

THE 'WORLD ORDERS' IN CENTRAL ASIA: UNITED AGAINST POLITICAL ISLAM?

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Abstract

Central Asia is a region of immense importance for all major powers, as well as regional states, for their diverse interests. There is more of a divergence of interest than convergence, as far as major powers are concerned. The situation is so complex that this involvement and divergence of interest has been given the name of the 'New Great Game'. Despite having divergent interests, Russia, China, the US, and the Central Asian Republics want to counter Political Islam in the region. All of them are also concerned with the Afghan situation, which is considered the spring of Political Islam in the region. This paper attempts to explore the convergence of interest of major powers, better known as the 'world orders' against the Islamic Order. The research tries to address the following questions: What are the world orders? Which world orders are involved in Central Asia? Why has Political Islam emerged in Central Asia? What are the kinds of Political Islam in Central Asia? And why the world orders' interests converge against Political Islam in this region?

Introduction

Importance of Eurasia in global politics has been recognised by all the major powers throughout history. In 1904, Herald Mackinder, in his famous theory of 'Heartland', has emphasised the importance of this region by stating that "whoever controlled Central Asia would yield enormous power."¹ The Great Game between British India and Tsarist Russia is the best example of the importance of this region, wherein both the superpowers of their time tried to occupy it. The disintegration of the

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Soviet Union and the ideological vacuum in the newly independent Central Asian states paved the way for extra-regional powers to engage in this region. Motives and interests of these powers have convergences as well as divergences. The US was interested primarily in the safety of nuclear weapons and nuclear waste left by the Soviet Union in Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, import of hydrocarbons from the region to the Western markets, and initiation of the process of democratisation and market economies in the Central Asian Republics.

Russia, on the other hand, still considers Central Asia its backyard and is averse to allowing any other regional or extra-regional power to control this region. Russian interests in the region include energy security in terms of oil and gas exports from the region to Europe through mainland Russia, countering extremism, terrorism, and drugs and arms smuggling, security of the large number of ethnic Russians in Central Asia, primarily in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and containment of potential contenders to its influence in the region. China is primarily concerned with its trade and economic relationship with Central Asia. Other important objectives of China in the region include import of hydrocarbons, countering extremism, separatism, and terrorism, as well as physical infrastructure development in the Central Asian states. India, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey have their own vested interests ranging from economic to political and from cultural to religious. Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and—to a lesser extent—Pakistan were interested in Islamic revivalism in the Central Asian Republics. Iran and Turkey wanted to revive their historic socio-cultural and religious ties with Central Asia.

The non-state actors in the form of religious groups have their own agenda and interests in this region. They consider China, Russia, and the US imperialist powers trying to destroy Islam and its heritage in the region. There are several Islamist groups claiming to implement *sharia* laws in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Another hue of Islamists is fighting for 'independence' in Xinjiang, China, and the North Caucasus, Russia. Although they differ in their strategies to achieve their objectives to implement *sharia* laws, all of them are declared as Political Islamists by all the local, regional, and extra-regional governments. Some of these groups try to achieve their objectives through constitutional means, while others resort to violent methods. So there is a sharp difference within

Political Islam. Since all the major actors involved in the region have a convergence of interests against Political Islam, they have joined their hands to counter it.

This paper attempts to find out why, despite their divergence of interests, Russia, China, the US, and the Central Asian Republics want to counter Political Islam in the region. It attempts to explore the convergence of interest of major powers, better known as 'world orders' against the Islamic Order. In doing so, it analyses the role of various 'world orders' and versions of Political Islam active in Central Asia. It applies the theory of world orders and uses a descriptive, analytical, and critical method of research. The paper is divided into three major parts. The first part discusses the emergence and different variants of Political Islam in Central Asia. The second part talks about the convergence of interests of the world orders against Political Islam, while the third part presents an analysis of the situation. After analysing the Central Asian region, Xinjiang, and North Caucasus, the paper comes to the conclusion that the emergence of Political Islam is an indigenous phenomenon but failure to achieve its objectives in the Central Asian region can be attributed to the convergence of world orders against it.

Theoretical framework

Tahir Amin has declared all the actors involved in the region as 'world orders', with convergences and divergences of interests in the region. He says that these world orders cooperate and compete with, as well as interpenetrate each other. These world orders have made Central Asia a competing ground for their divergent interests. This situation has been termed as the New Great Game by various experts on the region. But all these world orders are on one page against the Islamic Order in the region.

