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## AFGHANISTAN AND POLICY OF THE NEIGHBOURS\*

Afghanistan, a landlocked nation in Central Asia, covering an area of 250,000 square miles, shares its international frontiers with some of the important countries of the world. It borders with the USSR and China, the two communist giants in the north and north-west respectively, and is flanked by Iran, one of the strategically important areas of the world in the west, and Pakistan in the east. Geographically the USSR, China, Iran and Pakistan appear to be the immediate neighbours of Afghanistan. However, beyond this perimeter are to be included also the potential countries like India in the east and the Islamic countries in the west as second-door neighbours of Afghanistan.

Throughout its chequered history, Afghanistan has continued to survive as an independent state interacting vigorously with her neighbours. The interaction of the neighbours also goes back to centuries revealing little of continuity or consistency in each of the neighbouring country's policy towards Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the fact remains that all the neighbours recognized Afghanistan as a viable entity with its own values and dynamics that through ages exerted its own influence on them.

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\*Paper submitted for presentation at the second seminar on Afghanistan organized by the Institute for Political and International studies (IPIS), Tehran, 2-4 October 1989.

Lying at the confluence of many ethnic and cultural movements, Afghanistan had often been the cross-roads of Central Asia. Numerous races inhabited this land whose contributions to civilization in and around Afghanistan are unique. Besides, Afghanistan's very peculiar location and its strategic importance bore special significance for her neighbours. Another factor was the Islamic sentiments of its people which acted as a catalyst in linking Afghanistan with countries like Iran and Pakistan.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Afghanistan's relations with her neighbours. The changes in her neighbourly policy took place due to several cross-border political and economic developments, to some of which she was not favourably disposed. Of special significance was the partition of the Sub-continent which affected the long traditional relations between Afghanistan and India, with Pakistan in between. The cold war had its divisive effect on the region which led Afghanistan to pursue her policy solely on its own calculation.

In post World War II period until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, no significant political development took place in the region, which could result in visible changes in either Afghanistan's relations with the neighbours or in the latter's relations with the former. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has constituted a watershed in the political history of this region. The invasion in 1979 and the continued occupation of this land for nearly a decade not only placed the political status of Afghanistan in a quandary, but was also largely instrumental in bringing about sharp changes in the policy perceptions of the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan as well. Being confronted with an invasion by a mighty foreign power at the door step, it was natural that each of the neighbours of Afghanistan had to reshuffle its policy under the exigencies of time and situation. Thus, the policies of the neighbouring countries in the aftermath of Soviet invasion largely reflected various strategies and tactics that each sought to adopt from its own perception of the changed situation.



Now, despite the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan on the basis of the Geneva Accord of 1988, the Afghan crisis at present looks nowhere near a political solution. While the prospect for peace still remains bleak, the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan can play an effective role in salvaging Afghanistan out of the present imbroglio. In this connection, it would be interesting to study to what extent the policies of the neighbouring countries can either contribute to or complicate the future peace process in the region.

The pertinent questions are : What are the determinants of the neighbouring countries policies towards Afghanistan ? What have been the nature and content of each neighbour's policy during the invasion period ? What is the future of the Afghan problem and the response of the neighbouring countries towards it ? These are among the issues to be discussed in this paper.

### **The Determinants of the Neighbours' Policies**

Probably the immediate concern of a nation's foreign policy is to evolve a sound pattern of relationship with its neighbouring countries, taking into account certain factors like geographical location and strategic considerations, past linkage, social, economic and cultural compulsions. The neighbours of Afghanistan, likewise, evolved their individual pattern of relationship with Afghanistan taking into consideration a set of factors to guide their policy formulations, which are unique in themselves and, thus, differed from each other. However, in general, geographical proximity and close historical links acted as the permanent inputs in articulating the policies of the neighbours towards Afghanistan.

As is known, Afghanistan's survival as an independent nation in the past was dependent on its role as a buffer state between two powerful empires in southern and central Asia, the British and the Russian. "The amirs of landlocked religious and ethnically heterogeneous Afghanistan through various historical phases, learned to evolve a diplomacy which served their purpose well. They managed



to keep their survival by neutrality. Sandwiched between the two imperial powers, Russia and Britain during the 19th and 20th centuries, rulers of Afghanistan learnt the art of balancing the influences of the rival powers and were able to get concessions and aid from various quarters".<sup>1</sup> This policy of Afghanistan marked deep impression in the neighbours policies towards her.

Historically, the relations between Afghanistan and the undivided Sub-continent of India go back to Vedic era as references to such names as Gandhara (present Kandhar), Kabha (Kabul) and Balhika (Balkh) are mentioned in the earliest Indian scripture like Rigveda.<sup>2</sup> For centuries Afghanistan had been known as forming a cultural province of India.<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan in the past was used as a spring-board by races as the Aryans, the Greeks, the Mongols and also the Muslims for invading India on several occasions. In the process there occurred constant contact between these two countries resulting in close commercial relations and similarities in socio-cultural and political institutions.

The British Indian government ever since the Anglo-Russian convention of 1907 accepted Afghanistan as outside the Russian sphere of influence and continued to maintain friendly relations with the Afghan rulers.<sup>4</sup> Afghanistan, too, from its own political calculation viewed India as the most important neighbour. Most of the Afghan goods were consumed in the Indian markets and the Afghan rulers generally thought it convenient to rely on the people across the southern frontier for economic, political and strategic reasons.

