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SOVIET ROLE IN AFGHANISTAN : PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan leading to the overthrow of President Hafizullah Amin's Government, the setting up of a new government with Babrak Karmal as President and the continued and massive involvement of Soviet troops to sustain Karmal's government and preserve overall Soviet interests has presented the West with a *fait accompli*.

There arise a number of questions for consideration. What motivated the Soviet military action and how was it justified? Was such an intervention necessary and why did it take place at the time it did? What are the prospects for a neutral Afghanistan? What are the consequences for the sub-continent? This paper is an attempt to answer these and other questions.

I

The official reason given by the Kremlin for the Red Army's intervention in Afghanistan was to respond to an ally in need, in this case to restore and consolidate the political viability of the tottering regime of Hafizullah Amin. On December 28, 1979, Tass quoted Kabul Radio as saying that the Afghan government

This article written in August, 1980 is a revised version of a paper presented to the *Seminar on Afghanistan* at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies, Dacca, March 5, 1980.

issued urgent appeal to the USSR for military assistance because of external interference from the US, China and Pakistan. On December 30, Pravda reported that the USSR sent troops to Kabul in response to repeated requests by the Afghan government. Pravda argued that the USSR was obligated to send military help under the provision of the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty¹ of December 5, 1978 and the UN Charter. Brezhnev, in his re-election speech to the Politburo, confirmed that the Red Army would remain in Afghanistan to rebuff armed interference from outside as long as such interference continued.

From what could be gathered things were proceeding well with Daoud and the Kremlin may have wished to maintain its strategy of political camouflage and gradualism to minimise opposition and avoid possible civil war. However, diplomatic sources in Kabul reveal that with the Taraki take-over internal events started going out of hand and Taraki's overt pro-Moscow stance not only aggravated the delicate balance between the political factions within the Khalq Party, it also brought the Soviet role in Afghanistan to a sharp focus. Subsequent development of events appeared incoherent and unpredictable, forcing the Kremlin to act in a now-or-never situation. Within eight months of the Taraki coup, Moscow signed a Friendship Treaty with a carefully worded provision for military co-operation between the two countries, and on the basis of that provision (Art. 4) calling for "cooperation in the military

1. For full text of the Treaty, see *Survival* Vol. XXI, No. 2 (March/April, 1979): 92-93.

field on the basis of appropriate agreements concluded between them" the Soviet Union sent the Red Army to defend its ally against purported external interference, although that ally was no longer Amin but Babrak Karmal, the 'purged' leader of the rival Parcham group. The Treaty was a deft manoeuvre by the Kremlin to justify its anticipated military build-up and take-over to pre-empt political deadlock and give Moscow a direct control over ensuing events. It should be noted that although Article 4 of the Treaty allowed for military co-operation, Article 1 stated that "the high contracting Parties officially declare their firm resolve...to promote all-around cooperation on the basis of...non-interference in the internal affairs of each other", a provision which stood violated due to current Red Army take-over of much of Kabul's administration.

Also, the Kremlin refrained from citing any Article in the UN Charter under which it felt obligated to help the Afghan regime. In fact, nowhere in the UN Charter is there any provision for military intervention in the internal affairs of another country bypassing the Security Council. On the contrary, Soviet actions violated Art. 2, para. 4 that calls upon all members to "refrain... from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity" of another state, Art. 33, para. 1 that calls for pacific settlement of disputes and Art. 52, para. 1 that condemns activities inconsistent with the Purposes and Principles of the UN.

However, the theoretical basis for intervention in Afghanistan was supplied by the extension of the Brezhnev

Doctrine first put to use during the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Doctrine argued that "the sovereignty of each socialist country cannot be opposed to the interests of the world of socialism, of the world revolutionary movement". In other words, the world revolutionary movement enjoys a special primacy and socialist countries are obligated to help the socialist forces in their class struggle. This is consistent with Khrushchev's policy of supporting all "wars of national liberation". On January 18, 1980, an article in the Moscow weekly, *Novaya Vremya*, recalled the Brezhnev Doctrine to justify Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.² It argued that the obligation of a socialist state towards a socialist movement in another country had to be more than political rhetoric, it had to include even military help and it is in the spirit of such a socialist obligation that the USSR went forward to help its ideological ally, Afghanistan.