The authors of *Defining the Post-Cold War World Order*² have given five major existing paradigms in the post-Cold War international politics. These include 'the end of history' by Francis Fukuyama, 'the clash of civilisations' by Samuel P. Huntington, 'complex interdependence' by Joseph Nye, 'neo-realism' by John Mearsheimer, and 'the criminal anarchy' by Robert D. Kaplan. The authors of *Defining the Post-Cold War World Order* argue that none of these paradigms could explain the changing dynamics of international politics. According

to the authors of the 'world order' project, their analysis of the principal fault lines of the emerging world order range from civilisational clash (Huntington) to great power competition (Mearsheimer), liberal-market democracy versus history (Fukuyama), American leadership versus disorder (Nye), and anarchy (Kaplan).³

All of these paradigms are concerned with the possible political and probably economic decline of the West. Therefore, to continue the Western dominance in international politics and preserve the status quo, they have given these theories. Since none of these paradigms is acceptable to the broader international community as a whole, a new concept of multiple world orders has been given by Hayward R. Alker, Thomas Biersteker, Takashi Inoguchi, and Tahir Amin. These authors are of the view that the post-Cold War era has witnessed multiple world orders, which compete, cooperate, interpenetrate, and overlap with each other. World orders encompass ideas about political and economic systems, conceptions of religion, and their role in society.⁴

According to these authors, the world orders are "patterned human activities, interaction regularities, or practices evident on the world scale. World orders are also multidimensional. They traditionally have normative, political, and directional aspects, i.e., they are intentional. They often perform a governance function. Finally, their politically contested goals, norms, and values are grounded in widely (inter-subjectively) shared beliefs, worldviews, historical missions, cosmologies, or modes of thought."⁵ These world orders operate in Central Asia as well.

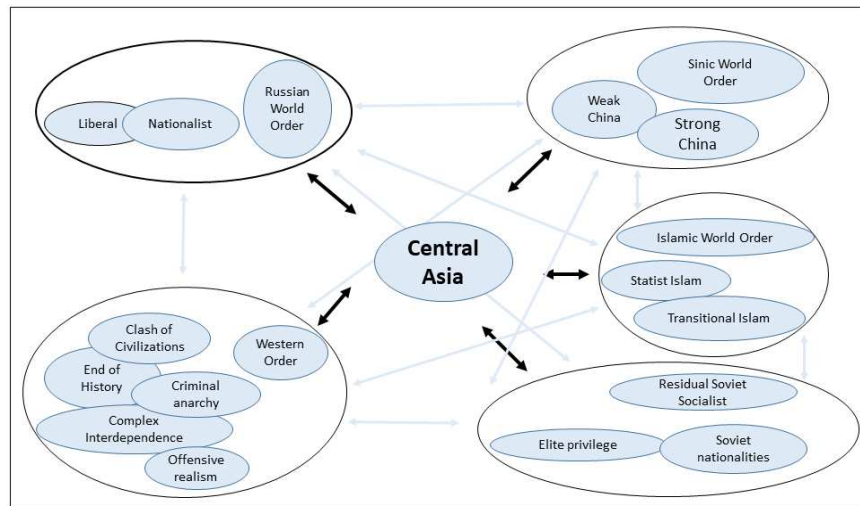
Tahir Amin has described the world orders in Central Asia in detail. He states, "World boundaries do not have to be absolute and mutually exclusive, so, we expect to find overlapping and even interpenetrating orders, and smaller, possibly regional orders within more encompassing, truly global world orders."⁶ The competing world orders in Central Asia are Islamic, Chinese, Western Liberal, Slavic, and Residual Socialist. Central Asia has got sandwiched amongst these world orders because all of them compete as well cooperate with each other, which has brought the regional leadership to a state of confusion. The situation, however, has benefited the region, as the Central Asian states not only get assistance from but also trade with these 'orders'.

