity, provided support for local Muslim institutions is forthcoming.

The principle of attending first and foremost to the conditions of Muslim orthopraxy in South East Asia in any strategy designed to win the sympathy of local populations is also recognised by Middle Eastern governments and private donors. We have noted, for example, Libya's support for Muslim groups in the Philippines, but in fact this is simply one small element in a much more extensive web of patronage offered to South East Asia. Most of the financial support which is provided is directed toward religious, educational and charitable foundations: money for orphanages and clinics, mosques, schools and universities, language laboratories, libraries, books and journals, and training programmes for teachers of Arabic and for religious preachers.²⁸ There is also support for regional youth movements and regional Muslim associations, of which a good example is the RISEAP (Regional Islamic Da'wa Council of South East Asia and the Pacific).²⁹ Most significant of all, there seems to be abundant provision for student travel and scholarships to study in Middle Eastern countries – not just Saudi Arabia and Libya but also Egypt and Iraq (both, incidentally, countries where Abdurrahman spent a number of years).

Local communities which are the beneficiaries of this development aid are clearly appreciative of the new facilities which have become available to them. Beyond simple appreciation, however, there is also a sense of pride in the ability of wealthy Muslim nations to compete with Western countries and international organisations in such projects and this enhances their own sense of Muslim identity. It is not, I think, sufficiently recognised that in the Muslim countries of South East Asia there is much anxiety and occasional resentment felt towards the actions of Christian missionaries and Christian charitable foundations. The latter are perceived to be very effective in, for example, the administration of schools and universities, hospitals and medical centres, as well as in poor relief. Their effectiveness often contrasts with what has, until recently at least, appeared to be the relative inefficiency of Muslim foundations. Feelings of dismay and inferiority in comparison with the successes of Christian minorities often contribute to feelings of bitterness and hostility. When, however, it can be demonstrated that international Muslim organisations are equally capable of providing educational and social support, confidence in the religion is revived, and with that comes a greater interest in, and openness towards, the wider Muslim world of the Middle East.

Observers often date the emergence of a new popular interest in pan-Islamic society to the mid-1970s and link it to events surrounding the

revolution in Iran and the OPEC-led rise in oil prices in that decade. It is certainly true that among Asian Muslim nations there was a sense of excitement at what was happening in the world at that time. In terms of immediate impact, however, these events were probably not so sensational as Russia's defeat by Japan in the Russo-Japanese war of 1905, which certainly did awaken Asians to their continent's potential role in global politics. The significance of the Iranian revolution took time to percolate into popular consciousness in South East Asia. More important, it seems to me, and predating the events in the Middle East, was the growing accessibility from the late 1960s to Muslims in South East Asia of new Muslim thinking and ideas. This was thanks to the phenomenal expansion of Muslim publishing at a time of relative economic prosperity in the region, which led to a bewildering profusion of books, pamphlets and magazines as well as cassettes and videos, and was followed most recently in the 1990s by the availability of electronic communications.³⁰ Hefner, in an analogy with Benedict Anderson's thesis about the influence of print capitalism on the development of nationalism, has described this phenomenon as 'print Islam' and argued strongly for its impact on Muslim consciousness.³¹

The ready availability of a vast quantity of publications, in particular translations of works by contemporary Muslim thinkers writing in Arabic and English, coincided with a massive expansion of tertiary education (to cope with the significant increase in the numbers of school-leavers and to meet the demands of the economies of the region for a more highly educated and skilled work-force). There was consequently a large potential readership for these publications. Another factor encouraging this new turn to Islam – well-described incidentally in autobiographies of the time³² – was the absence of any political channels through which students could release their intellectual energy. Governments in Malaysia and Indonesia prevented any kind of student engagement in politics for roughly two decades – circa 1975–95 – and it is to my mind no coincidence that there was a major expansion in student involvement in religious prayer and study groups during this period. Moreover, the activity of these groups was much stimulated by the comings and goings of students from South East Asia studying overseas, not only in the Middle East but also in centres of Islamic studies in the United States, Australia, Britain and the Netherlands.³³ This has all been well documented, as have the political challenges which Malaysian and Indonesian governments faced in responding to what appeared to them to be the more threatening manifestations of this new Islamic consciousness. For our purposes here, however, what needs to be understood is that this new perception of what constitutes a moral and intellectual commitment to Islam brought about a greater enthusiasm for exploring the nature of Muslim society in other parts of the world, and a clearer recognition of the international nature of Islam. Whereas in the past Muslim readers would have had to make do largely with books and pamphlets written within Indonesia, now, thanks to the mushrooming of Muslim publishers – of

which perhaps the most well-known was Mizan in Indonesia – they were able to read translations of radical Muslim ideas from the pens of, for example, Sayyid Qutb from Egypt and Ali Shariati from Iran.³⁴ Government gatekeepers remained for the most part unconcerned about the dissemination of these publications. However, the spread of Shi'a ideas and the proselytising of Iranian missionaries did arouse fears and action was taken – fully endorsed by most, though not all, local Sunni scholars – to curb the spread of Shi'ism.³⁵

