



# CENTRAL TREATY ORGANIZATION

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**CENTRAL TREATY ORGANIZATION** (CENTO), a mutual defense and economic cooperation pact among Persia, Turkey, and Pakistan, with the participation of the United Kingdom and the United States as associate members. CENTO replaced the [Baghdad Pact](#) Organization, after Iraq withdrew from it in Farvardīn 1338 Š./March 1959. The pro-Soviet Iraqi “revolutionary” government that was established after the coup d’état of Tīr 1337 Š./1958 rejected the “defensive” strategy of the pro-Western Baghdad Pact and accused Britain, the United States, and Turkey of imperialist designs in the Persian Gulf region (Hadley, p. 6). The remaining members of the Baghdad Pact gathered in London, where they decided to transfer the permanent secretariat from Baghdad to Ankara and established a scientific secretariat in Tehran in late 1337 Š./1958 for research in agriculture and technical expertise. The name change did not take effect until Šahrīvar 1338 Š./August 1959, when the United States became an associate member, signing a series of bilateral defense agreements with Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan.

CENTO was created as a conventional military alliance in the Cold War climate of the 1950s and served as the central link in the chain of strategic defense pacts against the Soviet Union and its allies established by the Western powers from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). Although the fear of communist expansion in the Northern Tier region (i.e., Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan) was very real,



it was unlikely that Persia, Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan would have come together on their own initiative without British and American assurances. London in particular considered CENTO to be “vital” (Hadley, p. 3) to its security and ardently hoped that other states would join in due time. For the British a Middle East security system required the participation of Arab states, especially Egypt, to give it viability. Without the participation of nationalist Arabs a defense pact associated with the West could not remain stable. After the Iraqi withdrawal in 1959, in spite of serious efforts, CENTO failed to secure the cooperation of any other Arab state (Hadley, pp. 3-4). This deprived the alliance of much of its significance, and one might say that its sword lacked a cutting edge.

Throughout the 1350s Š./1970s “détente” dominated American and Soviet policies. Moscow in particular was concerned with the rising influence of the People’s Republic of China in Asia. CENTO’s regional members no longer feared an outright Soviet attack, as they improved political and economic relations with Moscow. The strategic reasons for creating CENTO in the 1330s Š./1950s were no longer pertinent in the 1350s Š./1970s. But for Moḥammad-Rezā Shah CENTO remained an important institution, because it provided Persia with membership in an exclusive international club, which in addition to prestige gave important economic benefits. Ironically, the Soviet threat of the 1330s Š./1950s was dwarfed by more real challenges to CENTO’s regional members in the 1340s Š./1960s. Turkey’s conflict with Greece over Cyprus (1964), Pakistan’s quarrel with India (1965), the border disputes between Persia and Iraq (1989; see [boundaries iv](#)) left their marks on the long-term relationships of CENTO members in the Middle East. Persia’s CENTO politics in particular were perceived negatively by nationalist Arab states, who objected to Tehran’s pro-Western policies (Hadley, pp. 5-6).

CENTO had an elaborate organizational structure, including a council of ministers, a secretariat, and an economic committee, with subcommittees in the health, trade, and communications fields. The council of ministers, CENTO’s supreme source of authority, met annually at the prime ministers’ or foreign ministers’ level, alternatively in Tehran, Islamabad, Ankara, London, and Washington. A council of deputies held fortnightly meetings at the Ankara headquarters at the ambassadorial level. The secretariat, composed of approximately 200 individuals in the 1350s Š./1970s—including 50 military officers—maintained close ties with both NATO and SEATO. A Secretary General, appointed by the council of ministers for a renewable three years,



oversaw CENTO activities. Six individuals occupied the post after 1339 Š./1960: Osman Ali Baig (‘Otmān-‘Alī Beyg; Pakistan), ‘Abbās-‘Alī Kaḷ‘atbarī (Abbas Ali Khalatbary; Persia), Turgut Menemencioglu (Turkey), Naṣīr ‘Aṣṣār (Nassir Assar; Persia), Umit Haluk Baylken (Turkey), and Kamuran Gurun (Turkey). The Secretariat had four divisions that carried out nonmilitary tasks. The Political and Administrative Division prepared and serviced council meetings and implemented directives from the Secretariat. The Economic Division prepared and serviced meetings of the Economic Committee and administered the technical cooperation program, as well as the Multilateral Technical Cooperation Fund. It also acted as liaison for technical exchanges between member states, developed statistical materials, and worked in close cooperation with the Agricultural Machinery and Soil Conservation Training Center in Persia. The Public Relations Division promoted knowledge and understanding of CENTO purposes and activities by distributing press releases, reports, and technical papers. Finally, the Security Division oversaw the security of the Secretariat and its staff.