According to Tahir Amin, all these 'orders' are not unified and have different versions. The Residual Socialist order is divided into 'elite privilege' and 'Soviet nationalities' thinking. This order is engaged in nation building and wants to establish an independent policy. However, the elite are heavily dependent on Moscow and cannot overlook the Russian minorities living in Central Asia while formulating policies. The Russian Slavic order has three dimensions: Western school of thought, the Asiatic school of thought, and the Eurasian school of thought. All the three schools of thoughts try to chart out a policy towards Central Asia according to their own viewpoint. The Western Liberal order looks at Central Asia from five different dimensions, including the end of history, clash of civilisations, complex interdependence, neo-realism, and criminal anarchy. The Islamic world order has two dimensions in the region: state-centric Islam and transnational Islam. While the Chinese world order is stuck between the concepts of weak and strong China. This thinking has deep influence over Chinese policy towards Central Asia.⁷

The most important phenomenon, according to Tahir Amin, is that all the world orders are at one page against the Islamic world order. They think that the Islamic world order in Central Asia is a source of destabilisation for other world orders. It is deemed as a common enemy. Coordinated efforts to contain the Islamic order by other world orders have forced the Islamic order to think of all the other world orders as a common enemy bent upon destroying the religious and cultural traditions of the region. Tahir Amin states, "The western liberal order finds commonality with the Russian, Sinic and Residual Socialist world orders in combatting the Islamic world order in central Asia."⁸

The following figure explains the competition and cooperation of world orders in Central Asia.⁹

Figure 1
Interpenetrating world orders and Central Asia¹⁰



Source: Tahir Amin, "World Order in Central Asia," in Renee Marlin-Bennett (ed.), *Alker and IR: Global Studies in an Interconnected World* (London: Routledge, 2012), p.75.

It is also interesting to note that there is no single world order within the Muslim world. One may find various Islamic world orders, which operate across the whole Muslim world. The major reason is that no single commonly accepted variant of Islam has been given by the Muslim world. Terrorism is one variant of the transnational Islamic world order. Today's Islamism is comprised of state-centric Islam and transnational Islam. Sometimes these two versions of Islam compete with each other and sometimes cooperate. The same is happening in Central Asia. Despite such realities, all the world orders are at one page against the Islamic order in Central Asia.

Political Islam in Central Asia, Xinjiang, and North Caucasus

Islam remained deeply embedded in the socio-cultural and political life of Central Asia throughout its history. The region remained one of the greatest seats of learning in the Muslim history, especially in the Middle Ages. Samarkand and Bukhara remained the centres of

civilisational excellence. The madrassas of this region, the equivalent of modern-day universities, produced world-class scientists, physicians, musicians, architects, religious scholars, and statesmen.¹¹ Clergy and the Sufis had great respect not only among the society but also in the emperors' courts. Rulers of the region imposed Islamic laws and practices into their states not only after the region embraced Islam as its religion but even before the Muslims could establish their rule in *Mawar-an-Nehr*.¹² However, after the advent of sea routes, the economic importance of Central Asia declined, as trade through the ancient Silk Routes decreased substantially, which weakened the power of Turkestan.¹³ It was split into three Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand. Later, the whole region was occupied by Tsarist Russia and then the Soviet Union. Two major movements, Basmachi and Jadeed, erupted to revive Islamic rule and teachings in the region. Basmachi Movement was an armed movement while Jadeed movement was to bring modern education to the Central Asian region.¹⁴ Both the movements received setbacks and ultimately died. Scholars and historians claim that both these movements were political in nature and both wanted to revive the lost glory of Islam in Turkestan.

There had been certain clandestine Islamic movements throughout the Soviet era but they did not contribute substantially to Islamic revivalism in the region. It was Glasnost and Perestroika policies of the last Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev that paved the way for Political Islam to rise in Central Asia. The independence of the five Central Asian Republics was a landmark for Political Islam to flourish as it got support from the extended 'brethren' community of Muslims, especially from the Middle East. The success of Mujahideen in Afghanistan also contributed considerably to the revival of Political Islam in Central Asia. Right after their independence, Political Islam surfaced in the form of small groups like *Islami Lashkari Tauba* and *Barka* in Namangan region of Uzbekistan and *Hizbe Nuzhat-e-Islami* (Islamic Renaissance Party) in Tajikistan. They demanded implementation of *sharia* in this region. Although they could not succeed in their struggle as Political Islamist groups of Uzbekistan were crushed by the Karimov regime¹⁵ and Islamic Party of Tajikistan struck a deal with the regime in 1997 to end its armed struggle against the regime and joined the Tajik

electoral system as a registered political party,¹⁶ their struggle sowed the seeds of revival of Political Islam in the region.