Inevitably in this intellectual ferment, which we can now recognise as very similar to other periods of Muslim intellectual regeneration in South East Asia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were conflicting views of what constitutes legitimate and appropriate Muslim orthopraxy. Disagreements were in large part internal to the Muslim communities, and governments were happy to allow debates to be aired publicly. However, whenever it appeared that what were regarded as cults were in danger of undermining state security – as the move towards Shi'ism was perceived to be – then the reaction was swift. The action taken by the Malaysian government against the Dar al-Arqam movement (see more below), arresting the leader and forcing the disbandment of the organisation, is an example of this.³⁶ Such summary actions against allegedly heretical movements won the approval of the religious establishment – i.e. the officials of religious departments and the state-appointed members of Muslim committees – but they were less enthusiastically received by student groups, who felt that intellectual and religious freedoms were being suppressed.³⁷ Although provincial governments in Indonesia were concerned about the spread of heterodox ideas which al-Arqam seemed to represent, the central government, unlike its Malaysian counterpart, took a more relaxed view of the matter. In Meuleman's view this reflects a greater tolerance of diverse Muslim views in Indonesia.³⁸

In such a climate divisions grew between how Muslim associations on and off university campuses perceived developments in international politics and their government's response. Thus students and intellectuals such as Amien Rais denounced the Americans and their allies for the bombing of Iraq, while government opinion and (given government control of the media) the mass of the population condoned, if only tacitly, the demonisation of Saddam and of the Iraqi position. Any attempt to rouse popular support against a government's pro-American position and to accuse it of failing in its Islamic duty was easily countered. Governments could quickly point to their financial support for Muslim institutions. There were, for example, extensive mosque-building programmes throughout South East Asia, and from time to time governments ostentatiously issued statements of an anti-Western kind when there was little danger of economic or other repercussions, as when Prime Minister Mahathir spoke out against perceived lack of European concern at the massacres of Bosnian Muslims. Seen in this context, the relatively small scale of anti-Western and anti-American demonstrations in recent years in Indonesia and Malaysia is explicable: popular anti-American feeling certainly exists, and indeed is sometimes shared by governments, but

such sentiments are far outweighed by pragmatic considerations of internal stability and development and, at an international level, the need for a common position with fellow ASEAN members. Student opposition can be largely ignored since, unlike on issues such as corruption and economic mismanagement, it lacks the endorsement of either the urban middle classes or the rural population.

In short, over the last two decades an awareness of Middle Eastern positions and an appreciation of Middle Eastern support for local Muslim institutions has undoubtedly grown in South East Asia, and concomitantly a greater willingness to participate in Islamic fora and associations has emerged. However, these developments have not fundamentally altered the priority given to national and regional South East Asian developments in the making of foreign policy, the guiding principles of which remain non-alignment and non-interference.

Conclusion

Writing in 1983, Michael Leifer concluded his chapter on the Islamic factor in Indonesia's foreign policy by saying that 'Islam does not provide a natural meeting ground between Indonesia and other states. Indonesia prefers to keep the Arab-Islamic world at a distance, because Islam remains a divisive symbol and force within the Republic, the more to be feared because of its international resurgence'.³⁹ At the time that conclusion was fully warranted. As Leifer had pointed out, the military was still then the body ultimately determining state policy, and there was indeed a mistrust and fear of Muslim militancy. Furthermore there was uncertainty about the degree to which Indonesia should commit itself to the OIC. Now, twenty years on, the situation has changed; indeed it had begun to change by the late 1980s, once the issue of allegiance to the state ideology, Pancasila (which had been, as Leifer indicates, a controversial matter), had been resolved. Attitudes to Muslim groups softened and Muslim intellectuals and politicians were encouraged to come in from the cold and join the new organisation of Muslim intellectuals, ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Se-Indonesia), under the chairmanship of Habibie, a close ministerial colleague of President Suharto. Militant Muslim opposition, which had seemed such a threat in the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, seemed to have evaporated, and the establishment of new Muslim institutions – not just mosques and schools but also non-government organisations and publishing houses – was encouraged. In another move designed to create more space for the implementation of Muslim principles, Islamic courts were given greater powers in relation to family law and a new compilation of Muslim law was issued for these courts.

