

*Mohammad Humayun Kabir*

## PEACE IN AFGHANISTAN: THE MUJAHIDEEN FACTOR

Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Soviet Union and the United States signed the UN-sponsored Geneva accords on 14 April 1988 designed to bring peace in Afghanistan. In accordance with the provisions of the accords, the Soviet Union has begun to pullout its troops from Afghanistan. The accords stipulate that fifty per cent of Soviet forces would be withdrawn in first three months while the entire process would be complete in nine months. But the Mujahideens have rejected the accords as they are not a party to them and as they continue their fight against the government forces which is gradually intensifying as the Soviet withdrawal proceeds. The Peshawar-based seven-party Mujahideen alliance has recently declared the formation of a 'Provisional Government' which, according to them, would replace the Najibullah government in Kabul.

Contrary to the objective of the Geneva accords, the war continues unabated between the warring parties for political-military supremacy in Afghanistan. It therefore appears pertinent to ask whether the Mujahideens will be able to offer a viable political alternative to the Kabul regime? Do they have a strategy to materialise such an alternative? How do the Mujahideens view the future of a post-Soviet Afghanistan? What is, after all, the prospect of peace in Afghanistan? Attempt will be made in the paper to provide answer to some of these questions.

## I

The Mujahideens are the orphans of the Geneva accords. They are not a party to it. But they are a wild card for Washington and Islamabad. There is no mention of cease-fire in the accords. The Mujahideens have rejected the peace accords and are continuing their fight against the Kabul regime. The Mujahideens are fiercely determined to drive the Soviets out and establish a government of their own by dislodging the present Marxist Kabul regime. It is, therefore, significant to know in some details about the Mujahideens - who actually they are? Who constitute the Mujahideen forces and what is their political philosophy? Do they have any well-planned strategy for fighting the domestic and foreign adversaries?

In recent history Vietnam serves as the most glaring example of a successful national liberation movement. A determined and well-organized people of Vietnam successfully fought a protracted war with the United States, a superpower that intervened in Vietnam. The Vietnamese people also triumphed over the regime in South Vietnam propped up by the United States. Therefore, before going into a discussion about the Mujahideens and their fight against the Kabul regime and the Soviet forces in Afghanistan, a brief reference to the struggle of the Vietnamese people against the Americans as well as their local surrogates appears to be of some relevance.

Vietnam is a nation of fierce nationalists. Their very long record of fight with the foreign powers has, in course of time, made them great patriots firmly imbued with a sense of national pride, unity and discipline. Vietnam proved to be a nation that can make any sacrifice for any length of time for a cause it perceives to be just. As a matter of fact, it is primarily the quality of a people that defines the course of a nation's history and achievements.

In their fight against the United States and the Saigon regime, the Vietnamese people rallied around a well-organized Communist

Party which emerged as the central force in their struggle against them. The party had a sound and effective strategy which gave a clear direction and steered the struggle to success. Through its tenacious and impressive organisational network and indoctrination it mobilized the masses. Party's astute handling of the international situation and its use of diplomacy was also an important feature of its strategy. The party made a deliberate use of diplomacy as a means of achieving a psychological advantage over the United States and eventually maneuvering it out of the war.<sup>1</sup> A well-organized party or a national front is, thus, an essential prerequisite for the success of a people's struggle.

A crucial factor that led to the Vietnamese success against the Americans is the fact that Vietnam was bestowed with a chain of dynamic and charismatic leaders who very astutely led the party and the people. They commanded the absolute respect and allegiance of the army and other fighting forces, and could forge a unity among them. Ho Chi Minh was the most towering of the Vietnamese leaders. People who knew him considered him an "unusual composite of moral leader and organizational genius, half Gandhi, half Lenin, dynamically combining both". Ho Chi Minh was the "very soul, the shining banner that led the entire party, the entire people, the entire army to unite as one man and struggle gallantly". He was a "political genius who was able to adopt a doctrine born in the industrialized West to the needs of an Asian nation of peasants". Indeed he was a "man of many parts and of great culture"<sup>2</sup> which made him a

1. William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1982, pp. 322-329.
2. Robert F. Turner, *Vietnamese Communism: Its Origins and Development*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, California, 1975, pp. 1-2; Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: The Unforgettable Tragedy*, Audre Deutsch Limited, 1977, p. 19; Wilfred Burchett, *The China Cambodia Vietnam Triangle*, Vanguard Books, Chicago, 1981, p.7; Duiker, *op.cit.*, p. 329.

legend to his own people and other admirers around the world. After Ho Chi Minh's death also the mantle of leadership fell upon a group of able leaders.<sup>3</sup> External support to the cause of Vietnam also played an important role in defeating a superpower adversary. The external help that Vietnam received was meant for Vietnam to win, and not just to cause bleeding to American wound in Vietnam.