The dissection of the sub-continent into two countries, India and Pakistan, with the end of the British rule altered the earlier

1. Tahir Amin, "Moscow's Kabul Connection: Lessons for Asian Countries", *Strategic Studies*, Vol. V, Winter, 1982, No. 2.
2. H. A. S. Jafri, *Indo-Afghan Relations : 1947-67*, (New Delhi : Sterling PVT, 1976), p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 26.



uninterrupted relations between India and Afghanistan. The emergence of Pakistan between Afghanistan and India lessened the geographical proximity of India to Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the new geographical configuration has assumed a different significance in the changed circumstances. Despite the fact that the creation of Pakistan deprived India of its pre-partition benefits and India became dependent on Pakistan for carrying on her trade with Afghanistan, the relations between the two traditional friends, were further extended, covering such fields as economic, technological and cultural.

Pakistan with its long border with Afghanistan shared the same historical legacy and experience, like India, with Afghanistan, but the relations between the two countries remained almost cool ever since the time of partition as difference arose between the two over the legality of the Durand line which subsequently took the shape of Pakhtoonistan issue and has continued to bedevil their relations ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from these permanent factors, certain trends in post-world war international politics have also influenced the policy of India and Pakistan towards Afghanistan. In fact, India and Afghanistan had identical approach to cold war politics of alliances and counter-alliances. India's adherence to non-alignment as the basic precept of its foreign policy was a source of inspiration for Afghanistan, which with her traditional experience of neutrality followed the Indian line to meet the cold war challenge. On the other hand, Pakistan's entry into the West-sponsored alliance like CENTO and SEATO was an anathema to Afghanistan. The American military aid to Pakistan was considered by Afghanistan as having pernicious effect not only on the situation in the area but throughout the world.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of China as a communist power in the periphery of Afghanistan also influenced Indian policy towards Afghanistan.

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5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

While Afghanistan realistically viewed China as a power in her proximity and sought to develop working relations with her, India perceived this development in her own context. Being herself entrenched in a rift and contention for power and supremacy in the Third world with China, India sought to further strengthen her relations with Afghanistan following the 1962 Sino-Indian border debacle. In this respect, India's massive aid and assistance to Afghanistan is to be viewed as one of far reaching significance.

While geographical proximity of Afghanistan to Russia has acted favourably in formulating a cautious policy of the former towards the latter, certain political and strategic interests motivated Russian policy towards Afghanistan. As mentioned earlier, Afghanistan acted as a buffer between the two biggest empires of that time, Britain and Russia. The Russians were always apprehensive about the British moves in Afghanistan and this fear was further exacerbated by suspicion about the loyalty of the Afghans towards Russia.

The October revolution of 1917 brought about revolutionary changes in the Soviet political, economic and social structure and the spirit of revolution found its way also into the nation's foreign policy. Subsequently the policy towards Afghanistan was adopted in the context of Lenin's thinking that national bourgeois in the developing countries must be supported in order to weaken the hold of the imperialist countries and to gain time for the emergence of an indigenous communist movement.<sup>7</sup>

In post world war period, the changing political climate generated by the cold war was a factor that greatly influenced the Soviet policy towards Afghanistan. In the context of bi-polar politics, the opportunity for more active Soviet cooperation with Afghanistan came with Pakistan's joining the West-sponsored military pact—a move that both the countries perceived as a threat to their countries. Besides, the Sino-Soviet estrangement also acted as a determinant in shaping the Soviet policy towards Afghanistan.

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7. Tahir Amin, *op. cit.*, p. 39.



The factor of commerce and trade also influenced Soviet policy towards Afghanistan. Because of economic geography, transport cost differential, better terms of trade, stable volume of import and exports and absorptive capacity of the Soviet markets for Afghan goods, the Soviets dominated Afghan trade which was the lifeline of Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, the need for cultural linkage shaped the Soviet policy towards Afghanistan to a great extent.

In the north-west a narrow strip, the Wakhan valley connects Afghanistan with China. This factor of geographical proximity also gained prominence in the Chinese policy towards Afghanistan. Strictly speaking, historically Afghanistan has never been a vital area of concern for the Chinese. In the early days limited contacts were maintained between the two countries. Although the rise of China as a communist power widened its political and strategic concern, Afghanistan did never figure prominently in Chinese foreign policy, rather it remained a marginal area of interest for China. "Chinese relations with Afghanistan in 1949-78 were essentially a factor of its relations with the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan rather than being vital in themselves."<sup>9</sup>

Iran in the east, despite its geographical proximity and cross-border Islamic feeling did not evolve an active neighbourly policy towards Afghanistan, "Afghanistan's relation with Iran has been less than cordial historically".<sup>10</sup> However, economic interests prompted Iran to maintain a working relation with Afghanistan. Like Pakistan, Iran's entry into the Western alliance was looked upon by Afghanistan with suspicion and Iran for a considerable period also looked disapprovingly at Afghanistan's tilt towards the Soviet Union. This cold war factor was a perennial source of irritation between the two countries. The Islamic revolutionary regime in

8. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

9. Sujit Dutta, "China and the Afghan Conflict", in V.D. Chopra (ed), *Afghanistan: Geneva Accord and After*, (New Delhi: Patriotic Publishers, 1988), p. 120.