This greater openness to Islam had ramifications for Indonesia's relations with the Middle East and its participation in the OIC. As we have seen, it began to take a much more active part in attempts to negotiate a satisfactory resolution to the problem of the southern Philippines.⁴⁰ More was made of

Islamic cultural institutions such as international Qur'anic recitation competitions. President Suharto went on the hajj amid great publicity. It is true that elements in the armed forces were wary of these new overtures to the national and international Muslim communities; as described above, this may have led to the formation of 'green' and 'red and white' parties within the armed forces. However, except in so far as Suharto's own motives came to be distrusted, this uneasiness seems to have been relatively insignificant. Certainly for the Muslim population at large the period from 1985 onwards was one of optimism and self-confidence, encouraged by the state's willingness to engage with Muslim interests nationally and internationally.

Since 1998 this self-confidence has grown, first with the appointment of Habibie to succeed Suharto in 1998 after the latter's downfall, and then with the election of Abdurrahman Wahid as President in 1999. Inevitably though, the very success of Muslim political forces has carried with it the seeds of its own undermining, as we witnessed in 2001. Muslim public opinion seems to be at least as divided as it was in the 1950s; the NU and the central axis of 'modernist Muslims', represented by Abdurrahman and Amien Rais respectively, having reached a comfortable *modus vivendi* three years ago are now (especially since the downfall of Abdurrahman) virulently hostile to one other. Ranged against them both are the secular nationalists under Megawati Sukarnoputri, with the armed forces feeling more vulnerable now than ever before to the pressure of public opinion. Under these circumstances issues of foreign policy do not appear very important – it is internal stability, and the fear of the disintegration of the Indonesian state, which are critical and urgent. This does have some consequences for relations with other Muslim states as some of the present conflicts, though they may have underlying economic causes, appear to turn on religious difference. There has been sufficient criticism (including in widely read popular weekly journals such as *Sabili*) of the government's alleged inaction in response to attacks on Muslims to raise the spectre of Muslim donors overseas being encouraged to support armed Muslim militias such as the Laskar Jihad. At present, however, this does not appear to be a major threat. Certainly Abdurrahman's personal credentials and that of his Foreign Minister, the Muslim scholar and academic Dr Alwi Shihab, whatever their opponents may say about them at home, were enough to reassure the members of the OIC and dissuade them from interference. It is possible that this will change now that Megawati has become President, but it is more likely that a policy of non-interference will continue. Meanwhile the government continues its efforts to win economic support from all ends of the international political spectra, right to left, Israeli or Muslim. Civil society, however, has more immediate and pressing concerns with respect to economic and political stability at national and regional levels, and is likely to face them for several years to come. In such an environment, issues like pan-Islamic solidarity and the politics of the OIC are of minimal relevance.

Malaysia has not had to deal with comparable problems hence the government's strategy and public perceptions of the place of pan-Islamic solidarity

take on a different hue. But different as the Malaysian and Indonesian circumstances appear to be, it is worth observing how they had the same starting point in the 1980s and how the two countries continue to share a common approach to international developments. If the turning point in Indonesia was the capitulation of the last Muslim organisations to demands that they accept Pancasila as their basic ideology, the same point was reached in Malaysia in 1994 with the arrest of Ashaari Muhammad, the leader of al-Arqam, and the subsequent disbanding of that organisation. Up to then the government had clearly been worried by the impact that al-Arqam was having on Muslim consciousness. A number of middle class professionals had joined the association, which seemed to offer them the consolation of a purer and more spiritually satisfying life-style than was available in mainstream society (the claims to orthodoxy which al-Arqam made referred to the pristine early Muslim community).⁴¹ In cracking down on the organisation, the government accused it of subversion and claimed that there were plans afoot to overthrow the state. Government action caught the public by surprise and there was little opposition. In the aftermath of this episode, however, the government seems to have taken a long hard look at its policy towards Islamic institutions. Metzger⁴² argues with some justification that material support for Muslim institutions had been initiated much earlier. I would simply argue that the support which al-Arqam had gathered caused the government to redouble its efforts in the mid-1990s.

Just as in Indonesia, there exists in Malaysia a conflict within the Malay population between nationalist and Muslim constituencies,⁴³ and again as in Indonesia the population has been dominated by nationalists. The difference is that the Malay nationalists have always claimed to be in permanent confrontation with the non-Malay population of the country. Mahathir has cleverly played these factions off against one another. By appointing Anwar Ibrahim, well known as the leader of the radical Muslim student organisation ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia), to his cabinet in the 1980s, and by attacking the special privileges of the Malay aristocracy, he showed himself sympathetic to the Muslim constituency. Consequently he could both out-manoeuvre Muslim party political opposition and afford to take steps against al-Arqam without too much risk of a backlash. At the same time, unless the government moved quickly to demonstrate that although it rejected 'cults' it supported Islam, there was a danger that Muslim opposition would unite against it. The government responded exactly as its Indonesian counterpart had done: it vigorously renewed its programme of support for Muslim institutions.⁴⁴ In addition to promoting the same institutions – mosque-building, cultural performances, Muslim education and, importantly, the Muslim legal system⁴⁵ – the government went out of its way to construct a new concept of Muslim civil society (*masyarakat madani*) which presented an alternative to the Western concept and at the same time implicitly challenged al-Arqam's claim to sole Muslim legitimacy.

