



*Afghan mujahideen in 1979. Today, three years after the Soviet withdrawal, sectarian and ethnic divisions among the former rebel groups threaten to engulf the country in civil war.*

intervention takes place without resolving the real problems that separate the Afghan leaders, it is taken for granted that Afghanistan will be partitioned.

The dangers such a solution entails are manifold. While the Tajik-Uzbek combine will control Kabul and northern Afghanistan, and possibly western Afghanistan in alliance with the Shia groups, Hekmatyar will control Khost, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, providing him control over almost the entire eastern portion of the country bordering Pakistan's North West Frontier Province and parts of Baluchistan. Besides the threat that Pakistan will face from the betrayed Hekmatyar (since Pakistan's Frontier province consists of the Pakhtoon tribe, and a Greater Pakhtoonistan Movement has a long history), the Central Asian republics will be subjected to polarizations on the basis of ethnic and sectarian lines. There, Islamic countries like Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan, which are planning to reap the bonanza in the reconstruction of these Central Asian countries, will find themselves enmired in a chaotic situation where no economic development can be sustained. There are already indications that China and Israel, as well as the United States, have begun to make forays into this area.

It is this danger that should entice Pakistan and Iran to leave aside their vested interests in the Afghan issue and come together to mediate between the warring Afghan factions. Such negotiations should have been carried out when the fissures between the mujahideens began to emerge with the departure of the defeated Soviet Army. However, it is neither too late, nor is there much choice left. The sooner the heads of state in Islamabad and Teheran get together and commit themselves to stop the fratricidal war in Afghanistan, the better it is for the region.

Too many local wars, one should note carefully, often lead to an all-engulfing war involving the region and beyond.

## Iran offers India access to Central Asia

by Ramtanu Maitra

The visit in early August to Teheran by Indian Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Eduardo Faleiro, has drawn much attention in New Delhi. It has been noted that both Iran and India share many views on the changing world situation. Of particular importance is the Iranian government's willingness to strike a more radical posture at the Sept. 1-6 Jakarta, Indonesia summit of the Non-Aligned Movement and pull NAM out of the abyss that it has been sinking into over the last nine years.

Equally important, from Delhi's viewpoint, is the offer extended by Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to provide India with access to the newly independent Central Asian republics in order to help these fledgling republics reconstruct their infrastructure. Iran has long recognized India's engineering capabilities for large infrastructure projects.

### Offer to India

From the Indian standpoint, the offer came as a windfall. Strapped with foreign exchange shortages and with an economy which has little export capability, India had been looking wistfully at the reconstruction potentials of the Central Asian republics, while lacking the ability to participate in the building process of these Muslim-dominated countries. President Rafsanjani said countries like India could help the Central Asian countries in their progress in many ways, and Iran is prepared to offer the facility. Although it has not been spelled out yet, it is assumed that Teheran would provide the much-needed seed money to start various programs, in addition to exerting its political influence to bring India onto the scene.

India has also been asked to participate in four major projects in Iran. These projects include the construction of a steel plant, installation of railroads, and electrification of a large township now under construction with all modern facilities. Minister Faleiro has been reportedly assured that it is only the beginning, and much stronger economic ties can be built.

Faleiro also received a clear message that Teheran is aware of the dangers that the post-Cold War era portends, and is considering how to act in developing nations' interests. President Rafsanjani made it clear that the Non-Aligned Movement has to be made more effective and there was

complete agreement between the two sides on "sovereignty and independence of developing countries."

The thinking behind this stance was elucidated by a column in India's *Hindustan Times*, citing top Iranian strategic analysts. According to this Iranian view, the economic problems of the United States will force it to emit occasional "hiccups," Russia will remain dormant and subservient to the United States until it rediscovers its economic and technological strength, while Japan and the European Community will continue to "tame" the United States without making it transparent that they are out to clip its wings. All in all, the analysts say, the great ones are "less great" now, but "they will roar a lot."