The guerrilla movement in Afghanistan is, however, different in many ways from other post-war resistance movements including Vietnam's. Firstly, the movement is politically overwhelmingly rightist. Removing the Marxist Kabul government and its supporting Marxist superpower, the USSR, is what the struggle is all about. Secondly, no resistance party or political coalition dominates the scene. The resistance groups essentially were aggregation of followers of one or another opposition figure. Few of the organizations offered a clear political programme or could really claim a cadre of members. While some groups advocated democracy for any post-Soviet Afghanistan, some other groups aspired to a fundamentalist Islamic republic.<sup>4</sup>

Due to lack of central command, the Mujahideens, who are divided along ethnic lines, sectarian affiliation, operate virtually independent of one another. While some Mujahideen groups operate within Afghanistan, others launch their attacks from across the border. Ethnic factors have always been important in Afghanistan and observers claim that the historically dominant and largest ethnic group, the Pushtuns (42%), would never accept national leadership by non-Pushtuns, although some of the best known guerrilla leaders were non-Pushtun. The resistance movement is proving divisive also because the ethnic Hazaras of central

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3 Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, pp.12,24,29,30.

4. J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan*, National Defence University, Washington, DC. 1986, pp. 89, 190.

Afghanistan reportedly insist on more autonomy in any post-Soviet future. Within Afghanistan, most of the resistance groups are independent guerrilla bands representing a cluster of villages, a valley, a section of a province, or a tribe, thus confined within a clearly defined territory. For logistical reasons, most have a voluntary affiliation with an exile resistance organization based in Peshawar or Tehran. The foreign-based resistance parties, however, exercise little control over military operations inside the country, although they play the role of suppliers of arms and other aid. Another important factor is age - composition of the guerrilla fighters. Only 40% of them are of fighting age between 18 and 35 and the rest are boys or older men. Such a mixture of age groups represent a handicap for a well-disciplined, effective fighting body.<sup>5</sup>

It is thus found that the groups involved in the Afghan resistance are numerous, and their orientations and aspirations vary. They differ in ideology, in base support, and in relative capability. Those who want basic changes can be broadly described as Islamic "fundamentalists," even though there are significant differences within this category. Broadly speaking, they advocate the establishment of a "New" political system, namely an Islamic republic, which has not existed in Afghanistan before. The largest Afghan "fundamentalist" groups are Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jamiat-i-Islami; Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami; Yunus Khalis's Hezb-e-Islami Afghanistan; and Abdul Rasool Sayyaf's Islamic Alliance for the Liberation of Afghanistan. Owing to their connection with the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt these leaders demonstrated their fundamentalist orientation since the early 1970s which was only sharpened and accentuated after 1978. Although in general terms they favour a strict application of Islamic law, the Sharia, in domestic politics, and advocate equidistance from the superpowers in foreign policy, they are

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5. *Ibid*, pp.89, 190-192

reported to have been maintaining close links with the Arab conservative regimes while having no clear political prescription for a future Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup>

Another set of parties can be classified as "traditionalist" or "moderate." They, too, declare that they want an Islamic government in Afghanistan. However, they are likely to be satisfied if pre-1978 Afghan political institutions were restored. One such "moderate" party is Mahez-e-Milli-ye Islami, headed by Ahmad Gailani; a second is Jabh - e-Najat-e-Milli, led by Siabghatullah Mojaddedi; a third is Mohammad Nabi's Haraket-e-Inqelab-ye-Islami. These parties represent the moderate clerical, secular and Royalist elements of the Afghan society. They represent the old elite who openly call for support from the West. Among the Peshawar-based leaders Gailani (who was a friend and adviser of former King Zahir Shah and who is now the Alliance leader) is considered to have the clearest blueprint for a post-Soviet Afghanistan : a parliamentary democracy that would allow a multiparty system and a mixed economy. He accepted the notion that the USSR should wield the influence expected of a large and important neighbour. While the "fundamentalists" want foreign support to come largely from Islamic countries, Gailani welcomed support from non-Islamic powers. But, as a whole, the parties are said to be ill-organized and lacking strong and effective leadership.<sup>7</sup>

While the Pakistan-based groups are the largest resistance organizations, there are other important groups. These include the Shiites in Central Afghanistan, who can be sub-divided into those supported by Iran (NASR and Sepah) and those independent of Iran ( Shura-Ye-Ettefaq, Harakat-i-Islami, and Mustazafin ).