There was also a major international dimension to this strategy. Malaysia continued to be enthusiastic about the OIC and hosted several international Muslim conferences. However, more visible were two major new developments. The first was the establishment of the International Islamic University, which drew its staff from all over the Muslim world and won widespread approval at home and abroad. The second was the introduction of a Muslim banking system and the creation of several Muslim financial institutions. The history of these institutions has been well documented⁴⁶ and although some scepticism has been expressed about their overall impact on the national economy, their symbolic importance is difficult to exaggerate. Not only do they serve to illustrate that the government, contrary to the implicit accusations of al-Arqam supporters, promotes fundamental Muslim social structures, they also promote pride in Islam and serve as a tangible point of reference in any discussion of contemporary Islamic accomplishments. Through these institutions it can be shown that a significant beginning has been made to the construction of a civil society predicated on Muslim values.⁴⁷ In placing emphasis on banking and finance the Malaysian government has at the same time drawn itself into closer association – if only by echoing developments elsewhere – with similar institutions in other parts of the Muslim world. In such circumstances it is hardly surprising that Malaysia is much respected in the Muslim world.⁴⁸ Even the arrest and detention of Anwar, shocking though it was to international Muslim diplomats who held him in high regard as a senior Muslim representative on the international stage, dented this image surprisingly little.

One way to interpret the increasing ‘islamisation’ of South East Asia in the last two decades is to argue that Muslim opposition in Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei has been out-played and its thunder appropriated by the governments of those countries. Such an interpretation, though it certainly contains elements of the truth, would I think be unduly cynical. Those who have overseen the changes and thought through the implications of the new openness to Islam, as well as being concerned to control Islamic militancy, have been equally if not more motivated by a genuine desire to improve the social fabric of the nation through the realisation of religiously inspired moral values. At times the implementation of these values, especially when they appear to infringe the freedom of women to make their own choices, may appear restrictive and to hit harder in some countries than in others. But given the speed with which change is occurring perhaps it is inevitable that initially there will be injustices, sometimes of major dimensions, which will need to be redressed. It is important that (as seems to be the case at the moment) opportunities for disagreement and opposition remain open, especially when the doors to meaningful political participation remain so firmly closed.

The question underlying this chapter has been to what degree have these changes in the Islamic character of the Muslim countries of South East Asia over the last twenty years affected perceptions of the Middle East and

international Muslim politics, both among the populations at large and in the corridors of power. The simple answer must be that in both cases increased communication has led to a greater recognition of the significance of the wider Muslim world in global politics, and to a sense of the potential which might lie in international Muslim cooperation, not just yet but in the future. At the same time, increasing pride and confidence in change which has been generated internally by South East Asian Muslim communities has created a new sense that while South East Asia has something to learn from the Middle East, the latter has much to learn from South East Asia – not only in terms of new theological ideas but also in terms of social, economic and political institutions which demonstrate the potential (if not the realisation) of a plural society imbued with liberal Muslim values. Nonetheless, however impressive many of these moves to create a religious ethic in South East Asian civil society may be, and however much they predispose local populations to look more sympathetically upon the Middle East and its culture, it remains firmly the case that foreign policy, and indeed the whole political orientation of South East Asia, remains largely indifferent to what happens in the Middle East. Feelings of pan-Islamic solidarity may be useful make-weights in the domestic construction of political rhetoric, but in the international arena of hard politics they are inconsequential.

In the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001 one of the strategies pursued by the US government has been investigation into terrorist networks in South East Asia with a view to demonstrating the links between these networks and al-Qaida and the Middle East in general. In its determination to extirpate terrorism, the US has combined tactics of cajolery and intimidation in its approaches to South East Asian governments, and the latter have responded sympathetically to American demands.⁴⁹ The culmination of the Bush administration's efforts in this regard was the signing by Colin Powell of an agreement between the US and ASEAN countries in Brunei on 1 August 2002. There were sound reasons for the accommodation of South East Asia's Muslim countries to US requests. In the first place, it is to the immediate advantage of countries of the region if they can identify, through international cooperation, terrorists who may be seeking to undermine their own governments. Secondly, the countries have implicitly tied their support for American initiatives to favourable consideration of their economic difficulties and an American willingness to turn a blind eye to what might otherwise be condemned as repressive political measures. It was thinking of this kind which took President Megawati to Washington so soon after 11 September, and it was the same thinking which persuaded Gloria Macapagal-Arrojo of the Philippines to welcome US military advisers into the country to help to deal with the Abu Sayaff group in the south.