### The 'Group of Four'

Under these circumstances, the Iranian analysts suggest, the major countries within the South must work in unison to advance the developing nations in trade, technology transfer, technology generation, economic sovereignty, and political independence. In this context, they urge Iran, China, India, and Indonesia to form a "Group of Four" (G-4), and force the Group of Seven industrialized countries to negotiate with them. They point out that these four countries share the same worldview and could work to protect the interests of developing countries.

It is, however, difficult to imagine that the Iranian view of China will find acceptance in either Jakarta or New Delhi, given China's recent actions to assert its claim on the South China Sea and Beijing's own operations in Central Asia in tandem with Israel.

The Iranians are suggesting that the G-4 operate bilaterally, especially in light of the fact that China is not a member of NAM. For the NAM summit in September, the Iranians believe that Iran, India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brazil, and a few other countries could form the lead group to push NAM in a more aggressive direction.

### Indian lethargy

Despite the difficulties, Teheran's ideas are the first fresh air in the present foreign policy confusion which has paralyzed most developing nations. New Delhi, for example, remains tied down by the old baggage of thoughts and has fallen back on its old lethargic ways. Hardly a single innovation toward the changed world situation has come from New Delhi's South Block, where India's foreign policymakers reside. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was hardly a requirement for innovation, and Indian policymakers trudged the furrow marked by Cold War compulsions. However, now more than ever, when constructive and firm policy initiatives are necessary, New Delhi continues with the proverbial old man's shuffle.

While there is no question that Faleiro's visit to Teheran has shed new light on future possibilities, it would be naive to assume that bilateral relations between India and Iran will

proceed without a hitch. However, it would be a great misfortune if the stereotyped Indian bureaucrats and complacent politicians, imbued with the ideology of maintaining the *status quo*, seize upon such differences and in the process, let yet another opportunity slip through their uncertain fingers.

In this context, an understanding of Iran-Pakistan relations is crucial. Teheran has indicated clearly that the Iranian government is not interested in exporting its brand of Islamic fundamentalism. But Iranian mullahs may not necessarily subscribe to Teheran's view on this issue. Pakistan, like India, is uneasy about the spread of Shia fundamentalism and tries to strike a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. While there is no question that Iran considers Pakistan an ally, it also has expressed uneasiness over Pakistan's closeness to both Saudi Arabia and the United States—the two stated enemies of Iran. It is also clear that Iran does not so far consider Pakistan's role in Afghanistan as an independent one.

Iran is also conscious of the crisis that has erupted due to the continuing violence in the Indian part of Kashmir. Iran had earlier endorsed the Pakistani demand to resolve the Kashmir issue on the basis of the 1949 U.N. resolution, but of late has chosen not to disagree with the Indian proposal that the crisis should be solved bilaterally, according to the 1972 Shimla Agreement. There are reports that Iran has expressed desire to mediate on the Kashmir issue because it feels that it can exert influence on all three involved parties—India, Pakistan, and Kashmiri militants. Teheran has also fully endorsed New Delhi's dictum on the thorny Temple-Masjid issue which has resulted in violent Hindu-Muslim riots.

The India-Iran relations over the last two decades have moved from one of Indian economic dependence on Iran to strains. Iran used to be India's main source of crude oil, but during the last decade Iran's supply has come down to a trickle. Meanwhile, not a drop of oil contracted with Russia earlier this year has reached India. Under the circumstances, India has been seeking a three- to five-year arrangement for oil supplies from Iran. During the last decade, India's trade with Iran plummeted from 14 billion to 2 billion rupees.

In addition to the slip in trade, bilateral relations were affected. India's alleged arming of Iraq and providing arms training to Iraqi officers while the latter was the aggressor in its 10-year war against Iran, initiated a number of genuine protests from Teheran. Iran, on a number of occasions, had expressed concern about the state of Muslims in India, perhaps acting under pressure from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

India, on the other hand, had been suspicious of Teheran's motives whenever Iran expressed support for Kashmiri militants. However, these responses by both countries were often triggered by the artificial conditions created by the Cold War. More important now, as Teheran is indicating, is the necessity to defend the sovereign rights of the developing countries.