An important Islamist group operating in the region is Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT). HT wants to establish a caliphate(s) across the whole Muslim world.¹⁷ It is quite popular in this region as well. It has the largest number of members out of all the Political Islamist groups, despite being banned. Since it has a non-violent strategy to achieve its objectives in Central Asia, it is very attractive to the educated youth and there are reports that a large number of young females have also joined HT.¹⁸ This organisation is quite active in the provision of social services to the needy in Central Asia.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) is the most lethal and violent organisation in the region. Created in 1998 in Afghanistan with the help of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Kabul, the major aim of the movement was to overthrow the 'un-Islamic' regime of the former Uzbek president Islam Karimov. It primarily remained engaged in Afghanistan before moving to FATA region of Pakistan with the onset of the Operation Enduring Freedom after 9/11. It is found involved in some of the deadliest terrorist activities in Pakistan. Different operations by Pakistani security forces pushed it back to Afghanistan where it has engaged itself with other transnational Islamist groups. There are reports that it has split into two major factions: one is supporting Al-Qaeda while the other has affiliated itself with the Islamic State of Khorasan, the Afghan chapter of Daesh.¹⁹ Since Karimov has died and the new Uzbek president Shavkat Mirziyoyev is more progressive and open towards religion, the future of the IMU seems bleak in Central Asia. However, its affiliation with Daesh and Al-Qaeda keeps it alive in other parts of the world, notably Syria and Afghanistan.

Right after the independence of the Central Asian region, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) tried to penetrate into Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The IRP was established in Astrakhan city of the Russian Volga region in 1990 by Tartar intellectuals. The major aim was to revive Islamic values and teachings in the former Soviet Union. Independence of the region led it to operate separately in different countries. Uzbek authorities banned it after the Namangan crisis. However, it was able to operate in Tajikistan. The political crises in Tajikistan, which led to the demise of Rahmon Nabiev's regime and ultimately to civil war, forced the

IRP to resort to armed struggle against Emomali Rahmon's regime. Since the conclusion of the civil war in 1997, the IRP has integrated into the Tajik political system. Nevertheless, the Tajik regime has banned it in 2015 and its current leader Muhiddin Kabiri is living in Tehran in exile.

There are certain other smaller Islamist groups operating in the region. They include *Akromiya*, *Jandul Ansar*, *Jaish-e-Muhajireen wal-Ansaar*, *Imam Bukhari Brigade*, and *Katibat Taoheed wal Jamat*. Despite their numbers, the Political Islamist groups have not achieved anything substantial. The major reasons for their failure are the Central Asian regimes' strict policies, support of other 'world orders' in Central Asia, their internal differences, and the social structure of this region. The most important reason for their failure is the convergence of interest among the 'world orders' to contain Political Islam in the region. The following section discusses in detail the strategies the 'world orders' have charted out against Islamists in the region.

Russian Slavic order and Political Islam

The Russian Slavic order is really concerned about the activities of Islamists in the North Caucasus. Moscow has faced armed resistance in this region in the form of Chechen uprising. A large number of Central Asian Muslim migrant workers are already in Russia and more are pouring into the Russian cities. Moscow thinks that such a situation can spark Islamist resistance in the whole of the Russian Federation. Therefore, it considers it essential to cooperate with the other 'world orders' in Central Asia to contain the influence of Political Islam within Russian territories. The Russian Muslims are closer to Central Asia in their beliefs, rituals, and social values than the Arabs or Turks. Moscow is so concerned about the Islamists of the region that a Russian analyst points out that "preservation of Russia's wholeness begins in the Fergana valley."²⁰ Recent accumulation of Islamists, especially the Islamic State of Khorasan in northern Afghanistan has raised eyebrows in Moscow because Russian decisionmakers fear that the penetration of Islamists into Central Asia will have dire consequences for the Russian security as a whole.

Since the IMU and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) have joined Daesh in Afghanistan and Iraq, Moscow can predict the consequences once these Islamists get involved in the Central Asian

region. President Putin has called for “coordinated actions to address the Islamic State (IS) threat to the region.”²¹ However, it is the Chechen issue and the rise of Political Islam in broader North Caucasus region that has forced Russian Slavic order to cooperate with Western Liberal, Chinese, and the Residual Socialist world orders to combat the Islamic World Order in the region.