10. B.N. Banerjee, *India's Aid to its Neighbours*, (New Delhi: Select Books, 1982), p. 281.

Iran, likewise, considered the Soviet factor in Afghan politics as being a menace and detrimental to its Islamic interest. The Pakistani factor also influenced Iran's policy towards Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Iran being traditional friends and possessing an identical approach to world politics, Afghanistan could never gain favour from Iran against Pakistan.

A conspectus of what has been discussed above would reveal the following trends in the neighbouring countries' policies towards Afghanistan:

- (1) India's policy is guided by historical legacy, geo-strategic and political considerations, economic interests, anti-Pakistan and anti-China factors.
- (2) Pakistan's policy is guided by the Pakhtoonistan issue solely, with anti-India and anti-Soviet underpinnings.
- (3) The Soviet policy is guided primarily by strategic-security considerations, vast economic and commercial interests with anti-West undercurrent
- (4) Chinese policy is mainly guided by anti-Soviet, anti-India and pro-Pakistan gestures.
- (5) Iranian policy is guided by politico-economic interests with anti-Soviet and pro-Pakistan fervour.

#### **Nature and Content of the Neighbours' Policies**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has created sharp reaction both at the regional and international levels evoking criticism and condemnation from all concerned quarters. By acquiring militarily the control of a country of great strategic importance, the Soviet Union has aroused new apprehension in the neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Iran, China and India. All these countries viewed the new situation in the light of their respective interests, values and policy options. Therefore, this section would deal with the policies of the neighbouring countries towards Soviet-occupied



Afghanistan. Also Afghanistan's policy towards these neighbours would be reviewed.

## PAKISTAN

Against the backdrop of an icy relation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the Soviet invasion instantly created sharp reactions in Pakistan. Besides, the Soviet Union itself had always been a constant source of anxiety and worry to Pakistanis ever since the dawn of cold war and containment policies.

The bogey of Soviet threat was expeditiously used by the Pakistani leaders to justify Pakistan's direct involvement in the crisis and it appears that Pakistan's pre-occupation with Afghanistan formed a substantial part of its foreign policy endeavour and challenge throughout the eighties.

Because of geographic proximity Pakistan had no choice but become a front-line state in the Afghan crisis and shared the same repugnance for the Soviet occupation as of the West. William Borders rightly remarked, "The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, just across a long and troubled border, has forced Pakistan and the US into the same corner, obliging American re-evaluation of a once cordial relationship that has lately become tortured. The other one time US ally in this region-Iran is no longer in the running and the future foreign policy of India under a resurgent Indira Gandhi is a source of concern to Washington".<sup>11</sup>

In Pakistani perception the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan transformed Pakistan's geo-strategic situation as it increased Islamabad's sense of vulnerability. The Pakistani and the Western leaders shared the same apprehension that the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was a part of its long term grand strategy to gain access to the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. As a result, Pakistan with its military strength and geo-strategic location was incorporated into what is called the US concept of strategic consensus.<sup>12</sup>

11. *The New York Times* (Weekly Review), 21 January 1980.

12. Uma Singh, 'Pakistan's Perception about Afghanistan', in V.D. Chopra (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 172.

The Afghan government sensing that the reaction of Pakistan would be sharp and critical went to the extent of offering some olive branch to Pakistan. As part of its effort to persuade Pakistan to recognize the DRA government and prevent any assistance to Afghan resistance elements, the Kabul regime and the Soviets attempted to woo Pakistan through their willingness to recognize the Durand line formally as Afghanistan's border. An example of this gambit was the following statement made by the DRA Foreign Ministry on 17 January 1981. "There is no dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan or between Afghanistan and Iran. The DRA has no territorial claims whatsoever against those countries".<sup>13</sup>

However, nothing could placate the Pakistani authorities as they had their own stakes and gains in the newly emerged crisis. The Afghan crisis was believed not to be resolved shortly. Moreover, the event generated a chain of politico-economic and social implications for Pakistan. These can be summarized as under:

1. With Soviet forces now directly on its long border and with Afghanistan being a traditional enemy of Pakistan, Pakistan strategists feared Soviet designs in the troubled province of Baluchistan, located in southern Pakistan and adjacent to Iran and the Indian Ocean. The possibility of Soviet-DRA assistance to Pakistani separatists and opposition elements also worried many Pakistanis once the Soviets consolidated their position in Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup>
2. The Soviet Union's military and other close ties with India, a traditional enemy of Pakistan also increased Pakistan's fear of a future Indo-Soviet axis against her.
3. Pakistan was inundated by refugees from across the border. These refugees who settled in the NWFP and Baluchistan caused adverse effect on the country's frail economy as well as on its socio-political balance.

13. J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation*, (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1986), p. 345.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 356.



4. The Afghan crisis ushered in a boon for the Zia regime to consolidate its position in Pakistan politics. The bogey of Soviet threat now took precedence over all other national issues and Zia tried to convince his people that he alone had the courage and ability to settle the Afghan crisis in an acceptable manner. In fact, the Afghan crisis but forward before Zia a formidable challenge to his Islamic policy and fundamentalism. Given the internal political instability and soaring economic crisis, Zia in a way tried to dissuade the public opinion from all these predicaments and turn it in his favour. He tried to Islamicize the Afghan issue in keeping with his Islamic sentiment. According to Selig Harrison, "Zia hoped to see a strategic realignment emerge from the war in Afghanistan, a new order whereby Pakistan would overcome the historic tension between the two countries (as expressed through a major border dispute) and play a decisive role in shaping the future of postwar Afghanistan. Zia's strategic policy envisaged the creation of a pan-Islamic federation in which both countries would delink from the southern Asian region and join other Islamic nations of the greater Gulf region. In this way Pakistan could confidently counter the perceived Indo-Soviet threat from the north and east, and could perhaps even enhance its influence by attempting to win over the southern Republics to the greater Islamic federation".<sup>15</sup>