But while the governments of both Indonesia and the Philippines may in principle be well disposed to the US initiatives, both realise that their populations are suspicious of the US and will lobby the governments to resist any pressures which smack of international bullying. Thus concessions to US

demands have to be presented in a manner which cannot be construed as capitulation to American high-handedness. A clear indication of the depth of anti-American feeling (taken here to be hostility not necessarily to American life-styles, but to US political actions on the international stage) were the protests which broke out in Indonesia after the bombing of Afghanistan. Very quickly it seemed that the sympathy evoked by the 11 September events was followed by outrage at what was regarded as unjustifiable American aggression,⁵⁰ and South East Asian governments did not make the mistake of trying to defend American actions. Prime Minister Mahathir hit the right note by expressing his nation's horror at the attack on the World Trade Center on the one hand, but on the other condemning in strong terms the bombing of Afghanistan. In doing so he managed to boost his reputation on the world stage – which had taken a dip after the action taken against former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim – and in addition he successfully projected Malaysia as an exemplary moderate Islamic nation,⁵¹ to the point where Iran was urging Malaysia to take up a position as international mediator.⁵²

If South East Asian leaders found it difficult to give direct support to America in its anti-terrorist actions, it was relatively easy to win local approval for inter-governmental cooperation within South East Asia (between Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia) which led to the arrest and detention of terrorists implicated in bombing campaigns in Indonesia in the period 1997–2001. By demonstrating that these terrorists were linked through various networks and operated trans-nationally within the region, and at the same time maintained links with backers in the Middle East and Europe, governments were able to argue convincingly that they were taking the issue of terrorism very seriously. They could be seen to be responding both to what had become an increasing cause for alarm domestically – in Indonesia's case especially, due to the growth of inter-religious conflict since 1997 – and to international concerns. The only slight wrong-note in the smooth cooperation between the ASEAN countries was a typically insensitive assertion by Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister in Singapore, that Indonesia was rife with terrorists and that Singapore had the evidence to prove it.⁵³

That there have been Muslims in South East Asia who have taken up arms against the governments of the region, that some of these individuals have been to the Middle East, and that some of the funding for their activities has come from Middle Eastern backers, are all undeniably the case. However, it would be a fundamental error to move from that statement to the assumption that all Muslim opponents of the ASEAN governments are terrorists or that they have links with terrorist groups such as al-Qaida in the Middle East and elsewhere. The US would seem to like to steer world opinion towards this assumption – though for a contrary view see the cautious remarks of James Kelley, Assistant Secretary of State for Asia and the Pacific, rejecting the general conspiracy theory⁵⁴ – and on occasions some South East Asian governments might for their own purposes wish to

endorse it. It is not, however, a view which has wide support; certainly not in Indonesia, nor among international groups campaigning for human rights and freedom of speech. The latter feel very strongly that attempts to crack down on all Muslim opponents of the present Indonesian government represent a return to the bad old days of the Suharto regime of the 1970s and 1980s. Such action is totally unacceptable to public opinion. For their part the governments of the region are all too well aware of the need to take a softly-softly approach for fear of pushing the opposition underground and into the arms of violent terrorists. In the Indonesian government's view, a distinction needs to be made between those with radical Muslim opinions and those who are terrorists. Furthermore, even in the case of the latter, links with al-Qaida are not apparent.⁵⁵ So sensitive is the issue of freedom of expression that Colin Powell, responding to comments that the repression of Muslim dissent in Indonesia could be taken as an attack on human rights, felt constrained to state that in his opinion democracy was not being jeopardised.⁵⁶

Recent scholarship has thrown much light on oppositional Muslim groups in Indonesia.⁵⁷ An International Crisis Group (ICG) report from Jakarta has looked specifically at alleged links and accusations of terrorism, basing its findings on extensive interviews with individuals who had at one time or another played significant roles in opposition to the Indonesian government and had been involved in a variety of Muslim organisations.⁵⁸ Among its conclusions was the statement that while there was indeed some evidence linking certain individuals with terrorism, the label 'terrorist' was in most cases extremely problematic. Tracing dissident Muslim opposition to successive Indonesian governments from as far back as the 1950s, the report showed a continuity in the kinship and friendship connections of the people involved in opposition movements, and showed how funding came from a variety of sources including backers in the Middle East. Most notable among the centres in Indonesia which are currently being accused of advocating terrorism is the so-called *Ngruki pesantren* (traditional Javanese religious school) group, which formed around the religious teacher Abu Bakar Ba'asyir. Ba'asyir spent time in the Middle East and has been accused by Singapore of being one of the masterminds of Muslim terrorism in South East Asia. Ba'asyir denies that he advocates terrorism or anti-state violence and maintains that his campaign for bringing about an ideal Islamic state is predicated on the spiritual revolution of the individual rather than political manoeuvring.⁵⁹ The ICG report also gives support to the claim that allegations of terrorism have in many cases been made to discredit Muslim opposition in general, a claim which has often been made in the past but which it is illuminating to see so carefully demonstrated here. The report shows, for example, how Suharto's chief intelligence adviser, Ali Murtopo, deliberately cultivated the friendship of known Muslim dissidents and deceived them into taking subversive action so that he could later arrest them, thereby undermining Muslim opposition to Suharto. The present

Indonesian government has strongly denied this allegation,⁶⁰ but the evidence is convincing and consistent with what is known of Ali Murtopo's tactics.