In order to combat the Islamic World Order in the region, Russia has signed security agreements with the Central Asian states. The most important out of them is the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) signed in 2002 to combat terrorism. As almost all the Central Asian Republics do not have modern high-tech security forces, the Residual Socialist Order has to rely on Russia for this need. This reliance has been described by the late Uzbek president Islam Karimov in the following words, “We have centuries-old relationship of friendship, brotherhood, and mutual assistance with that [Russia] country and its great people.”²² Russian role in maintaining the so-called peace during the Tajik civil war is another example of the Central Asian Republics’ dependence on Russia for their security. The most important security measure of the CSTO is the creation of Collective Rapid Reaction Force. The major purpose of this Reaction Force is to counter any internal threat to the stability of any member state if requested by the concerned state. It is feared that this force will be used against any possible political or religious opposition or insurgency. According to AbduJalil Boymatov, Chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), “Most of the security measures taken by the Central Asian governments in general and Uzbekistan, in particular, to deal with the internal crisis are fake and aimed to counter the opposition, both religious and secular.”²³

Countering Political Islam in Chechnya

Like their counterparts in the Central Asian states, Chechen Muslims had similar socio-political and religious experiences during the Soviet rule. Having very little modern education, no religious reconstruction due to a strict ban on religious activities, and the influence of Afghan Jihad, Mullahs in Chechnya got influenced by Islamists. In order to keep them away from Political Islam, Moscow even introduced *Sharia* Courts in Dagestan and Ingushetia.²⁴ The state failed to achieve its objective as it had banned all kinds of religious materials in these

regions. The *Sharia* Courts could not fulfil the demands of the local Muslim majority population.

An uprising started that led to the First Chechen War in 1994. The war lasted for two years. Almost 4,000 Russian troops were killed during the war. It was one of the greatest losses to the Russian military after the Second World War. In response, Moscow used ruthless force to crush Islamist resistance. This strict policy against Political Islam by the Russian Slavic order encouraged the Residual Socialist order in the Central Asian Republics, especially in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, to chart out similar strategies against the Islamic World Order. The second Chechen war of 1999-2001 was a direct outcome of the rise of Political Islam in Afghanistan in the form of the Taliban regime. This war started right after the creation of the IMU as well. Moscow declared that the Chechen rebels had contacts with Islamists in Central Asia and Afghanistan and that they were getting support and training from them.²⁵

The increased activities of the Islamists in the Caucasus have forced Moscow to declare this region as a "new haven for separatism."²⁶ To combat this menace, besides countering the Chinese and Western Liberal orders in the region, the Russian Slavic order created the CSTO in 2002 and a Rapid Reaction Force in 2009. It has established its military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and is negotiating with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for the establishment of its military bases to assist regional states in improving their security measures as well as to counter the US influence. Russia is operating Kant Base in Kyrgyzstan, which is only 30 miles away from the US base in Manas, Kyrgyzstan.

China and the rise of Political Islam on its western borders

Although ethnic Uighurs are of Turkic origin, they have been dominated by the Chinese from time to time. This dominance has been declared as 'colonialism' by the Uighurs of Xinjiang, the Muslim majority region of China bordering Central Asia.²⁷ Due to this thinking, there have been several independence movements in Xinjiang. The prominent among them took place before and after the Second World War and after the Soviet disintegration in 1991. In order to alter the ethnic demography of Xinjiang, Beijing has introduced the policy of ethnic Han Chinese migration and settlement into the Xinjiang region. Han migration to this

region has created a huge demographic imbalance that has resulted in the Uighurs' discontent. Han population in Xinjiang has increased from merely 6 percent in 1953 to 40 percent in 2010²⁸ and is increasing every year. After failing to achieve their objectives politically, Uighurs blended their struggle with ethnicity and later on with Islam. They created the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). This struggle got violent when it joined the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

The independence movements around the Second World War led to the creation of two independent Turkestan Republics in 1933 and 1944. The republics were recaptured by the Chinese military shortly thereafter. Impacts of the creation of these republics on the lives of Uighurs, however, were immense. Since the republics implemented *sharia* as state law, it had profound effects on the Uighur society. It also clearly showed the world that the people of this region adhered to their religion. The Basmachi Movement against the Soviet rule in Central Asia is considered one of the major causes for the establishment of the first East Turkestan Republic in 1933. Creation of the second East Turkestan Republic was also influenced by the religious and social freedom Central Asia got during the Second World War.