The question arise: what is the international solidarity of revolutionaries? Does it consist of moral and diplomatic support and verbal wishes for success, or does it also consist...in rendering military aid, all the more so when it is a case of blatant, massive outside intervention?

The history of the revolutionary movement confirms the moral and political rightness of this form of aid and support. This was

2. David Binder, "Brezhnev Doctrine Said To Be Extended," *The New York Times*, February 10, 1980.

the case for instance, in Spain in the 1930s and in China in the 1920s and 1930s. Now that the system of socialist states exists, to deny the right to such aid would simply be strange.³

Thus the military actions in Afghanistan under the garb of Treaty obligations could be viewed as the Soviet Union's latest move to conscript a country in her battle with the United States for global preponderance.

Unofficial Motives : Among the 'unofficial' motives for military intervention in Afghanistan at least three deserve mention.

1. *Encirclement of China*: One of the major foreign policy objectives of the Soviet Union since the late 1950s has been the 'containing' of China. Since the Sino-Soviet split, relations between the two giants have soured considerably and deterioration continues. Any hope for a *modus vivendi* with post-Mao China was dashed with the emergence of a more active Chinese foreign policy aimed against the Soviet Union. Chairman Hua's provocative visit to East Europe—a Soviet stake-out—and his Tehran bid in the summer of 1978 to persuade the Shah to join China's anti-Russian coalition was not lost on the Kremlin, nor did Vice-Premier Deng's much-publicised trip to the States assuage Moscow's fears.

Moscow's fears were further heightened by the speeded up Chinese nuclear program, renewed attempts to modernise her military capabilities and China's forays into international diplomacy that included: (a) rapprochement with the EEC in economic relations;

3. *Ibid.*

(b) rapprochement with the US that secured for China a MFN status and promises of substantial capital investment with transfer of technological knowhow; (c) a bilateral treaty with Japan that condemned hegemonism, meaning the USSR, and promises transfer of industrial knowhow and a source of much-needed credit; and (d) a political rapprochement with UK, France and West Germany aimed at purchasing military hardware⁴—all contrary to Soviet interests. China has even supported a militarily stronger NATO. Besides the diplomatic offensive, the Chinese have pursued a propaganda warfare accusing the Kremlin of revisionism, hegemonism and social imperialism. It was suggested that China's attack on Vietnam was not only "to teach Vietnam a lesson" but also a calculated risk to test whether the Soviet Union would militarily intervene to help its ally, Vietnam.⁵

The Soviets on their part made a strong bid to convince the West European governments not to sell sophisticated military hardware to the Chinese. It may be recalled that in 1969 Brezhnev made an abortive attempt for an Asian Collective Security system directed primarily against China, and on two occasions the Kremlin leaders sought American acquiescence to a Soviet pre-emptive strike against Chinese nuclear facilities.

The Soviets are aware of the common border between China and Afghanistan and of the constant

4. William Hyland, "Soviet Security Concerns in the 1980s," *Adelphi Papers* no. 152 (1979): 21.

5. A view expressed by His Excellency K. M. Kaiser, Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations.

Chinese attempts to beef up the sub-groups 'Sula-A' and 'Satam-i-mili', the pro-Chinese factions within the Khalq and Parcham groups of the Afghan Communist Party. During the early days of domestic turmoil in Afghanistan the Soviets even feared a Chinese take-over of the communist movement in the country.

Thus, the Sino-Soviet struggle in diplomacy, propaganda and in the ideological field may have intensified the Kremlin's desire to 'contain' China. The current Soviet resolve to maintain a military presence in and a permanent political grip over Afghanistan perhaps gives credibility to the theory of the 'encirclement' of China which, indeed, has more meaning now with pro-Soviet Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea, India and Afghanistan on China's southern and southwestern flanks, while only Thailand and Burma remain to be co-opted into the Kremlin orbit.

2. *Buffer Zone*: The desire for buffer zone was purely a security arrangement made necessary by the perceived existence of hostile forces outside the Soviet State boundary. Since the successful consolidation of Bolshevik power, attempts at physical annihilation of the Soviet State came only once, in the 1940s, with Hitler's attack on Moscow resulting in tremendous physical destruction and human casualties for the Soviet Union. This appeared to be sufficient justification for Stalin's post-War territorial demands in the Allied Conferences at Yalta, Tehran and Potsdam. After World War II the Soviet Union gradually expanded her political and military dominance over her East European neighbours, later "legitimised" in the Helsinki Declarations. The

protective glacis served at least two purposes: it increased Soviet State security by distancing the Soviet Union from would-be enemies and giving her more time to react in self-defence; and, should conventional war break out, engaging the enemy in the buffer zone would spare physical destructions on Soviet territory—much the same reasoning employed by Israel to rationalize the occupation of Arab territories. The takeover of Afghanistan would extend the buffer zone into Central Asia giving the Red Army a more forward deployment and an offensive posture than possible earlier.