The point to be extracted from the ICG report for our purpose here is that the history of this earlier period shows that while there were Muslim opponents to Suharto, only a very few became violent or terrorist activists. Their terrorism had no connection with any international Islamist group based in the Middle East or elsewhere, although they, like their non-violent counterparts, may occasionally have obtained funding from individual backers in the Middle East. One example of the kind of tangled scenario which emerges from the details of personal links documented by researchers points to the influence of the DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia) which, under the leadership of Mohammad Natsir, a former Indonesian Prime Minister, campaigned in the Suharto period for the spiritual regeneration of Muslims in Indonesia and for resistance to what was seen as creeping 'Christianisation'.⁶¹ Natsir was well respected in the Muslim world and through his international contacts was able to attract funds for various educational projects. He was also able to place eager young Muslims in educational institutions in the Middle East and Pakistan. Some of these individuals adopted extremist views, or at least began to take positions of a more extreme kind than Natsir himself, and went on to form associations with extremists in the Middle East. On returning to Indonesia they set up their own schools and through their preaching encouraged people to take a harder line against the government. One important individual who took this route was Ustad Ja'far Umar Thalib of the Laskar Jihad.⁶²

It is exceedingly difficult to disentangle terrorist links between the Middle East and South East Asia from links which are genuinely made in the pursuit of educational and welfare goals. Where research has been carried out, the evidence suggests that the terrorists are very few in number, and that there is no overarching terrorist network, but that contacts are individual and almost random. It suggests that the tendency to see a terrorist behind every hard-line opponent should be strongly resisted by the Indonesian government, despite the wish to be seen to be acting against terrorism for the sake of American goodwill or to placate Western opinion.

(The preceding paragraph was written about a month before the Bali bomb blast in October 2002. This was a shocking terrorist attack and quite unprecedented in Indonesia in terms of it being directed at a civilian expatriate population. Indeed, so unprecedented was it that for some time afterwards Indonesians refused to believe that it could have been perpetrated by fellow-citizens, and a number of conspiracy theories were widely circulated. However, after the arrest and confession of Indonesian suspects and the apparently clear evidence implicating them, Indonesian opinion began to accept that Muslim fanatics had indeed been responsible. The involvement of Muslims in the Bali attack appears to vindicate the views of those outside observers who had for some time doubted commentators who dismissed the potential of Indonesian terrorists to link up with al-Qaida and

bring mayhem to Indonesia. However, much remains to be investigated. Although intelligence reports from Singapore, Malaysia and elsewhere seem to have demonstrated conclusively links between Malay and Indonesian terrorists working in concert, the exact nature of the terrorist organisation remains unclear. What seems to be emerging is that the South East Asian terrorists in Malaysia and Indonesia worked largely independently of any Middle Eastern networks, and their goals – revenge attacks on the government or local Christian communities – were dissimilar to those of al-Qaida. They had furthermore been operating well before 11 September, and Christian targets in Jakarta had been bombed as early as Christmas 2000. Subsequently, backers operating from the Middle East, and perhaps Pakistan, saw a way to exploit South East Asian terrorism for their own purposes, and provided the financial and logistical backing for this. It was at this point that a decision must have been made to switch the focus of attacks away from internal Indonesian targets to something affecting the expatriate community. The Bali attack seems to have been a copycat operation designed to catch international attention. It is perhaps needless to point out that Indonesian Muslims in general are horrified by what has happened and wish to see the perpetrators brought to justice. For those engaged in anti-terrorism, the task now must be to identify the precise nature of the terrorist network and the numbers of those involved, without causing undue alarm or giving encouragement to those who would want to conduct witch-hunts. It is likely, in my opinion, that the terrorist activists will turn out to be relatively few in number and to resemble more the kind of bomb-wielding terrorist anarchists of the nineteenth century described by Conrad in *The Secret Agent*, rather than sophisticated individuals out of a Le Carré novel. Nonetheless, terrorists today, however intellectually unsophisticated they may be, have a far greater potential to wreak havoc than their nineteenth-century predecessors, and they need to be tracked down as quickly as possible.)