The post-1970 era witnessed an ethnic cleansing of the indigenous people from the region. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing declared "the non-Hans as alien in the Chinese lands. A systematic campaign against the Uighurs was started by the Chinese authorities with incidents like defaming religious leadership, parading them in the streets and in extreme cases, burning the Quran."²⁹ Such practices increased hatred towards Hans amongst the Uighurs. Although the Uighur struggle had remained political in nature, Beijing's religious persecution made it more religious than political. Afghan jihad reinforced the political struggle of Uighurs.

Countering Political Islam in Xinjiang

The Chinese World order has dealt harshly with the rise of Political Islam in the Xinjiang region. This no tolerance policy strengthened after 9/11 and the start of the Operation Enduring Freedom, as ETIM had joined hands with the Taliban regime in Kabul and Al-Qaeda. Different agreements have been signed with the Residual Socialist Orders in the Central Asian Republics to counter the Islamists in Xinjiang. The ethnic Uighurs also live in the Central Asian Republics—

notably in Kazakhstan, besides Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. An estimated 300,000 Uighurs live in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan alone.³⁰ Uighurs in Kazakhstan are under a perpetual eye of the authorities. In order to keep the Uighurs under control, Beijing has concluded an extradition treaty with Astana. Kazakh authorities frequently extradite the wanted Uighurs to China. For example, a school teacher who fled to Kazakhstan from Xinjiang in 2009 was extradited by the Kazakh authorities.³¹

The traditional social and religious practices are put under strict control by the Chinese government in Xinjiang. A complete ban on fasting and offering prayers has been imposed in educational institutions and workplaces. Dress code for students in educational institutions also forbids them from wearing their traditional dresses. *Wahabi* is the common pejorative term used against the practising Uighurs. Kids under 18 years of age cannot attend religious studies. Such state policies have strengthened the Uighur hatred towards the state and the Hans living in Xinjiang. It has also escalated ethnic tension and violence in Xinjiang.

Central Asia-Xinjiang connection of Political Islam

History shows that Islam in Xinjiang remained influenced by the developments in Central Asia (Turkestan). The religious figures of Turkestan led rebellious movements against the Qing dynasty in Xinjiang. Similarly, the creation of two East Turkestan Republics in 1933 and 1944 was also influenced by the developments in Central Asia. It is said that "Kashgar is closer to Baghdad than to Beijing."³² Chinese authorities fear that religious and ethnic developments in neighbouring Central Asia have deep impacts on Xinjiang. Therefore, it is considered important to have joint mechanisms with the Central Asian Republics to counter their influence in Xinjiang.

The concentration of Islamists in Afghanistan before and after 9/11 provided an ample opportunity to the Islamists of Central Asia and Xinjiang to cooperate with each other. Creation of the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT) in 2002, which was a blend of the IMU, ETIM, and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU) is a good example in this regard. Chinese authorities claimed in 2002 that they had intercepted 50 Uighurs who were trained in Afghanistan and were sent to Xinjiang through Central Asia. In response, Beijing came out with stricter policies in Xinjiang.³³ China has warned the bordering Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan not to "harbour or give sanctuary to any of the

ETIM's dissidents; otherwise, Chinese investments will be in jeopardy."³⁴ The Residual Socialist order is cooperating with Sinic Order in this regard.

World orders and Political Islam in Xinjiang

ETIM's transnational linkages with other Islamists of the world, especially Al-Qaeda, has brought Chinese, Western Liberal, and the Russian Slavic Orders on one page against Political Islam in western China. After 9/11, spokesperson of Chinese foreign ministry stated, "[Uighurs] have been trained by the international terrorists, so, the fight against separatists in Xinjiang is part of the fight of the world against terrorism."³⁵ The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) dominated by Russian Slavic and Chinese orders adopted a resolution in 2002, which says that activities "threatening the peace, stability and security of the member states of the SCO or the entire world be dealt jointly."³⁶ This statement invited other world orders to cooperate with each other against the Islamic order.