3. *Strengthening of Strategic Positioning*: The idea of strategic parity with the West is a product of post-Stalin thinking. Although Stalin narrowly defined Soviet security in terms of the Red Army's physical reach into neighbouring territories, Khrushchev viewed Soviet security needs in a global perspective. The transition from Stalin to Khrushchev "reflected the shift from a regional conception of security to a global one, from a basically defensive orientation to an offensive one and from the era of World War II to the nuclear rocket age."⁶ This expanded perception brought the Soviet Union in direct competition with the only other global power, the United States, whose overwhelming strategic reach, demonstrated during the Berlin Crisis, convinced Khrushchev to build not only a credible conventional war-fighting machine that in peace-time would act as a deterrent but also strategic-force capabilities that would allow the Soviet Union to fight, survive

6. Helmut Sonnenfeldt and William G. Hyland, "Soviet Perspectives on Security", *Adelphi Papers* no. 150 (1979) : 10,

and possibly win a nuclear war. Thus the vastly improved Soviet navy with its emphasis on relational 'manoeuvr' approach⁷ was expected to provide the Soviet Union with the strategic reach of a global power bringing in its wake military and naval bases, proxy war capabilities and improved strategic positioning.

Central Asia—Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran—with its oil resources and geography has suddenly become an area of great security consideration for the two Super-powers, each vying to affect the course of events in the region in its favour. The take-over of Afghanistan has for the first time in history given the Soviet Union the only natural opening to the lands south of the impassable Himalayas, and the advantage of this Soviet strategic location may include the following :

- like the Golan Heights is to the Syrians, the central higher ground location gives the Soviet Union a natural dominance over, and a macrocosmic view of, Southeast Asia and Southwest Asia ;
- the Soviet Union could divide Asia into two manageable halves by striking southward militarily to secure a passage to the Gulf of Oman or even to set-up a pro-Moscow Baluchistan if that would further her designs;
- in war the Soviet Union would be able to appropriate mideast oilfields and deny oil to the West and Japan or divert oil to herself and her allies;

7. For details, see Edward Luttwak, "The American Style of Warfare and the Military Balance," *Survival* Vol. XXI, no. 2 (1979) : 57-60.

- the proximity of her presence could have psychological effects dampening any overt anti-Soviet posture in the foreign policy, domestic policy or military conduct of regional countries.

II

Timing of the Intervention: The Soviets intervened in Afghanistan at what seems to be the most propitious moment for the Kremlin. It came at the time when the United States is on the defensive, China and Japan are still defensively oriented and militarily manageable, West Europe is more concerned about its trade with the Eastern Bloc, the already politically gerrymandered Middle East is further splintered by the Camp David Accords, India has elected pro-Soviet Indira, and Iran and Pakistan are in chaos, thus giving the Kremlin the *carte blanche* in Afghanistan.

For the United States, while the Pueblo Affair, loss of Panama Canal, defeat in Vietnam and Angola and the 'abandonment' of Taiwan seriously eroded her international prestige, the whittling away of defence alliances, troop withdrawal from bases abroad, loss of naval facilities, closing of listening posts and the lack of willingness to militarily defend her allies in times of need seriously eroded her military credibility. In addition, the Watergate Affair, the crippling of her intelligence apparatus, the oil crisis and the removal of credible international leaders in the persons of Nixon and Kissinger undermined her domestic base, and the hostage crisis in Iran immobilised her to further passivity. In

this period of American "retrenchment", Soviet international offensive was to be expected. It is noteworthy that the military intervention took place during Christmas recess when American political and military reaction would be considerably handicapped.