6. Zalmay Khalilzad, "Moscow's Afghan War", *Problems of Communism*, January-February 1986, pp. 10-11; Amstutz, *op. cit.*, pp.397-403.

7. Zalmay Khalilzad, *op. cit.*, p.11; Amstutz, *op. cit.*, pp. 404-406; Oliver Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 219.

There are also a number of groups independent of both the Shiite organizations and the Pakistan-based Sunni groups. In the Nooristan region of eastern Afghanistan, for example, there are the Free Resistance Front and the Free Government Group.<sup>8</sup>

Although the above-mentioned parties and groups have had success individually, a lack of unity has prevented them from realizing their political and military objectives by offering a credible political alternative to the PDPA and Kabul regime. The infighting within the Mujahideen ranks, their ideological differences and competition for domination and power have resulted in the absence of an effective apex organization, a single overall political and military strategy and command, above all a charismatic national leader who could command an absolute loyalty and allegiance of the Afghan people, particularly that of the forces opposing the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime in Kabul. A dynamic and farsighted leader backed by an well-organized party or national front based on common ideological commitment and popular support, equipped with a sound political and military strategy can steer a nation into the fulfillment of the aspirations of its people, can instil a sense of direction in a movement launched against a regime perceived to be working against the choice and interests of the people. The Mujahideens fighting the Kabul regime seem to lack all this and hence the prospect of forming an effective Mujahideen government by defeating the existing Najibullah regime does not really seem to be at hand.

There is also a known external dimension to the Afghan problem. The Mujahideens are morally and materially supported by a number of external powers, principally Pakistan and the United States. But an intriguing question is whether the United States and for that matter any other concerned and interested parties are genuine in seeing a purely Mujahideen government installed in Kabul with Islamic fundamentalist orientation? The

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8. Zalmay Khalilzad, *op. cit.*, p.11; Oliver Roy, *op. cit.*, pp.219-220.

absence of an unequivocal stance on this point works against what the Mujahideens are fighting for. The point is best illustrated by puzzles in the diplomatic front. The Kabul government remains represented in all the organizations and world bodies including the UN and NAM. Its membership is only suspended in the OIC. The 'friends' of the Mujahideens did not and do not seem to genuinely and effectively pursue the Mujahideen interests in the international community. The 'friends', among all others, refer the Mujahideens as "rebels" implying that they were fighting against the legitimate government. And in contrast to their repeated protestations the United States and Pakistan have in effect recognized the Kabul regime as the legitimate government of Afghanistan by signing the UN-brokered four-way peace accords on Afghanistan at Geneva. Following the accords, Pakistan's pledge to continue help to the Mujahideens is a violation of the letter and spirit of the accords and it will inevitably invite Afghan (and even Soviet) retaliation against Pakistan and the Mujahideens. If the Mujahideens adopt a "go alone" policy in such a situation, their fate is not expected to be significantly altered given the continued disunity within the resistance movement.

Nevertheless, the Mujahideens have not laid down their arms. They appear to remain as intransigent as before in their resolve to dislodge the Kabul regime. In such a situation, questions arise whether the Kabul government would be able to hold on to power and what is the prospect of peace in Afghanistan? Whether and when the refugees would go back home? What might be the nature of the government in Kabul? What will be the role of Pakistan and the United States in the Afghan affairs?

## II

Opinions are divided on the prospect of survival of the Kabul government in the wake of the Soviet pullout. Western sources in Kabul believe that the regime will fiercely defend the capital, other



cities, towns and highways and the Mujahideens can not expect to have a walk into those places. A different view, however, comes from Washington and Islamabad which predict a very rapid fall of the garrisons and the Afghan government as the Soviet withdrawal proceeds.<sup>9</sup> The state of affairs on the ground might throw some clarification. Following the signing of the Geneva accords President Najibullah embarked on an active diplomatic campaign that took him to New Delhi, New York, Havana and Moscow. The purpose of his diplomatic offensive was believed to be an attempt of breaking out of Afghanistan's international isolation and gaining further legitimacy of his government and mobilizing world opinion in favour of implementing the Geneva accords.