5. The Pakistani authorities wanted the Afghan crisis to serve them well by generating a massive flow of aid from Washington whose anxiety over the issue coincided with that of Pakistan. The US aid to Pakistan had been severed, restored and severed again in the first two years after Zia's 1977 coup in response to his refusal to curtail his covert nuclear weapons programme.<sup>16</sup> The \$3.2 billion aid package from the Reagan administration boosted morale in the army which was still recovering from the traumatic effect of 1971 war that led to the independence of Bangladesh.<sup>17</sup> Moreover,

15. Selig Harrison, *Proceedings of the International Security Seminars*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 24, 1988.

16. *World Report*, August 29-September 5, 1988.

17. *Ibid.*

Pakistan's support to the Mujahedeen solidified its ties with Islamic states including Iran. Saudi Arabia sent huge amount of aid to Pakistan as well as to the Mujahideens.

6. Lastly, the Pakistani government had to give credence to public support for the Mujahedeen cause as a significant of the Pakistani populace was sympathetic to the Afghan resistance movement.

With such considerations that probably affected Pakistan's policy making towards Afghanistan, it is relevant here to mention in brief the actual course of Pakistan's strategy towards the Afghan crisis.

At the initial stage, the broad features of Pakistan's policy towards the Afghan crisis were : (i) to repel the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (ii) to keep Pakistan's strong commitment to its Afghan policy (iii) to keep its involvement indirect, discreet and limited<sup>18</sup>. Later on, Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan proved similar to those of the US and most of the Western countries. This policy was based on the four points contained in successive UN General Assembly resolutions as (i) immediate and total withdrawal of Soviet forces (ii) independence and non-alignment for Afghanistan (iii) self-determination for the Afghan people (iv) creation of political conditions necessary for the voluntary return of the Afghan refugees.<sup>19</sup>

It was in Pakistan's calculation that any safe return of the refugees to Afghanistan would be preceded by two-pronged developments - the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the installation of the government by the Mujahideens operating from Pakistani bases. In this connection, President Zia's endeavour to ensure the success of seven Afghan Mujahideen parties over the PDPA's government in Kabul deserves attention. His support for this brand of Mujahideen shows his ideological affinity with the Jamat-e-Islami parties which

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18. Uma Singh, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

19. J. Bruce Amstutz, *op. cit.*, p. 355.



have been instrumental in influencing Pakistan politics under Zia in many ways. President Zia identified the self-determination of the Afghan people with the victory of the Mujahideen. Therefore, Pakistan government favoured more fundamentalist faction particularly Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, head of the Hebz-i-Islam in the seven party alliance known as the IUAM (Islamic Unity Alliance of the Afghan Mujahideen). Pakistan's strategy was to have a new government in Kabul that would be beholden or atleast amenable to Pakistan. This meant such a government would not revive close ties with India or nurture irredentist claims to border-straddling Pathan tribal areas.

### IRAN

The next country to watch closely the Soviet invasion and feel threatened by it was Iran. The Soviet invasion occurred at a moment when the post revolution internal political situation in Iran was in its nascent stage and the regime under late Imam Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was preoccupied in consolidating its position in the country.

In view of Iran's persistent suspicion and doubt about Soviet motive in this region- a feeling shared by both the revolutionary leaders and their predecessors, the Soviet invasion in close proximity to Iran was natural to be viewed with great concern by the new regime.

Like Pakistan Iran denounced the Babrak government and did not recognize it. Its policy was well manifested in the following statement of the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs in late December 1984. "As it has announced frequently, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the unconditional departure of all the occupying forces without being replaced by any other oppressive force, giving the right of self-rule to the people and the honourable return of the Afghan refugees to their country as the only essential solution to the problem of Afghanistan".<sup>20</sup>

20. *Ibid.*, p. 358.

Some of the discernible differences between Pakistani and Iranian policies towards Afghanistan probably are:

1. Iran's verbal criticism of Babrak regime and the Soviet invasion were more vetuperative and critical than Pakistani public remarks. The Soviets were described as 'satanic' and their armed intervention as a flagrant violation of international law carried out in total disregard for the sovereignty of Afghanistan. The resistance was described as a 'sacred holy war' (Jihad).<sup>21</sup>
2. While the Pakistani government made no allusion to the formation of a government in exile, the Iran government held such a possibility if the conflicting resistance groups had united among themselves.<sup>22</sup>
3. There has been no generous flow of aid and assistance to the guerrillas from Iran like that from Pakistan. It is relevant here to mention that Iran from time to time made many statements supportive of the resistance and has even refused to become involved in the Cordoves negotiation so long as the Afghan guerrillas were absent. But actual Iranian material support, that too at extremely low level, was restricted to those Shia factions of the guerrillas who operated from Iran. The parties based at Peshwar were not allowed to transport weapons and ammunitions into Afghanistan via Iran.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the fact that Iran itself was burdened with refugees, throughout the Afghan crisis Iran seemed to have pursued a very restrained and cautions policy towards Afghanistan. The reasons appear to be :

1. Iranians feel traditional mistrust for the Afghans - an attitude which existed before the revolution in Iran.<sup>24</sup>

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21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 359.

23. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 213.

24. *Ibid.*



2. Iran, obsessed by the need to tackle its own post revolution domestic problems and the fratricidal war with Iraq, could not give due attention to the Afghan question.

3. The Iranian leadership perhaps realistically perceived that fighting the Soviets would ultimately lead to Iran's siding with the West. But the revolutionary Iran's antipathy towards the west and its much advocated policy of neither east nor west precluded any such possibility.

4. The Iraian leaders were probably content with Pakistan's over all dealing with the crisis. At least in Zia's hardline stance on Afghanistan, there was a semblance of an identity of interests between Iran and Pakistan. In the ultimate analysis, both the countries opted for a withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

5. Finally, the Iranian policies against the background of the politics of the whole region shows a common trend that Iran lends support to Shia communities whether they be in Lebanon, Iran, Bahrein or Afghanistan, despite its proclamation of the necessity of a universal Islamic revolution.<sup>25</sup>

## CHINA

The Chinese leaders viewed the developments in Afghanistan from the perspective of its long term rivalry with the Soviet Union. China became critical about Afghanistan situation after 1978 coup that led to an increased Soviet influence in the country. It was thus natural that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a country contiguous to China itself, would create sharp and critical reaction in the Chinese mind.

China strongly condemned the Soviet action and termed it as part of the Soviet southward policy. It also saw the Soviet strategy as one of encircling China. The PRC position was explained in June 1980 as follows, "Situated south of central Asia, Afghanistan is strategically very important. The old Tsars drooled over it long ago.

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25. *Ibid.*

The new Soviet Tsars have assumed the mantle from the old Tsars. To get hold of the passage leading out of the Indian Ocean and to control the strategic sea route of the West and Japan, the Soviet Union is energetically trying to control Afghanistan to open a land route south to the Indian Ocean".<sup>26</sup>

The proper response to the Soviet invasion according to the Chinese was firm rejection and resistance not conciliation or compromise.<sup>27</sup> Practically speaking, the response and policy objectives of China towards Afghanistan were similar to those of Pakistan and Iran. As seen by Beijing, the Afghan crisis could be settled only by the following three steps :

1. Soviet troops should withdraw without any precondition or as part of any package deal.
2. Afghanistan's internal affairs should be settled by the Afghan people alone. No one should compel the Afghans to accept the fait accompli achieved by the Soviet invasion.
3. All countries should firmly support the Afghan resistance against the Soviet occupation troops.<sup>28</sup>

The Chinese recognition of the Afghan guerrillas and its unrelenting commitment to the resistance movement was viewed by Iran and Pakistan as significant positive gesture with far reaching implications in view of Chinese friendly relations with both Iran and Pakistan. It is here that one notices a convergence of interests of the these neighbouring countries on a common issue. In fact, the PRC's obsession with the Soviet invasion was so much that a withdrawal of Soviet troops was put up as a precondition by China for any possible future rapprochement with the USSR.

## INDIA

The Afghan crisis led India into a very difficult and perplexing situation in view of its special relationship with the USSR and

26. J. Bruce Amstutz, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-365.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 364.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 365.



antagonistic relation with both China and Pakistan. The crisis had great significance for India's strategic environment and impinged on its relation with the superpowers as well.

It seems that Indian policy towards Afghanistan for sometime remained relatively vague, devoid of any commitment to or concrete proposal for a practical solution of the crisis. What appears is that Indian policy sharply contradicted the policies of other neighbours as discussed earlier. She made significant departure from the policy and response of other nations by recognizing the Babrak government as legal one and maintained full diplomatic relations with the regime. In May 1982, the Indo-Afghan joint economic commission, dormant since the 1978 Marxist coup in Afghanistan, met in Kabul. At this meeting India pledged economic aid to expand hospital facilities in the Afghan capital and to assist in developing small scale industries<sup>29</sup>

In the UN General Assembly voting on the Afghan question, India refused to condemn the Soviet Union and the Indian Representative at the UN Brajesh Mitra justified the Russian intervention in Afghanistan referring to the attempts of interference by outside powers in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by training, arming and encouraging subversive elements. "This Indian stand in the General Assembly caused shock and surprise among a large number of non-aligned countries and exposed it to the charge of repaying its debt to Moscow by abandoning a small nation struggling against a superior force. It was alleged that India's low key and compromising position was suggestive of Moscow's influence over New Delhi's support, atleast, not to oppose, the Soviet action in Afghanistan".<sup>30</sup>

India, perhaps, could not be expected to support the resistance movement which was under the sponsorship of her arch enemy, Pakistan. The crux of the whole problem in India was, therefore, not the Russian intervention or the legality of Babrak government,

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29. *Ibid.*, p, 365.

30. Arundhati Roy, *The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: Causes, Consequences and India's Responce*, (New Delhi: Associated Publishers House, 1987), p. 60.

but its apprehensions of a militarily strong Pakistan. India suspected that Pakistan was using the Afghan crisis as an excuse to build up its armed strength vis-a-vis India and that her motive in this connection is hypocritical. In India's perception, probably US-China-Pakistan axis was evolving out of the crisis which would affect her security. It is pertinent here to mention that India remained critical about US military build up in the Indian Ocean and her pouring of arms to small countries including Pakistan before the Afghan crisis actually erupted. Thus the Indian government seemed to recognize the necessity of Soviet presence in the region. This would place Pakistan in an awkward position between the two poles of an Indo-Soviet axis.