Another factor equally important in contributing to Moscow's military intervention now is the Soviet Union's self-scrutiny of what lay ahead for her in the coming years. The Soviet economy is becoming underproductive and soon the emphasis will have to be shifted from the military to the more pressing areas of housing, food and energy. The Soviet oil reserves may not be sufficient to meet Soviet needs and needs of the Eastern Bloc in the near future. Also, the increasing economic ties between East Europe and West Europe may erode the ersatz barriers dividing Europe, and Soviet control over East Europe may correspondingly weaken. All these will take place when China and Japan will be considerably enhancing their military capabilities. The change in her leadership in the near future may require a transition period to absorb any political revision. Also, heightened nationalistic agitations may challenge the viability of the multi-state Union. All these may considerably reduce Kremlin's freedom to act and, therefore, it could be assumed that Soviet intervention in Afghanistan today is an attempt to capitalise on this optimal period of Soviet security, and that the intervention was both timely and opportunistic.

III

Inside Afghanistan the situation is fraught with danger. The series of coups and countercoups reflected the antagonism between the nationalistic Khalq and the less-nationalistic, pro-Moscow Parcham groups, though both stand for leftist reforms. However, given the current Soviet military backing of Karmal, the Kabul-first-Moscow-second orientation of the Khalq Party may result in the systematic decimation of Khalq's leadership and the complete ascendancy of the Parcham group. Reports from Kabul already indicate massive purges of the Khalq leadership. Top government officials and armed forces personnel belonging to the Khalq faction are being removed on the slightest suspicion of their allegiance to the Karmal regime. On policy disputes the Parcham leadership has so far prevailed over the Khalq faction, reversing the former Khalq domination over Parcham faction during Amin's regime. The Karmal regime is either dismissing top Khalq leaders from positions of authority or sending them off to remote postings outside the country. The Minister for Interior Affairs, Syed Mohammad Gulabzoi, was recently stripped of his powers for failing to support Karmal's decision to create a "volunteer force"; and the Deputy Prime Minister, President of the 34-member Revolutionary Council and Chief of the Khalq faction in the cabinet, Mr. Assadullah Sarwari, was sent off to Mongolia as Afghanistan's Ambassador.⁸

8. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 31, 1980.

Soviet Entrenchment: The revival of long-term Soviet territorial interest in Afghanistan probably started in the 1950s when Afghanistan turned to the Soviet Union for arms after being rebuffed by the United States during the Afghan-Pakistan border dispute. Since then young Afghan officers went to Moscow for military training for periods up to seven years and many of them upon return drifted towards leftist agitations at home.⁹ In 1965, the leftists founded the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) which served as the political base from which to infiltrate the Afghan Armed Forces, the government and the civilian bureaucracy. However, personal differences precipitated a schism in the PDPA and by 1967 Babrak Karmal became the leader of a splinter group known as the Parcham (Banner) faction opposed to the majority Khalq (Masses) faction.

The Soviet Union also offered huge economic assistance which brought Soviet advisors into Afghan ministries, in marked contrast to Zahir Shah's approach of carefully balancing the capitalist and communist inputs in Afghanistan's economy to avoid inordinate influence by any one power. With the advent of Taraki's 1978 Saur Revolution, the proposed collectivisation of agriculture, land reform, abolition of private enterprise, abolition of peasant debt, nomadic resettlement, 'socialist industrialization' and economic alliance with the Eastern Bloc reiterated a definite shift towards Moscow.

9. David Satter, "Afghanistan's Rocky Road to Socialism," *The Financial Times*, October 31, 1978.

After Taraki was supplanted by Amin, personal and to a lesser extent ideological differences in the PDPA were greatly exacerbated. The Soviet Union was increasingly finding itself in the role of a mediator trying to arrange a working truce between the two feuding factions. But by December 1979, Amin was deposed and the overtly pro-Moscow Babrak Karmal, until recently exiled in East Europe, was installed by the Kremlin. As the uneasy truce continued to erode, the contretemps increasingly grounded the Soviet inside Afghanistan. While factional fight continued thereby paralysing government operations and boosting countrywide resistance, the Soviets were at a loss as to which faction to support since support for one faction would alienate the other. Nor could the Soviets withdraw their support without which neither faction can remain in power. As of now the Soviets are backing the Karmal regime, but they are clearly disappointed at its failure to galvanise either internal political opinion or outside public sentiment. The Soviets are well aware that a reconciliation between the estranged Khalq and Parcham factions has become imperative at least for two crucial reasons. First, only a united PDPA can provide the base from which the creation of a broad national front can be attempted. And, second, the Khalq faction commands the allegiance of the majority of government troops without whose support the full burden of the war would fall upon the Red Army. The initial Soviet estimate that the 85,000 troops brought into Afghanistan would be sufficient to cow internal dissidence and smother

