

Central Asia-Present Challenges and Future Prospects*

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As Kapil Kak points out in his paper on 'India's Strategic and Security Interests in Central Asia', India's historic links with Central Asia go back to mid second millennium BC. He quotes Toyanbee who described Central Asia as a region, "where routes converged from all quarters of the compass and from where routes radiate to all quarters of the compass." Its substantial reserves of oil and vast resources of gas are vital for both India and China. In the 'Foreword', Amitabh Mattoo states that the emergence of independent States in Central Asia in the 1990s has brought this region into the strategic horizon with major powers; US, Russia and China competing to gain control over the region for natural resources; oil and gas. India has stakes in the developments of the region with regard to both resources and markets. It hopes to establish a direct road link with Pakistan agreeing to transit facilities. Nagendra Rao highlights in the introduction that the post Soviet Central Asian security situation has acquired significance in the context of the Taliban and Al Qaeda activities.

The book is in three sections; Internal Dimensions, External Dimensions and Indo-Central Asian Relations. R R Sharma in his chapter focuses on Central Asia's quest for internal democracy. He writes that the apparent homogeneity in the region under the Soviet Regime was deceptive. Their emergence as independent states is simply the result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They have inherited a generally literate population, comparatively well developed state institutions, a modernised economic infrastructure and respectable levels of economic growth. However, the changed circumstances call for major economic and political reform; and overhaul of the political system. The political regimes

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are devoid of legitimacy; facade democracies have been imposed. There is a total absence of linkages between the people and the government. Nagendra Rao in his chapter observes that the expectation of emergence of a prosperous region, when assisted by free flow of capital and ideas from the West, has been thwarted: all republics are suffering from the negative tendencies characteristic of transitional societies.

The present population of Central Asia can be traced back to nomads from Iran and Turkey much before the advent of Islam, which evolved a broad divide based on Iranian and Turkic communities. Subsequently, the Sunni Sect dominated in all five countries. In the post Soviet period, major Islamists have become active. Nagendra Rao's Chapter on, 'Religious Extremism in Central Asia', examines the activities of the 'Islamic Revival Party', 'Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan' and *Hizb-ur-Tahirin*. He observes that Islamic influence varies in the region. During the 75 years of the Soviet period, Central Asia was cut off from the rest of the Islamic world in social, cultural and intellectual terms and was involved in a modernisation process; high literacy rate, greater gender parity in educational and employment opportunities, secular and modern outlook. The author concludes that because of these factors, large sections of Central Asians still treat religion as a step backward. Secondly, the tribal, ethnic, regional and national loyalties are coming in the way of any supranational identity in this case, Islam. Thirdly, the nature and practice of Islam in Central Asia, which is largely influenced by *Sufism*, is not receptive to fundamentalism advocated by the current ideologies of the extremist organisations.

Section II of the Book looks into the prospects of a 'Strategic Partnership', between Russia and China in Central Asia. Russia, China and the US wish to increase their influence in the region. The Russians and the Chinese wish to limit the US role and advocate a multi-polar strategy. Mohammad Munir Alam examines the problems and prospects of the US policy in Central Asia. He feels that by placing a priority on anti-terrorism in the US policy towards Central Asia, the US has shored up authoritarian regimes and encouraged public distrust of the US intention in the region. Two other chapters look into 'Islamic World and Central Asia' and 'Iran and Central Asia'.

Section III goes into 'Indo-Central Asian Relation'. In the introduction, Nagendra Rao argues that four objectives have become critical in India's policy priorities for Central Asia. First, neutralising security threats from *Jihadi* forces and drug traders. Second, developing transportation and communication links for enhanced access and connectivity. Third, maximising the share of economic benefits the region offers, particularly in the energy sector. Fourth, finding a fine balance between the priorities of the US, Russia and China that are actively engaged in this strategic region to establish their supremacy.

Examining the economic dimensions from the point of India's security interests in Central Asia, Kapil Kak quotes C R Raja Mohan's *Crossing the Rubicon* to say that lack of physical access and economic resources prevented India to achieve its objectives in Central Asia although, before its collapse, the Soviet Union allowed India to interact in the region.

The book covers the subject comprehensively and would be of value to policy makers apart from educating the public.