As the Afghan government was not for the military solution, Mujahideens took the advantage and launched military offensive as the Soviet withdrawal began. Though the Mujahideens scored some initial success vis-a-vis the Afghan government troops, it is not certain whether the rebels can maintain the pace. Because there appears no reason to speculate that strength of the Kabul regime has begun to wane with the Soviet withdrawal. Analysts maintain that in the wake of the Soviet pullout, the PDPA would remain as the single largest political group as also the strongest in terms of military infrastructure. Its political and military cohesiveness has improved significantly.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the Soviet military advisers are going to stay on to assist Najibullah's army as long as the situation remains unstable. Above all, the Soviets may resume their arms shipments and even halt their withdrawal process if the situation so demands.

The Kabul regime, backed by Soviet advisers, money and arms, has been steadily rebuilding the demoralized Afghan army and

9. Steven Strasser, "Afghanizing the War", *Newsweek*, 9 May 1988, p. 21; *Newsweek*, 23 May 1988, p. 12.

10. K. Subrahmanyam, "The Afghan Issue : Towards a Solution?" *Strategic Analysis*, New Delhi, May 1988, p. 193.

Sarandoy (paramilitary police) intended to be a major part of the anti-guerrilla operations. At the same time, the regime has also been recruiting local militias, especially drawn from Pushtun tribes along the frontier with Pakistan. If the PDP government could keep the loyalty of these units, with continued strong Soviet backing in the form of 'advisers' and money, it could conceivably survive a phased withdrawal of Soviet troops<sup>11</sup>. For its survival and power consolidation the Kabul regime is making relentless efforts in broadening its power base at home and liberalizing its economic policies with the outside world. It is known that one of the main components of Kabul regime's national reconciliation is the formation of a coalition government. The forces which are going to be a part of this coalition comprise the opposition forces, that is, the refugees, the second rank commanders, the commanders who are stationed in Afghanistan, the clergy, group representatives, moderate forces, intellectuals, socio-political figures, most of whom reside in the West, former King Zahir Shah and his supporters in Afghanistan, the PDPA, the left bloc as well as the Peasant Justice Party of Afghanistan, and the Islamic Party of Afghan People.<sup>12</sup> This appears to be a broad spectrum of social forces based on a multi-party system. President Najibullah also seems to pursue a policy of "divide and persuade" the rebels. He is reported to cherish contempt for guerrilla commanders based outside Afghanistan and respect those like Ahmed Shah Massoud who have remained in the country. Thus, some of the rebels have been successfully persuaded to join which exposed the divisions and rivalries within the resistance. As a matter of fact, to many observers, the Afghan resistance looked less like a viable alternative government of an independent Afghanistan than a motley collection of rival warlords.<sup>13</sup> Najib also seems to be keen on

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11. Anthony Hyman, "Afghanistan", *The Asia & Pacific Review* 1988, World of Information, Essex, 1987, pp.35-36

12. *South*, May 1988, p. 16

13. *ibid*, p. 14; K. Subrahmanyam, *op.cit.*, p.190; Anthony Hyman, *op. cit.*, p. 37

having an open economy with investment opportunities for Afghans as well as foreigners. A law was enacted last year to attract private and state foreign investment. Responses to this call from abroad are well pouring in.<sup>14</sup> All these measures are likely to blunt the edge of criticism and attacks against the Kabul regime which would consequently overshadow the cause of the Mujahideens.

As a matter of fact, the reforms and modernization programmes launched by the Marxist regime in Kabul have obviously created some groups of beneficiaries and vested interests in a largely backward society like Afghanistan's. The social and economic policies of the government have benefitted certain sections, particularly the women and poor peasants. Although the agrarian land reform appeared to be the most problematic thousands of rural workers have been benefitted as they received titles to land. Wages have increased. Houses, schools and polyclinics have been established. Agrarian indebtedness has been eliminated, measures have been adopted for rapid eradication of illiteracy, enhancement of women's rights, cultural promotion of Afghanistan's ethnic minorities, etc.<sup>15</sup>

The Sovietization process of Afghanistan through various policy measures will also serve as a factor of survival of Kabul regime. The process had aimed at moulding governmental institutions and practices on the Soviet model, controlling and manipulating the media, restructuring the Afghan educational system, expanding use of the Russian language, and sending children, college students, and officials to the Soviet Union for training and indoctrination.<sup>16</sup> This factor, when counted with a PDPA with decreasing in-fighting, and a strong military, makes Moscow confident of Kabul regime's survival in the wake of the Soviet pullout.