rebel resistance has proved erroneous. Reports from Kabul indicate that the purges and desertions in the Khalq-dominated Afghan Army have reduced its strength to under 40,000 men, about half its size two years ago.¹⁰ The latest mutiny in the heavily reinforced Afghan 14th Armoured Division raises further question about morale and allegiance.¹¹ The troop reduction is so acute that students are being called in to join the army, although most are boycotting.¹² With the purge of Khalq's Gulabzoi, Babrak himself now commands internal intelligence and police work, and with factional fighting assuming serious proportions Karmal has recently formed a "Parcham Army"—the armed wing of the Parcham faction—whose job is to root out any political opposition.¹³ The Karmal regime has also formed a "volunteer force" in which young Parcham members were enlisted and each member was given an automatic weapon and a licence to kill.¹⁴

As the two factions fight an internecine warfare, Moscow is left to hold the fort and increasingly finds herself bogged down to a degree probably unanticipated before. According to a report prepared by the US Department of Defence,¹⁵ Babrak's bodyguard, chef, doctor, driver and six advisors are all Soviet ; senior

10. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 26, 1980.

11. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 30, 1980.

12. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 26, 1980.

13. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 31, 1980.

14. *ibid.*

15. Special Report No. 72, "Soviet Dilemmas in Afghanistan," June 1980, published by Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington, D.C.

positions in every Afghan Ministry except the Foreign Ministry are being held by the Soviets; production, clearance and dissemination of information are done by the Soviets; Soviets sit on the editorial staffs of the Afghan newspapers and every major decision in the country is made by them. The Kremlin has not only re-structured the Afghan government but additionally formulates the country's economic, cultural, education and foreign policies. A new Afghan constitution is being drafted by the Soviets. Russian has recently replaced English as the foreign language to be taught in Afghan schools.¹⁶ Also, an economic and technical co-operation agreement pledging Moscow's increasing role in Afghanistan's educational and agricultural training program was recently signed.¹⁷

That these developments may seem to project a long-term Soviet policy is further evidenced by certain permanent constructions underway in Afghanistan:¹⁸

The Soviet Army is replacing rubber fuel storage bladders at its huge Pole-Khomri logistics base with permanent underground fuel storage facilities. Hardened ammunition storage facilities also are being constructed at Pole-Khomri. Fuel reserves are being increased at other Soviet military bases in Afghanistan.

16. *Daily Telegraph*, (London), July 19, 1980 and *Bangladesh Observer*, July 20, 1980.

17. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 10, 1980.

18. Special Report No. 72, *op. cit.*, and *Bangladesh Observer*, July 1 and 8, 1980, Certain sections reproduced here verbatim.

Recently, the tour of duty for Soviet troops in Afghanistan has been set at 2 years. Dependents of Soviet military personnel are being brought into the country. Permanent quarters for Soviet officers and troops are under construction at major Soviet bases, and the Soviets are taking over some of the better equipped Afghan bases.

Soviet military engineers are renovating the Tap Tajbek place in Kabul to house a major Soviet command headquarters. Another large permanent Soviet military headquarters is being built to the north of Kabul.

Soviet engineers have resurrected a plan to build a rail-road from the Soviet border into the Kabul area.

Two permanent bridges across the Amu Darya River separating Afghanistan and the Soviet Union will soon replace Soviet pontoon bridges used by the Soviet invasion force during December 1979.

Key Afghan airfields are being upgraded including new revetments and permanent aircraft shelters.

The existing MI-24125 helicopter gunship maintenance facility at Kabul airport is being enlarged, and a new gunship repair facility reportedly is being built at Bagram Air Force Base. Permanent operating bases

are being built at Jalalabad and Ghazni to accommodate gunships involved in military operations in those areas.

The Soviet army recently has started construction of permanent communication facilities to replace mobile field communications sites used during the invasion.

New airfields are being built near most provincial towns and an oil pipeline is being built connecting Afghanistan and the USSR.