CENTO was provided with a powerful military committee as well. Although no military command structure or any combat troops were ever assigned to the organization, the military committee was its pivotal arm, conducting periodic joint military exercises. Four annual military exercises were held from 1339 Š./1960 to 1356 Š./1977, including a maritime training program called MIDLINK held in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea for naval and air forces; an air defense operation (Šahbāz) to coordinate the movement of aircraft with NATO; a search and rescue exercise (Najāt) that simulated human disasters involving local police and the gendarmerie, as well as the regular armed forces; and a small arms competition (Nešān) to promote marksmanship. Biannual war games (Zanjīr) were also held to streamline cooperation at the command levels.

British and American defense agreements led to the creation of the Permanent Military Deputies Group (PMDG), which oversaw, through the agency of a special committee, a number of economic activities, including the completion of railway and telecommunications links between the three regional states. Composed of five senior officers who represented the military committee, the PMDG was mandated to advise on military problems in the Persian Gulf and the Northern Tier regions and provide direction to the Combined Military Planning Staff (Europa, p. 146). CENTO demonstrated a strong interest in subversion activities, most of which were presumed to originate in the Soviet



Union, and, accordingly, supported counter-subversion activities (Ramazani, 1966, pp. 120-21). But it failed to meet the real security needs of its members. In September 1965, for example, Pakistan invoked the treaty in connection with its war with India. Persia and Turkey gave verbal support, whereas Britain and the United States opted for neutrality (Ramazani, 1975, pp. 339-42). Because of such failures, CENTO turned its attention more to economic development and technical cooperation issues.

In 1338 Š./1959 the United States established a special Development Loan Fund and financed, among other projects, the Turkey-Persia railway. One of the most spectacular achievements was the inauguration of a 7,925 km microwave telephone line linking Ankara, Tehran, and Karachi, which was inaugurated in 1344 Š./1965 and which cost 30 million US dollars. In 1341 Š./1962 an industrial development wing was established within the secretariat to finance numerous industrial projects. The port of Trabzon was enlarged in 1342 Š./1963 and that of Iskenderun completely reconstructed with CENTO funds in 1351 Š./1972. Other projects included the 1,000-mile highway linking Pakistan, Persia, and Turkey, as well as the CENTO airway system, which introduced international standards for the control and surveillance of the air routes between Ankara, Tehran, and Karachi through air-navigational aids, radar-equipped air traffic control centers, and modern meteorological services. By 1353 Š./1974 significant technical cooperation had been accomplished, causing high university officials from CENTO regional countries to begin meeting annually (Europa, p. 147).

Costs for CENTO-sponsored projects were drawn from the Multilateral Technical Cooperation Fund and the Multilateral Scientific Fund, to which all members contributed, even though London and Washington voluntarily assumed higher financial burdens. Individual governments met all local expenses associated with conferences. Supplementary payments were made voluntarily to cover substantial costs for nationals attending CENTO meetings. The Secretariat budget covered salaries for most CENTO staff, except for military personnel serving on the Combined Military Planning Staff, as well as the expenses incurred by the headquarters in Ankara. CENTO budgets required 300,000 pounds sterling in 1970 and close to 500,000 in 1977 (Hadley, p. 25). All five countries contributed equally to the financing of the headquarters.

Because of its pro-Western leanings, CENTO caused serious disturbances throughout the Middle East. Outside the organization, Arab leaders hoping for



a neutral bloc between the communist world and the West were bitterly opposed to the organization. But even inside the organization, long-term regional interests persuaded Persia, Turkey, and Pakistan to operate more independently from Britain and the United States, and in Mordād 1343 Š./July 1964 these three countries established the Organization for Regional Cooperation and Development (ORCD) to satisfy their own nascent concerns.

The twenty-fifth and last CENTO Ministerial Council meeting was held in 1357 Š./1978 in London. By the fall of 1357 Š./1978 premonitions of revolution led Tehran to scale back its participation, and in 1358 Š./1979, after the fall of Moḥammad-Rezā Shah, the government of the Islamic Republic canceled its membership in CENTO. Thereby the organization lost its central link and consequently its *raison d'être*. With the subsequent withdrawal of Turkey and Pakistan in the same year the organization was dissolved formally.

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