However, the fact remains that India always remained concerned about the Afghan question which was introducing superpower confrontation in the region, to the detriment of India's security and its own aspiration for regional primacy.

The policies of the neighbours towards DRA during the invasion time, except India, were all opposed to Afghanistan's PDPA regime and were pursued to break the status-quo prevailing in the region. As a result DRA's bilateral relations with her neighbouring countries became limited and increasingly strained. The most conspicuous exception was its relation with India. The DRA felt encouraged that India shared the Soviet view about its intervention in Afghanistan and that India condemned foreign assistance to the Mujahideens.

Throughout the occupation period Afghan government remained vulnerable to Mujahideen attacks from within Afghanistan and across the border. As the government was viewed to be merely a puppet established and run by the Soviet government, the incumbent government in Afghanistan failed to curry favour with the world community. The regime, it seems, met with two utter failures in its foreign policy objectives-first, it failed to gain diplomatic recognition from most of the UN member states and second, it could not persuade her neighbours and others to cease giving aid to the Afghan opposition groups.



The last decade of Afghan internal scene marked by armed fighting between the Soviet occupation forces and the resistance groups caused political fragility, armed violence, continuing unrest and disruption of normal life in Afghanistan. Finally, the realism prevailed when all the parties to the conflict agreed to sign the UN sponsored Geneva Accord on 14 April 1988. The Accord included Afghanistan, Pakistan and the two superpowers as its signatories. "The Geneva agreement is a recognition of the futility of continuing the brutality, violence and lawlessness. The agreement also represents the culmination of a process of consultations intended to create the conditions for a peaceful settlement of crisis in Afghanistan".<sup>31</sup>

### **The Afghan Crisis at Present**

The political vacuum in Afghanistan following the Soviet withdrawal seems to remain the most pressing problem at the moment. The legitimacy of the Najibullah government being in question, two of the parties to the Geneva Accord, Pakistan and the US seem to be increasingly critical about the present regime whose exit from the political scene appears to be their only goal. At the other end of the tunnel, the Najibullah government is fully supported by the Soviet Union and its continuity and stability are thought to be conducive to Moscow's vested interests in Afghanistan.

The crux of the problem being the establishment of a government acceptable to all the parties directly or indirectly linked with the present Afghan crisis, it would be relevant here to delve into the policies and positions of these actor in this regard. Most of the parties involved—the Soviets, the US and Pakistan in general agree that it is primarily the Afghans that can forge a strong national government and bring stability in Afghanistan. But they sharply differ from each other on the nature and composition of a future government to be installed in Afghanistan.

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31. K C. Pant, "Geneve Accord: Boost to Peace", in V.D. Chopra (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 20.

For the Soviet Union the withdrawal from Afghanistan has been a planned and organized one. It was in accordance with an agreement concluded a year earlier. Unlike the Americans in Vietnam, the Soviets have not abandoned their interests in this country nor will their geo-strategic interests even let them do so. From its one decade of occupation in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union tried to demonstrate to the world that its security and geo-strategic imperatives demand friendly governments around her periphery and that any deviation from this line would be a challenge to be met with her might. In line with this Soviet foreign policy requirement, Afghanistan which shares more than a thousand mile long common border with the Soviet Union, thus, cannot afford to be anti-Soviet. The Soviet withdrawal policy was two fold, while committed to leave Afghanistan, the USSR attempted to strengthen the Kabul regime militarily and at the same time to create conditions for the emergence of a broad-based regime to which Najibullah's government would be a party.<sup>32</sup>

Being replenished with both military and civil aid by Moscow from time to time, the PDPA government in Afghanistan acts according to Moscow's line of thinking. It favours a coalition government with any of the opposition groups which wants to join the process of national reconciliation. This would be followed by free elections for a successor government. It is relevant here to mention that under the policy of national reconciliation, the PDPA had tried to enlarge its support base while maintaining a grip on all facets of the government. The strategy is two fold—to prevent the fall of Kabul as far as possible and to drop all that made the regime unacceptable like references to communism, one party rule, secularism etc. under a deconstruction of socialism policy.<sup>33</sup>

India strongly favours the survival of the regime or at least its accommodation in a new coalition. This is partly because of a long standing bond with the Soviet Union. There is also the news of the

32. *Strategic Survey*, 1988-89, p. 152.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 144.



Indian military advisers operating in Afghanistan for the PDPA regime and if the present in-fighting drags along for an indefinite period, perhaps, Moscow may make an ever-increasing use of India to enhance the Soviet interests in Afghanistan. India would, thus, seize the opportunity for its own consideration of regaining political and economic influence in Afghanistan that has received a setback as a result of the Afghan conflict.