US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation*

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The book examines how the US Army rebuilt itself after the Vietnam War and how this has affected US intervention policy, from victory in the Gulf War to the failure in Somalia, the Bosnian and Kosovo interventions and the use of force post-11 September 2001. It sets out to analyse the changes in the US military intervention strategy by examining two separate issues: the nature of the US Army as it rebuilt itself after the Vietnam War, and the attempts by the US to establish criteria for future military interventions. The author argues that the US strategy traditionally relied upon national mobilisation to co-ordinate political aims and military means; he subsequently indicates how this changed to a formula of establishing militarily achievable political objectives prior to the use of force. Drawing on a vast body of material and on strategic culture and military innovation literature, he demonstrates that the strategic lessons were a product of the rebuilding of the US Army's identity as it became a professional all-volunteer force and that the US Army's new doctrine developed a new 'way of war' for the nation, embodied in the AirLand Battle doctrine, which changed the approach to strategy. The book gives a practical analysis of how the interventions in Panama and the Gulf War vindicated this approach and brought a revived confidence in the use of force, while more recent campaigns in Somalia, Kosovo and Bosnia exposed its weaknesses and the limited nature of the US Army's thinking. The legacy of the US Army's innovation is also examined in their new strategic environment post-11 September 2001 Afghanistan and Iraq.

The tensions that exist between ideals and violence are inherent within society as violence lies at the heart of the foundational

*U.S. Intervention Policy and Army Innovation - From Vietnam to Iraq. Richard Lock-Pullan (London and New York : Routledge, 2006), 291p, £70, ISBN 0-0714-65719-0.

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myth of any state. The US is no different, as it was born in the violence of the Revolutionary Wars and faced Civil War. The identity of the US has been put under great pressure by the violent events of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath. Terrorism is a very real danger, but there is also the potential calamity due to an extreme pre-emptive response as America has always faced threats and also exaggerated these threats to a large extent. During the Cold War, the US had a single enemy, Soviet Union, a demonised monolith, which had the key features of ideology, intercontinental weaponry and geo-strategic interests. The current times are in danger of being recast in that mould, with Islam, terrorism and China taking the three roles in the traditional understanding of threat. As Tariq Ali eloquently put it, "there is currently a danger of there being a clash of fundamentalisms: religious fundamentalism and imperial fundamentalism looking to discipline the world". For example, the US enforcing one code of international conduct whilst following a permissive one itself has become a key issue for the US and international relations. This is further complicated by the US being a technologically - based culture - "The more we become immersed in technology, the more difficult it is to be patient with the natural unevenness and unpredictability of living. We learn to close ourselves off".

Finally, the author postulates that the US culture has a problem coping with failure, there is a need, as the American writer Bill Holm said, for the focus to shift away from self-obsession and 'sympathetically imaging something outside'. The need for empathy runs in the face of America's hegemonic power being understood simply as a unilateral opportunity. The culture of fear pervades Western society, which means that problems are inflated, potential solutions overlooked and new challenges are transformed into issues of survival. There is still a need to come to terms with Vietnam, especially as 'We were humbled in Vietnam, purged, for a while, of a dangerous hubris'. Exaggerated responses and avoiding risk is counter-productive, especially when linked to a lack of hubris. To re-establish solidarity within its borders and engage with those without, the US needs to turn back to its visionary resources and face the issue of failure and the risk of engagement. The US Army needs to express that as well, and not just focus on the technical

aspects of the profession of war, or rely on its mythology of the Vietnam War and its lessons. It needs to be far more open in its innovation, to be a defender and embodiment of American values in an innovative fashion, and if that involves a lot of messy roles like peacekeeping and nation building, then so be it. That is why a nation pays for and raises an Army. There is no international institution that has proven capable of effective action without the power generated and exercised by the US. America's need and ability to create a vision that generates a creative approach to strategy is thus an issue for the world.

This book will be of interest to students of strategic studies, international relations and American politics, as well as to military professionals. It is part of the Cass Series in Strategy and History.

This new series focuses on the theory and practice of strategy. Following Clausewitz, strategy has been understood to mean the use made of force, and the threat of the use of force, for the ends of policy. This series is thus interested in ideas as in historical cases of grand strategy and military strategy in action. All historical periods, near and past, and even future, are consequently of interest.