China has provided millions of dollars in aid to Central Asian states to counter terrorism. There was a Counter-Terrorism Centre in Bishkek under the Shanghai-5. The SCO has established Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent. The charter of SCO is quite clear against the Islamic order as it states, "perceived potential danger of Islamist militants is the main threat that binds regional security strategies of the SCO countries together."³⁷

Prior to 9/11, the US was focused on eliminating human rights violations in Xinjiang, but it took a U-turn after 9/11 and softened its policy on human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The US State Department declared ETIM as a terrorist organisation in 2002 on the charges that it was planning to attack the US embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The Western Liberal order was in dire need of cooperation from the Chinese, Russian Slavic, and the Residual Socialist orders to combat Political Islam in Afghanistan. Since all these world orders were united against the Islamic world order, they joined their hands for this purpose despite their divergent interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

US: only countering militant Islam in Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics?

Washington provided millions of dollars in aid to Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet forces. Mujahideen fought for ten years against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan and forced Moscow to withdraw from Afghanistan. Mujahideen from across the globe were encouraged to join that jihad. They were trained, equipped with arms, and kept very close to the 'drivers' of that jihad. However, Mujahideen of the 1980s and their heirs became terrorists right after 9/11 and a global war against terrorism was started by Washington against the so-called terrorists (Islamic order) in Afghanistan. From 2001 onwards, the US forces are in Afghanistan trying to win an inconclusive war.

The US administrations had to rely upon the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan in order to continue its activities in Afghanistan. The central Asian region is very important for the US in this regard. Despite having reservations about the US stay in this region, all the orders have supported the Western Liberal order's Operation Enduring Freedom and its efforts to combat Political Islam. The Central Asian Republics are in favour of US stay in Afghanistan as they think that it will guarantee security to their southern and most fragile borders. The late Uzbek president Islam Karimov stated in April 2013 in Moscow, "Next year's planned exit of NATO troops from Afghanistan will create dangerous conditions in Central Asia, and Russia's presence will help maintain peace in the region."³⁸

US strategy to counter Islamic world order in Central Asia

Washington knows that in order to control the Islamic order in Afghanistan, it is necessary that it must not have contacts with its neighbouring networks. The White House's National Strategy for Counter-Terrorism states:

The US does not face a direct terrorist threat from Central Asia but has interest in maintaining the security of the US logistics infrastructure supporting operation in Afghanistan, key strategic facilities and in preventing the emergence of Al-Qaeda's safe heavens in Central Asia. It remains vigilant to warning signs in the region and continues to support local

efforts to ensure that the threats against the US and allied interest from terrorist groups in Central Asia remain low.³⁹

Central Asia is still important to the US. The importance has been manifested in the 2014 statement of the US CENTCOM commander General Lloyd Austin who stated the following to the Congressional Committee of Armed Services:

Central Asia's position bordering Russia, China, Afghanistan and Iran assures its long term importance to the US. By improving upon our military to military relationships we will be better able to maintain influence and access, counter malign activities, protect lines of communication and deny [violent extremist organisations] access to ungoverned spaces and restrict their freedom of movement [in Central Asia].⁴⁰

Central Asian states were quick to provide support to the US in Operation Enduring Freedom. They offered them basing rights on easy conditions. Karshi Khanabad base, the largest in the whole of Central Asia had been under the use of US forces until 2005 when it was vacated by the Uzbek regime in response to the human rights violation charges by the US. Other bases used by the coalition forces were Dushanbe (Tajikistan) used by French forces, Termez (Uzbekistan) used by the German forces, Shymkent (Kazakhstan) used by the ISAF forces, and Manas (Kyrgyzstan) used by the US forces.

When NATO's supply to Afghanistan was disrupted in Pakistan by terrorists' attacks on NATO convoys, the US administration established the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) in order to carry the NATO supplies from Russia and the Central Asian Republics to Afghanistan. Since the creation of the NDN, Western Liberal Order does not bother about the human rights violations by the Residual Socialist Order against Political Islam. As most of the Central Asian regimes are highly authoritative, genuine opposition is not allowed. Hence, people join underground Islamist organisations in order to show their discontent against the regimes. Human rights activists in the region are disappointed by the recent rapprochement between the US and Uzbek authorities against Political Islam. They think that it is just for political

purposes and has strengthened the human rights violations in Central Asia.