Moscow's intent to secure Afghanistan may be further indicated by the personal supervision of the entire military operation by General Pavlovsky, Commander of Soviet Ground Forces; the visits by high level delegations from Moscow including a visit by Kirilenko, the fourth ranking Politburo member; the continued huge economic aid packages to keep Karmal afloat; and, the assumption of command over the decision-making processes within the country. Also the Kremlin's persistent effort to successfully implement an Afghan Nationality Policy modelled on a similar Soviet policy may be indicative of a long-term Soviet plan *vis-a-vis* Afghanistan.¹⁹

IV

Resistance to Soviet Presence: The ability of the Afghan people to mount an effective resistance against the Red Army still remains doubtful. In spite of the

19. See, Eden Naby, "The Ethnic Factor in Soviet-Afghan Relations," *Asian Survey*, XX : 3 (March 1980), p. 237-256.

fierce Afghan determination to resist invaders, the ill-equipped rag tag Afghan resistance fighters both within the country and without seem to lack at least two fundamental ingredients necessary to repel invaders : a national identity and a national unity of purpose. The feudal order with its hundreds of clans committed to their age-old internecine wars may prove to be an obstacle in ridding the Soviet threat. The inability so far of the tribal chiefs to rally behind a unified leadership to spearhead the resistance against the Soviets may indicate a lack of national unity of purpose. It is not yet clear whether the numerous desertions and mutinees by the Afghan troops are a tardy concession to patriotism or a desire to bail out of a compromised position. Nonetheless, there are numerous instances of rebellion.²⁰ Islamic theologians and clergymen from throughout Afghanistan meeting at a congress in Kabul during the first week of July were openly hostile to the Karmal regime. Mullahs in mosques have been charged with subterfuge and sedition. Shopkeepers in Kabul and other cities have co-operated with the rebels in strike calls against the government. Eight Afghan army officers under military training in India have defected to Tehran after completion of their program. About 50 to 60 Afghan students studying in Moscow held a protest meeting on the eve of the 1980 Olympics severely criticising Soviet intervention in Afghanistan until the Soviet secret police heavy-handedly dispersed them, resulting in 20 students being hospitalised. Nor is

20. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 6, 11, 27 and August 5, 1980.

resistance confined to Afghanistan alone. Three Leningrad feminists have issued an appeal to the Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan urging them to refuse to fight against the Afghan resistance.²¹ And a defecting highly placed Soviet intelligence officer stated in an interview in London that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan is not well taken in the Soviet bureaucracy and that dissension has arisen even in the Soviet politburo.

Some Afghan rebel leaders have sought to internationalise the issue to garner support for their cause. Recently, two Afghan leaders appeared before the European Parliament in Strasbourg to publicise their struggle and request military aid.²² Syed M. Gailani, Chairman, National Islamic Front of Afghanistan—a leading resistance movement—also appealed at a London news conference recently for western arms to fight Soviet troops.²³ So far only Britain's Lord Carrington has publicly acknowledged the Afghan rebels' need for arms to fight the Red Army.²⁴ Indeed, there is indication that British weapons purchased by Gulf Region Arab countries are being smuggled to Afghan rebels with Lord Carrington's tacit approval.²⁵ While some leaders like Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the strongest Afghan insurgent organization, *Hezbe Islami*, rejected any form of negotiated settlement and called for jihad, other rebel leaders met in Geneva the 3-man committee

21. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 25, 1980.

22. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 11, 1980.

23. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 2, 1980.

24. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 5, 1980.

25. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 28, 1980.

appointed by the Islamic Foreign Ministers Conference (IFMC) to find political solutions to the Afghan crisis. This committee established in April 1980 and comprising of the Iranian Foreign Minister Sadeq Qutbzadeh, Pakistani Foreign Minister Aga Shahi and the Tunisian Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference Organization Habib Chatti was prepared to talk to the Kabul regime in its capacity as the ruling PDP and not as a government, since the latter would constitute recognition of the regime. In spite of initial rejection by Moscow and Kabul, contact was finally made according to some unconfirmed reports and the committee is scheduled to submit its Report to an emergency meeting of the Islamic Foreign Ministers in New York in late September this year.²⁶

V

Dilemma for the Sub-continent: The presence of rebel bases in Pakistan and Iran no doubt exacerbates the situation. The external military aid to the rebels would lead to flare-ups in the borders which is clearly distasteful to the Soviets, who would prefer the Afghanistan crisis to be a dead issue. If external support of the rebels continue then the Soviets may resort to the right of hot pursuit across the international border creating new tensions in the region, or fuel separatist movement in Pakistan's Baluchistan region.