The Indonesian position – and by extension that of Muslims in other South East Asian countries – has been well expressed by Amien Rais, the current chairman of the MPR (the upper house of the Indonesian parliament). In a recent speech in Leiden he stated categorically that ‘no Muslim in this world . . . condones the terrorist act committed by irresponsible and evil people of bombing both the Pentagon Building and the World Trade Center’. He went on to say that although many Indonesians could be found wearing Osama Bin Laden T-shirts this should not be read as a sign of approval for terrorism. Those who wore the shirts were very often unaware of their significance in this respect and were wearing them for other reasons – largely, though he did not quite say this, because they were a symbol of protest against American bombing. Amien also warned about the dangers of polarisation. The statement that those who were not with America were against it echoed too closely the Cold War rhetoric of the 1950s which had alienated so many non-aligned countries including Indonesia. More understanding was required of the dynamics of variation in Muslim practice and

sentiment in different countries of the world.⁶³ The corollary of this is that when examining links between Muslim countries on the global stage one should always look at the detailed picture. This requires elucidation of the multiple strands which connect Muslim centres to one another in a number of domains – economics, culture, education, politics and religious institutions. Then, within those strands, it is necessary to distinguish between the many different groups participating in exchanges and flows: not just individuals but also institutions of state, non-government organisations, cultural groups, entrepreneurs, scholars and pilgrims. The finer the detail, the clearer the overall picture that will ultimately emerge, and the current preoccupation with terrorism should not be allowed to obscure this for us.

Notes

- 1 See M. Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs and George Allen and Unwin, 1983) and by the same author, 'The Islamic Factor in Indonesia's Foreign Policy: A Case of Functional Ambiguity' in A. Dawisha (ed.), *Islam in Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 144–59. Also James P. Piscatori, 'Asian Islam: International Linkages and Their Impact on International Relations' in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Asia. Religion, Politics and Society* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 230–61, and J. Saravanamuttu, 'Malaysia's Foreign Policy, 1957–1980' in Zakaria Haji Ahmad (ed.), *Government and Politics of Malaysia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 128–60.
- 2 Those looking for a brief introduction should consult Robert W. Hefner, 'Islam in an Era of Nation States: Politics and Religious Renewal in Muslim Southeast Asia', in R. Hefner and P. Horvatic (eds), *Islam in an Era of Nation States* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 3–40 for South-East Asia in general; R. Hefner, 'Islamization and Democratization in Indonesia', in Hefner and Horvatic (1997, op. cit.), pp. 75–127, and Augustus H. Johns, 'Indonesia: Islam and Cultural Pluralism', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Islam in Indonesia* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 202–29 for Indonesia; William R. Roff, 'Patterns of Islamization in Malaysia, 1890s–1990s: Exemplars, Institutions, and Vectors', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1998, pp. 210–28, for Malaysia; Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1998) for the Muslim minority of the southern Philippines; and Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand* (Bangkok: Thai Khadi Institute, Thammasat University, 1985) for the Muslim minority in Thailand.
- 3 See Roff (1998, op. cit.).
- 4 Johns (1987, op. cit.), p. 206.
- 5 They affect politics right at the very apex of the political hierarchy: former President Abdurrahman Wahid drew his support from the NU, while Amien Rais, chairman of the People's Assembly, drew his from the Muhammadiyah. The two were constantly at loggerheads with each other, and not simply over issues of governance.