The American double standards on the Central Asian Republics are exemplified by its U-turn on the Andijon incident of 2005, where the Uzbek security forces killed hundreds of non-combatants including women and children. Initially, Washington not only criticised the actions of the Uzbek regime, it also demanded an international inquiry into the incident, which was rejected by Tashkent with the help of Moscow and Beijing.⁴¹ However, later on, the Pentagon said that "Andijon massacre was passé. It's gone, got over it."⁴² Washington has provided the Central Asian Republics with millions of dollars to train their security forces to combat Islamists in the region. The assistance amount in this regard rose from \$188 million in 2002 to \$247 million in 2010.⁴³ "US has also proposed to establish military training centres in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that have an estimated cost of \$17.5 million."⁴⁴ 'Exercise Regional Cooperation 10' in Tajikistan was an initiative of Washington with an objective to counter the menace of terrorism collectively at the regional level.

Conclusion

Major reasons for the rise of Political Islam in Central Asia are the Afghan issue and the lifelong authoritative regimes of the region. In Xinjiang and the North Caucasus, it revolves around anti-religious policies of the states and a quest for independence. The Islamic order is also very much concerned with global issues of the Muslim world, especially Palestine and now Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, etc. Islamic order also propagates the cooperation of other 'un-Islamic' Orders against itself in the region. Central Asian societies, especially those of living in the Fergana Valley,⁴⁵ are closer to religion. Therefore, they also think that the non-Muslims (orders) are a curse for them. The Islamic order says that there is a consensus of the enemies of Islam on eliminating religion from the Central Asian states. Political Islam considers Residual Socialist, Chinese, Slavic, and Liberal world orders to be on the same page as far as human rights violations, political oppression, and religious persecution are concerned.

Despite having divergent political and economic interest in the region, Russian Slavic, Chinese, Western Liberal, and the Residual

Socialist orders are at one page against the Islamic order in Central Asia. It is considered as a common threat. Several bilateral, as well as multilateral agreements, have been signed to counter Political Islam. The situation in Afghanistan has also provided the Islamists with a safe haven. But it is very important to note that there is no single variant of the Islamic order operating in the region. The world orders need to rethink their policies by demarcating the violent Political Islam from the peaceful and constitutional Political Islam. Double standards of the Western Liberal ORDER on democracy and human rights are also an important reason for the rise of Political Islam.

Beijing's and Moscow's policies are considered responsible for the blending of comparatively secular political movements with religious extremism. Having a weak security apparatus and fragile borders, the Central Asian Republics favour the staying of the US in Afghanistan, which more or less guarantees the security of their southern borders. Although Islamists in the region have failed to unite or chart out a collective strategy to achieve their common goal, it is the world orders' alliance against Political Islam that is a major blow to their activities. The emergence of the Islamic State of Khorasan in Afghanistan has again brought the world orders closer against the Islamic order. It can be estimated that this cooperation against the Islamic order will last for the near future because, with the initiation of the Belt and Road initiative, Beijing is very much concerned with the security of Central Asia. It is very important for the US to conclude the war on terrorism in Afghanistan as soon as possible, otherwise, Political Islam will get further strengthened as it will gain time to re-establish itself. Moreover, a US defeat will not only legitimise Political Islam in this region but in the broader Muslim World as well.

Notes and references

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- 4 Renee Marlin-Bennett (ed.), *Alker and IR*, op.cit., p.34.
- 5 Ibid., p.33.
- 6 Tahir Amin, "World Orders in Central Asia," in Renee Marlin-Bennett (ed.), *Alker and IR*, op.cit., p.71.
- 7 Ibid., pp.71-85.
- 8 Ibid., p.72.
- 9 Ibid., p.75.
- 10 Black arrows represent interpenetration of world order, acting on Central Asia. Grey arrows represent interpenetration of world orders acting through Central Asia.
- 11 For example, Avicenna, Al-Farabi, Muhammad Musa Al-Khawarizmi, Aburehan al-Biruni, Khoja Ahmed Yaswi, Muhammad bin Ismael (Imam Bukhari), Muhammad bin Isa (Imam Tirmzi), Jamshed al-Kaschi, and Ulughbeg.
- 12 The phrase means beyond the river. It was then used by the Arabs for Central Asia. The region was located beyond the Amu Darya so it was given this name. For details, see Ludmila Polonskaya and Alexei Malashenko, *Islam in Central Asia*, (Beirut: Ithaca Press Readings, 1994).
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