It is unlikely that either Iran or Pakistan would want her territory to be rebel bases from which to launch

26. *Bangladesh Observer*, August 6, 1980.

military attacks on the Red Army because of reasons of national security and sovereignty. In Pakistan's case, though Zia may currently find it expedient to use the border tensions to consolidate themselves at the expense of democratic transition in the country, in the long run the situation may parallel that of Palestinian military bases in Jordan ultimately precipitating something similar to Black September when King Hossain was forced to expell the Palestinians from his Kingdom because of their increasing encroachments on his sovereignty. It is possible then that the Afghan rebels may not get support from Iran or Pakistan in the long run.²⁷

Pakistan has already rejected American military aid, realising that short of a total American commitment to militarily defend Pakistan against the Red Army, such aid would unnecessarily antagonise the Soviet Union and do nothing to increase Pakistan's security. In the absence of tangible Western commitment to her security, Pakistan may have to reach out for a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union to guarantee her national sovereignty.²⁸

Regarding India, the immediate effect of Soviet military presence in Afghanistan is probably negative for at least two reasons. First, it is not to India's interest that the Red Army is so close to India's borders and would like to have Pakistan as a buffer state to keep the Red Army at bay. Second, the Soviet Union's proximity to South Asia would considerably dampen any hope

27. The Pakistan consulate in New Delhi refused visa to the defecting 8 Afghan Army Officers for fear they would join the Rebel resistance inside Pakistan's border. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 6, 1980.

28. Pakistan officials are privately beginning to indicate such sentiments.

Indira may have for the role of *primus inter pares* in South Asia.

However, Indira may have a number of options. First, a political thaw with China and closer ties with the US may signal to the Russians for restraint in their expansionism.²⁹ Second, Indira may desire viable and strong democratic government in Pakistan capable of withstanding Soviet expansionist pressure; her initial acquiescence to a defensive re-armament of Pakistan is such an indication although more recently India voiced concern over military supplies to Pakistan.³⁰ Third, Indira may solely insist on total Soviet troop pull-out to restore the *status quo ante* Afghanistan. Fourth, Indira may seek a *modus vivendi* with the Soviet Union and form a hegemonic alliance to dominate the sub-continent. For now, however, she has chosen the third option and is maintaining a low profile and diplomatically pressuring Soviet troop pull-out while her ministers in their initial jaunts to regional capitals expressed shock and total unacceptance of Soviet presence in Kabul—a move calculated to let the Soviets know clearly where India stands and yet not alienate them unduly. It seems, however, that Indira's support for Soviet troop pull-out may be less out of fear of the Red Army's proximity and more out of fear of greater US military involvement in the area either indirectly through

29. Recent cancellation of Foreign Minister Huang Hua's planned visit to India on the eve of Indira's recognition of the Heng Samrin regime may complicate attempts at Indo-China accommodation. *The Washington Post*, August 7, 1980.

30. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 28, 1980.

re-militarization of Pakistan or directly after US presidential election.

The suggestion in some quarters that Afghanistan may become Soviet Union's Vietnam overlooks two crucial factors. First, unlike the United States the Soviet Union does not have to justify her international conduct to her public and, second, the contiguity of their states gives the Soviet Union full logistics advantage which the United States lacked. It is difficult to state whether the Kremlin will ultimately manage to satellitize Afghanistan; debate rages on both sides. The possibility of Afghanistan gaining a neutral status appears remote because it could happen only if the Soviets voluntarily accepted a loss of face. It is more likely we would witness a "finlandized" Afghanistan.

VI

Long-term Consequences: The long-term consequences of Soviet take-over of Afghanistan evoke dismal scenarios for regional peace. The Red Army is not known to withdraw from an occupied territory without first making it politically, economically, militarily and ideologically subservient to Moscow. It may stay in the country for as long as necessary; the choice of Soviet Central Asian muslim troops that currently make up the bulk of the Red Army in Afghanistan seem to be aimed at psychologically pacifying the Afghan population by removing the "alien" effect. But military commands would be in the hands of the Russian officers. Politically, the Soviets would prop up whoever is most

likely to remain unequivocally committed to the Kremlin, and we may expect Soviet personnel to control or supervise the agriculture, communication and home ministries *sine die*.