The US, Pakistan, Iran and the Mujahideen on the other hand, seem to harbour a policy that simply contradicts the position of Moscow and its client government in Afghanistan. Although the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan has been a pyrrhic victory for the US, for Pakistan the withdrawal has rather been a means to achieve something more. As mentioned earlier, Pakistan's strategy has always been to set up a government in Kabul according to its choice. Thus it is obvious that the present Najibullah government could not be supported by Pakistan. The Pakistan's aim seems to have not merely been the withdrawal of Soviet troops, but to obviate the Soviet influence in Afghanistan too. In this connection, such a view seems to have been attested by her ally, the US also. Both these governments seem to be in total agreement that the present regime in Kabul must be replaced by a neutral government to facilitate negotiation with the Mujahideen for a political solution of the Afghan tangle. In Pakistan's view the greatest hurdle on the way of peace in Afghanistan is Najibullah government as it is not acceptable to the Mujahideens, the refugees, the field commanders and King Zahir Shah. Washington for its part terms it unfair to cut off arms supply to the Mujahideen resistance movement as it would create an unacceptable imbalance in favour of the Kabul government boosted by the huge amount of arms supplies left behind by the Soviets. Iran shares the same conviction as of Pakistan regarding the position of Najibullah government, but reserves its critical stance on the possible role of the US in any future government in Afghanistan. The Mujahideens seem to speak from the battleground and largely rely on its military policy to overwhelm the present regime. They continue to



reject any role of the PDPA in future Afghanistan and largely depend on Pakistan, the US and other aid donors in their military operation against the regime.

As it appears, in post Soviet withdrawal period, the divergent policies and outlooks of the neighbours towards the present regime in Afghanistan have not paved the way for a solution of the problem as yet. Each of the neighbours has reviewed the post-withdrawal scenario from its own interests and continues to pursue its Afghan policy in the light of new developments. As a result, no unified policy has yet been unleashed by the neighbours that could bring durable peace and stability in the region. It is pertinent here to review the present Afghan policy of Pakistan, the front line state in the crisis.

In Pakistan Benazir assumed power at the fag end of the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Thus, in post Soviet withdrawal period, the new government began emphasising on political, rather than military solution of the problem. This became particularly evident during her visit to the US where she expressed her preference for a political solution of the problem.

This shift in the Afghan policy is probably the outcome of a number of factors, both internal and external. With the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, a generous flow of western aid as before was not expected by the new regime. Moreover, the regime's concern was now with the safe repatriation of approximately 3.4 million refugees in Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> At the external level, the superpower detente having its ramifications on the global scenario, perhaps, could not fail to influence the new democratic polity of Pakistan. The growing prospects of superpower concord and consensus might

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34. The refugees have become an economic burden on the nation's development and a source of controversy across Pakistan. Their presence has been blamed for air raids and border incursions into Pakistan, spread of illegal weapons and narcotics, competition for pastureland, fire wood and jobs, pitch ethnic conflicts and interference in local politics.



have influenced the new regime to find a way for permanent peace and stability in the region. Besides, the incumbent government of Najibullah was found hard to be ousted from power. Being the incumbent government, it enjoys the power and authority over all sectors of the state machinery. Next, the Mujahideen's failure to take the city of Jalalabad disappointed those who visualized an early successive capture of Afghan cities immediately after the withdrawal. Lastly, the new government may have realized that too much dependence on military means would draw Pakistan more deeply into the Afghan embroglio that in the past created problems in her western frontiers.

However, Benazir's option for a political solution remains blurred by Pakistan's overt opposition to the regime in Afghanistan. Despite her preference for a negotiated settlement, Benazir at home remains vulnerable to the centralized and military-dominated defense and foreign affairs' bureauracies who exert influence in the direction of an aggressive policy towards the present government of Afghanistan.

Pakistan's Afghan policy now centers around the dilemma created by the formation of an Afghan interim government.<sup>35</sup> This government, formed in Pakistan, has not been an actual representative of

35. The Afghans have constituted their consultative council, called Shura. They have formed an interim government with Prof. Sibghatullah Mujaddedi as President. This interim government was formed against the backdrop of dissension, bickerings and misunderstanding among the several Mujahideen parties. The Afghan Shura that was hammered out by the Pakistan based Mujahideed parties does not enjoy the confidence of all the seven groups based in Pakistan. The most serious mistake was the non-inclusion of the Iran-based Mujahideens into the interim government. When the Shura was originally called, each of the Peshwar-based seven member of the IUAM (Islamic Alliance of the Afghan mujahidee) was allotted 60 seats. Another 60 seats were reserved for the Iran-basen IAC (Islamic Alliance Council). The IAC demanded 100 seats and turned down the offer. The Iranian Deputy Prime Minister visited Pakistan and met Premier Benazir but the Pakistan-Iran intercession did not help either. The result is that the Iran-based leadership



the Afghan people as it lacks the participation of Iran-based Mujahideens and other factions. The interim government, though heavily backed both financially and politically, is yet to unleash any definite plan for the future reconstruction of the country and remains unable to coordinate its military policies. The most formidable task before Benazir now seems to be her future efforts towards a reconciliation between the Peshwar-based Mujahideen interim government, on the one hand, and Afghan Mujahideens based in Iran, the guerrilla commanders, the non-communists in the Najibullah government, on the other.

At present, the Pakistan government seems to remain in ambivalence in tackling the Afghan crisis. It can neither depart from its past policy nor can it initiate anything new. Its present stance on a political solution of the crisis remains far from a reality as the regime in Afghanistan is rejected by her. At the same time, it is critical about the interim government formed in Pakistan. The question that now arises is whether Pakistan would revert back to its military option to let the Mujahideens fight to decide their destiny. But, in view of the present military position of the Mujahideens marked by fragile unity, infighting among themselves, divisions in their ranks, it is difficult to conceive a permanent solution of the problem through military option.<sup>36</sup>

Analysis and observers now see a vacuum in Pakistan's Afghan policy mainly due to its lack of direction. Seizing this opportunity,

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have kept away from the Shura decisions. Besides, the interim government did not take into consideration the case of those Mujahideens fighting within Afghanistan. In the ultimate analysis the interim government seems to be lacking a support base.