14. *South, op. cit.*, p. 14

15. *ibid*, Amstutz, *op. cit.*, p. 315

16. Amstutz, *op. cit.*, p.299

However, the situation in Afghanistan is not as rosy as Moscow and Kabul would like it to be. The rebels have been bolstered by the continued US and Pakistan support. In such a situation Moscow might halt its troops withdrawal on the grounds of violation of Geneva peace accords on the part of Pakistan and the United States. Such a state of affairs would mean putting the clock back and discard the hard-earned progress towards a peaceful settlement.

The post-Geneva Pak and US stance on Afghanistan issue apparently seems to be in a dilemma. Why is the United States still channeling its aid through Pakistan and why is Pakistan still supporting the Afghan rebels who launch attacks from their sanctuaries in Pakistan? No US government is likely to endorse a fundamentalist domination in Afghan affairs while the moderate Mujahideens may win its backing for their representation in any future setup in Afghanistan. The Kremlin leadership may find it acceptable. The continuing US support may, therefore, be perceived to be a pressure tactic vis-a-vis the Moscow-Kabul forces to bargain for a fair representation for the moderate resistance forces in a future coalition government in Afghanistan.

Pakistan may also hope for the same settlement. Notwithstanding the recent pronouncements of President Zia supportive of the Mujahideen government in Kabul Pakistan's compulsions for getting rid of Afghan refugees and the 'danger' of a Mujahideen government may compel Pakistan to share the US view of a future setup in Kabul. Pakistan's risks of violating the Geneva agreement is likely to be aimed at that. If, for the sake of analysis, it is conceded that a Mujahideen government is formed in Afghanistan, the seat of the government may be conceivable only somewhere near the Pakistan border. And such a seat may willy-nilly turn out to be the capital of "Pushtunistan" that would almost inevitably spread on either side of the Durand Line.<sup>17</sup> Such an

17. Pran Chopra, "Hard Choices for Pakistan", *Holiday*, 3 June 1988, p.5

eventuality, for obvious reasons, won't figure in Pakistan's list of options.

Another aspect of the Afghan settlement is the repatriation and resettlement of 5.2 million Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran as well as the rehabilitation of 2 million displaced citizens within Afghanistan itself. The task appears to be claiming the most daunting efforts of its kind since the Second World War. In a war ravaged Afghanistan the cost of repatriation and rehabilitation would be enormous which would include transportation, housing, foodstuffs and basic necessities for the initial few months at least. All this would require a colossal amount of assistance and for this purpose Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan has been appointed special United Nations coordinator for humanitarian and economic assistance for Afghanistan, who has already made repeated fund-raising appeals to various governments and agencies. Many countries, mainly the Western ones, have already committed assistance for the purpose.<sup>18</sup> Kabul has also asked for Western aid for the repatriation of the refugees and it has made a few concessions which include, among others, permission to monitor assistance programmes in the countryside—an important condition that agencies demand in order to help minimize corruption and mismanagement, and permission to refugee workers to operate in Mujahideen-controlled territory near the Pakistani border and to transport their supplies from Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> All this is meant to woo the Western governments that refuse to deal directly with Najibullah government. It is, however, feared that the Mujahideens themselves might hinder the repatriation of the refugees, who reportedly grew tired of war and sounds of shooting<sup>20</sup> and are willing to breathe their native air as soon as possible.

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18. Melinda Liu, "What Next for the Refugees", *Newsweek*, 13 June 1988, p. 16.

19. *ibid.*

20. *ibid.*

The absence of a provision in the Geneva accords for a cease-fire may appear to a cynic observer as an indication that the signatories had agreed that the warring parties in Afghanistan were to fight out victory for one over the other. The situation obtaining in and around Afghanistan, even after the accords and the beginning of the Soviet withdrawal, would bear out such an apprehension. Such a state of affairs would make peace in Afghanistan ever more elusive adding to bloodshed and agonies of its people. A moderate posture from all sides involved in defining the rights and interests of the Afghan people may, on the other hand, lead to gradual establishment of peace in Afghanistan.