The Soviet options are limited. If they withdraw, the regime of Babrak Karmal would collapse and the Soviets would lose face. Nor does it appear likely that the Soviets could reach an accommodation with the rebels since their mutual demands are antithetical. Therefore, the Soviet Union would seem to be faced either with the choice of remaining in Afghanistan at a heavy economic price or withdrawing by formulating a face-saving retrieve similar to Nixon's peace-with-honor. The signals appearing from Moscow are enigmatic. Moscow recently withdrew 6000 men and 100 tanks from Kabul and gave it a global publicity.³¹ To further bolster her "peace-loving" image, Moscow offered to withdraw 20,000 troops from East Europe in addition to the 20,000 troops from East Germany if the US withdraws 13,000 of her troops from West Europe.³² Yet, military fortification in Afghanistan goes on unimpeded.

If Afghanistan indeed becomes a *de facto* Soviet satrapy, it would be a major gain for any Soviet designs in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf Region. And any subsequent Soviet-Pakistan *modus vivendi* would significantly change the power alliances in the sub-continent.

31. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 1, 1980.

32. *Bangladesh Observer*, July 11, 1980.

However, a worst case scenario would be an hegemonic alliance between Soviet Union and India. If the Soviet Union is able to assure India's territorial sovereignty, the prospect of hegemonic alliance between the Soviet Union and India would then be a real possibility, and the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan instead of being a threat to India's security may become a contributing element to the alliance. We may then have an Indo-Soviet *modus vivendi* in which India's hegemonic dominance over the sub-continent would be supported and assured by the Soviet Union in exchange for Indian aid in securing a Soviet naval presence in the Arabian Sea. India would be the regional power and the Soviet Union would be the dominant military power in Asia. Should such an arrangement materialise however, Indira will have to be aware that it will not lead to a repetition of Hitler-Stalin Pact where the expansionist power proceeds to swallow up the lesser partner in the Pact.

Such a condominium would inevitable draw the other power to this region, particularly the Chinese who may attempt to create a counter alliance with possibly Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka supported by Australia and the United States. Instead of a nuclear-free zone, the sub-continent and the Indian Ocean may become an intensely contested area of interest leading to possible nuclear deployments in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The traditional restraints to such a development have been CENTO, SEATO and the flaunting of superior American military might coupled with India's pre-

occupation with her non-aligned status. Today, however, no credible Western military alliance exists in this region nor are the Americans militarily capable of countering the Soviet thrust without unacceptable losses. With the weakening of the non-aligned movement itself, India has gradually drifted away to a more pro-Moscow position. Hence, the original restraints are missing today, with a decided shift towards a Moscow-New Delhi alliance which may make an hegemonic arrangement credible.

Conclusion

The tangible pro-Soviet shift in the overall military balance due to Soviet Union's strategic advantage in Central Asia would seem to make-up for the tremendous economic drain on the Soviet economy due to the necessity of maintaining a whole army in Afghanistan. The "retrieval" of Afghanistan may be out of question and the West may have to write it off. What is to be feared is that such incidences do not bring about a replay of Allied appeasement of Hitler that precipitated World War II. The tendency to revive Chamberlain's rationale that it is better to appease a growing power may prove as counter-productive now with Brezhnev as it did then with Hitler.

The Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and the West's inability to secure Soviet withdrawal from the region is a reflection of the shift in global military balance favouring the Kremlin. There may not be a Soviet grand design or overt bipolar struggle for pre-

eminence but for many Third World countries Soviet-American action-reaction often translates into a seemingly zero-sum battle for global preponderance reflecting a new military or political aggrandizement at the expense of the Third World. As effective preventives, military alliances and re-armament have proven to be counter-productive and socially prohibitive. The panacea perhaps lies in the economic recovery of the undeveloped world which is likely to bring about strong and stable democracies capable of withstanding outside pressures.

With regard to Afghanistan *per se*, one optimistic outlook would be that Soviet military and political presence might bring about the breakdown of the feudal order, stimulate reform in education, administration, social services and agriculture, and generate a viable and strong national identity. How successful this transition would be would depend on whether the Afghan peoples would want these as socially desirable values and how readily they would be amenable to the changes. When the Red Army leaves, the Afghans would be the beneficiaries of modern roads, bridges, airports, schools, hospitals, recreation centres, communication facilities, military installations and other such manifestations of westernization.