36. The infighting between the Mujahideens is better illustrated by the recent Farkhaar incident that was unprecedented in its brutality. For the first time a large number of Afghan guerrillas were ambushed and killed in cold blood by other Mujahideens. At least 30 of Professor Rabbani's top men from the Jamat-e-Islami were killed when they were returning from a meeting with their field commanders.



Iran seems to be keen in taking new initiative on Afghan issue. The end of Gulf war, the smooth transition after Imam khomeini, new policy and objectives are some of the factors that have influenced Iran's rethinking on the issue. Current Iranian position on the Afghan issue appears to be:

1. It favours a a political solution of the Afghan problem. In the light of this assessment, Iran is apparently not providing any substantial military aid to the Iran-based eight party alliance preferring instead to extend political and humanitarian support.<sup>37</sup>
2. Iran feels that the new political thinking and pragmatism of Gorbachev could help solve the Afghan crisis. Both the USSR and Iran remain critical about the Pakistan-based interim government in which Iran-based Mujahideen has not been a party.<sup>38</sup>
3. Iran seeks a solution of the Afghan problem within a regional framework. It wants to de-internationalize the Afghan issue taking it away from the superpower politics. It is reported that Iran might propose a regional conference on Afghanistan to be attended by Pakistan, Iran, the USSR and all factions of the Mujahideen.<sup>39</sup>
4. Iran may accept some sort of political role for the People's Democratic party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with the exclusion of Najibullah.<sup>40</sup>
5. As opposed to super power policy, Iran seeks an Islamic regime in Afghanistan.

The situation in Afghanistan is so critical that a prognosis about its future development is difficult to be made at the moment. As the war remains indecisive, diplomatic moves are underway at the international and regional levels to resolve the conflict.

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37. *Dialogue*, October 27, 1989.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*

### Concluding Remarks

The international political system is now in a process of transition. With the demise of the cold war between the two superpowers, an air of mutual confidence, understanding and co-operation seems to be blowing all around. The analysts and observers describe the changes as 'peace that is breaking out all over.' Although many consider these changes to be more graphic than real, nevertheless, the fact remains that conflicts in several flash points of the globe are now shifting from its earlier position of confrontation to a process of negotiation and dialogue. The improved East-West relations seem to be having its positive fall-out on many of the regional problems which are now on the way of getting resolved. Only in the last year the world witnessed the Geneva Accord on Afghanistan, the ceasefire in the Gulf, the peace move in Kampuchea and in Angola and Namibia's journey towards independence.

The world is now experiencing what some term as the new detente largely facilitated by such developments as improved US-Soviet relations and the new rapprochement between the USSR and China. While a spirit of accommodation, co-existence, dialogue and confrontation is enveloping the global community, it is still rather unfortunate that the Afghan crisis still remains unresolved.

Considering the case that the parties to the Afghan crisis remain two superpowers with other countries as proxies in the conflict, there remains an immense opportunity for these actors to salvage Afghanistan out of the present crisis. Moreover, the region in which Afghanistan is situated itself is in a process of great transition, both internally and internationally and this could be of great importance for a new political development in Afghanistan.

Two of the important neighbours of Afghanistan have witnessed changes in their respective polity. Pakistan is evolving out to be a democratic society and its foreign policy is expected to reflect an independent orientation. The new regime's overture to maintain good relations with the Soviet Union and its arch enemy India is



seen as landmark steps towards fostering a harmonious relation with the country's neighbours.

On the other hand, a visible political change has taken place in Iran. Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as new President of Iran and other influential leaders like Ali Khamenie are expected to be moderate in nature than before. The new leadership set in train a series of pragmatic policies aimed at ending the country's international isolation and seeking funds for reconstruction from abroad. Iran's opening to Moscow in recent time has been a landmark political and diplomatic gestation that could have a positive influence on the regional politics-particularly on the Afghan crisis. It is relevant here to mention that Iran is now shifting towards a negotiated peace in Afghanistan.

Another dramatic change has been the Sino-Soviet detente that could have a significant influence on the Afghan crisis. As is reported China has publicly said that it favours the creation of a broad based government in Afghanistan.

Some changes are now discernible in India's policy towards her neighbours which basically reflected her 'short cut approach' to gain influence by coercive methods as in case of Nepal and Sri Lanka. India is reported to be heading towards a negotiation with Nepal to break through the political row existing between the two countries and its recent plan to withdraw IPKF from Sri Lanka is definitely a positive gesture. Moreover, India's intention to mend its fence with two of her rival neighbours, China and Pakistan, are viewed positively in the context of regional politics.

With such an inflow of fresh ideas and moves around Afghanistan's neighbourhood, it is expected that all these changes would compel these countries to facilitate the peace process in Afghanistan, rather than complicating it any further. What is deemed necessary is a new realization which must reign supreme in their thinking that the conflict in Afghanistan can only be resolved through dialogue and negotiation rather than through resort to arms.

The Afghan Mujahideens will be making a grievous mistake if they remain ignorant about the winds of change sweeping across the globe. They have to realize that they can no longer put all their eggs in the military basket and political strategy is more important. The Mujahideen leaders must not forget that all over the world, belligerents involved in regional conflicts are now trying to find a political solution of their disputes, be it in Angola, Nicaragua or Kampuchea. The sooner this realization prevail among the Mujahideen, the better it is for all the parties involved in the conflict.