- 6 B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971) and Hussin Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990).
- 7 Leifer, *Indonesia's Foreign Policy* (op. cit.), p. 139.
- 8 C.W. Watson, 'Muslims and the State in Indonesia', in Hussin Mutalib and Taj ul-Islam Hashmi (eds), *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State* (London: St. Martin's Press, Macmillan, 1994), pp. 174–96.
- 9 Boland (1971, op. cit.).
- 10 See the description to this effect by Vice President Hatta: M. Hatta, 'Indonesia's Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, April 1953.
- 11 Significantly, these same principles have been imported into ASEAN by Indonesia with much success.
- 12 The Indonesian government for example appears to be happy to negotiate with the Israeli Ministry of Defence for the purchase of spare parts for F-13 jets, and at one point Abdurrahman raised the possibility of recognising Israel.
- 13 <http://mindanao.com/kalinaw>
- 14 Miriam Coronel Ferrer, 'The Philippines: Governance Issues Come to the Fore', in *Southeast Asian Affairs 2000* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000), p. 253.
- 15 A.B. Shamsul, 'Identity Construction, Nation Formation, and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia', in Hefner and Horvatic (1997, op. cit.), p. 217.
- 16 W.K. Che Man, *Muslim Separatism: The Moros of Southern Philippines and the Malays of Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 75–8 and Chapter 5.
- 17 Che Man (ibid.), p. 141.
- 18 Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, 'Options in the Pursuit of a Just, Comprehensive, and Stable Peace in the Southern Philippines', *Asian Survey*, vol. XLI, no. 2, March–April 2001, pp. 210–28; Jacques Bertrand, 'Peace and Conflict in the Southern Philippines: Why the 1996 Peace Agreement is Fragile', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 1, 2000, pp. 37–54.
- 19 See the annual statements of the Conference (<http://www.oic-un.org/home/docs.htm>).
- 20 Quimpo (2001, op. cit.), p. 289.
- 21 *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, 20 July 2000.
- 22 *FEER*, 7 Sept 2000.
- 23 Greg Fealy, 'Inside the Laskar Jihad', *Inside Indonesia*, no. 65, January–March 2001, p. 28; cf. Hassan Noorhaidi, *Between Faith and Politics: The Rise of Laskar Jihad in the Political Arena of Indonesia*, unpublished paper prepared for Third Euroseas Conference, SOAS, London, 6–8 September 2001.
- 24 There is a vast literature on the place of the hajj in the religious and cultural life of South East Asian Muslims, much of it usefully summarised, at least with respect to Malaysia, in Mary Byrne McDonnell, *The Conduct of the Hajj from Malaysia and its Socio-Economic Impact on Malay Society. A Descriptive and Analytic Study, 1860–1981* (unpublished PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1986).
- 25 Laurent Metzger, 'Islam Observed: The Case of Contemporary Malaysia', *Studia Islamika*, vol. 5, no. 2, 1998, p. 67. See also L. Metzger, *Stratégie Islamique en Malaisie (1975–1995)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 159–83.
- 26 Though there are Malaysians involved too, see Piscatori (1987, op. cit.), p. 248.
- 27 Piscatori (1987, op. cit.), p. 233.

- 28 McKenna (1998, op. cit.), p. 205.
- 29 Piscatori (1987, op. cit.), p. 235.
- 30 Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson, 'Print Islam, and the Prospects for Civic Pluralism: New Religious Writings and their Audiences', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, January 1998, pp. 43–62; Roff (1998, op. cit.).
- 31 Robert W. Hefner, 'Print Islam. Mass Media and Ideological Rivalries among Indonesian Muslims', in *Indonesia* (Cornell), no. 64, October 1997, pp. 77–103.
- 32 Ali-Fauzi Ihsan and Haidar Bagir (eds), *Mencari Islam. Kumpulan Otobiografi Intelektual: Kaum Muda Muslim Indonesia Angkatan 80-an* (Bandung: Mizan, 1990).
- 33 Roff (1998, op. cit.), p. 220, notes that on a visit to Cairo in 1968 he observed that there were about a thousand students there.
- 34 Johns (1987, op. cit.), p. 227. Compare with Roff (1998, op. cit.), p. 227, making similar comments about Malaysia.
- 35 This occurred in the 1980s in Indonesia and about a decade later in Malaysia; see Metzger (1998, op. cit.), p. 67.
- 36 Johan Hendrik Meuleman, 'Reactions and Attitudes towards the Darul Arqam Movement in Southeast Asia', *Studia Islamika*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1996, pp. 43–78.
- 37 I recall one Muslim intellectual at the time saying to me that if it was acceptable to read and draw inspiration from Western Christian writings, what legitimate objection could there be to learning from Iranian Muslim thinkers?
- 38 Meuleman (1996, op. cit.), p. 59.
- 39 Leifer, (in Dawisha, 1983, op. cit.), p. 158.
- 40 <http://mindanao.com./kalinaw/dev/tri-people.htm>
- 41 Meuleman (1996, op. cit.), p. 49.
- 42 Metzger (1998, op. cit.).
- 43 Mutalib (1990, op. cit.).
- 44 A.B. Shamsul, 'Identity Construction, Nation Formation, and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia', in Hefner and Horvatich (1997, op. cit.), p. 217.
- 45 Roff (1998, op. cit.), p. 224.
- 46 Rodney Wilson, 'Islam and Malaysia's Economic Development', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1998, pp. 259–76; Metzger (1998, op. cit.). See also Mohamed Aslam Haneef, 'Islam and Economic Development in Malaysia – A Reappraisal', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3, September 2001, pp. 269–90.
- 47 Metzger (1998, op. cit.).
- 48 Shamsul, 'Identity Construction, Nation Formation, and Islamic Revivalism in Malaysia' in Hefner and Horvatich (1997, op. cit.), p. 220.
- 49 *Le Monde*, 4/5 August 2002.
- 50 Hans Antlöv, 'The Day that Changed Indonesia – or Did it?', *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter*, no. 4, December 2001, p. 15.
- 51 David Camroux, 'Malaysia: Winners and Losers', *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter*, no. 4, December 2001, pp. 8–9.
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