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## SOVIET-AFGHAN RELATIONS : SECURITY AND RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS

### **Introduction**

In recent history religious factors have rarely been closely related to strategic considerations. Emergence of a big number of secular states ultimately made religious issues and values less and less relevant to international relations. With the establishment of socialist states a total rejection of religion became inevitable in state affairs and even inter-state affairs. But strategic considerations sometimes led to a significant compromise with the state ideology.

The Soviet Union as the first socialist state and with its leadership role of the socialist bloc naturally had to maintain bilateral relations with the countries of different orientation. Afghanistan being a neighbour of the Soviet Union also came to close contact with Moscow. The strategic factors in Soviet-Afghan relations are apparent and have been focused by many analysts, but religious factors and related issues often were over-looked or underestimated. Moreover, some observers tend to be subjective in their analysis of religious issues because of their own psychological and ideological attachments.

For centuries, Afghanistan and the Soviet Central Asian Republics had been the heartland of Islam and their Muslim heritage and culture are reflected in almost all spheres of their life. Though their political identity became truncated, both the people apart from

religion, shared common ethnicity and culture. The policy makers in the Kremlin were aware of the religious and cultural identity of Central Asian and Afghan peoples. This awareness had clearly reflected in the formulation of Kremlin policy towards Afghanistan. In recent years the 'Muslim-factor' in Soviet-Afghan relations has emerged as an important issue.

The traditionally militant Muslim identity of the Afghans was further buttressed by the "Islamic fundamentalist" trends throughout the World in late 1970s. This has further cautioned Moscow and helped recast its relations with Kabul in light of the developments around the globe. In this context some pertinent questions can be raised : Why did the Soviets invade Afghanistan? What were the compulsions behind Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan? What role did the 'Muslim-factor' play in Soviet-Afghan relations? Does a military withdrawal mean a total aboutturn by Moscow towards Kabul? What would be the role of Moscow in relations to Kabul government in light of the emerging new international order? This paper is an attempt to address some of these issues.

The first section of the paper makes a review of the relationship between Afghanistan and the Soviet Union from 1917 to end of the World War II. Here discussions have centered around how the Soviets tried to ensure that in no way Afghanistan does become a security threat to Moscow. In the second section attempt has been made to analyse the nature of the Soviet ideological war and the slowpoisoning process of ideology in Afghan life. It has also been shown why the Marxists could not hold their ground, the failure of which precipitated the direct military Intervention. In the third section, the Soviet attempts to satisfy the disgruntled Afghan religious groups have been highlighted. In the final section, the scenario in Afghanistan following Soviet withdrawal has been analysed. The perspectives of the Soviets, the Mujahideens and the neighbouring Muslim countries has been summed up in the conclusion.



**Afghanistan : A Security problem for the Bolsheviks upto 1940-s**

After capturing power in Petrograd in 1917 the first duty of the Bolsheviks was to establish their control throughout the entire territory of Tsarist Empire. But establishment of Russian hegemony over the Muslim dominated areas was not an easy task. The Russians and the Red army met with strong resistance. Though to the common Muslims the Russian were the representatives of Christianity, after the October Revolution the conflict hinged not on religion but on ideologies, i.e. Communism and Islam. To the Russians Communism was an ideology cutting across religions and nationalities. However, V.I. Lenin for reasons of strategy tried to downplay the dogmatic approaches and paid special attention to the sentiments and emotions of the Muslims in order to enlist their support for the new Bolshevik regime.<sup>1</sup>

This pragmatic policy led to a quick establishment of friendly relations with its Muslim neighbour, Afghanistan. The Muslims of Afghanistan shared the sorrows and sufferings of the Muslims of the Soviet Central Asia in many ways. Apart from religious bond, there existed strong national and cultural links between the Muslims of Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan. Naturally Muslims fighting against Bolshevik's rule wanted help from neighbouring Muslim countries in the region. But they were not in a position to help the Muslims of the Soviet Union.

After achieving independence in 1919 Afghanistan had to formulate its own foreign policy, especially towards Britain and Russia. Historically, Afghanistan was used as a buffer state between these two imperial powers, and as such it had little leeway but to seek friendly relations with them. Both of these countries were holding vast territories previously ruled by the Muslims. Afghanistan had to fight for its independence against Britain but not against Russia.

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1. See for details, Babakhan, Ziyauddin Khan Iben Islam, *Islam and the Muslims in the land of Soviets*, (Moscow: progress publishers, 1980).

Tsarist Russia did not then pose any real threat to Afghanistan. After conquering the Central Asian Muslim principalities, the Russian Empire had to limit its colonial expansion because of its own crisis within the empire. After the socialist Revolution the Bolshevik regime had been facing formidable challenges within the country, and it did not want to create any problem with other countries. Initially, Afghanistan was little concerned with the new dimension of Bolshevism. The issues related to some Central Asian Muslim principalities and demarcation of boundaries between the two countries were the main problems in Russo-Afghan relations. But both the governments were enthusiastic in exchanging delegates and messages, and expressed their willingness to establish friendly neighbourly relationship between Moscow and Kabul. Though in the spring of 1920 the Russian and Afghan troops fought each other in Marv-Kushk areas, neither King Amanullah nor Lenin wanted any armed conflict between them and wanted to solve the problems through negotiations. The Russo-Afghan treaty was signed in 1921. Amanullah believed that he could solve the problems through negotiations and the treaty would really help him. His main interest was to keep Bukhara and Khiva as independent Muslim principalities which could greatly ensure the security of Afghanistan. The Russo-Afghan treaty stipulated such provision explicitly. The article VIII of the Russo-Afghan treaty clearly stipulated that "the High Contracting parties accept the actual independence and freedom of Bukhara and Keiva, whatever may the form of their government in accordance with the wishes of their peoples"<sup>2</sup> According to the article IX of the draft treaty the Soviets were supposed to hand over to Afghanistan Panjdeh and some other frontier districts occupied by the Tsarist Russia. But instead of agreeing with that condition the Russians formulated the article binding both the parties not to enter into any military or political

2. Quoted in: Abdul Samad Ghaus, *The Fall of Afghanistan, An Insider's Account*, (Washington: Pergalmon Brassey's international defence publishers, 1988) p. 39.



agreement with a third state which might prejudice one of the contracting parties.<sup>3</sup>

A superficial view may suggest that the article VIII is a concession to Afghanistan by the Russians and the article IX is the reverse. But the Russians had every reason not to think in that way. What could Amanullah's Afghanistan do when the Russians established socialist regimes in Bukhara or Khiva? Of course, Russians could argue that they did it according to the wishes of the Muslims of those territories. In fact, by its very nature the Bolshevik regime was supposed to establish socialism in the entire territories held under its occupation. Some authors believe that Amanullah had been providing even material and financial support to the *Basmachis*.<sup>4</sup> Even if it is true, what could be the size or amount of support? The emerging giant of Soviet Russia or Red Army could not be faced by the disorganised Muslims of Central Asia with the help of the then Afghanistan, Iran or Turkey.

But the Muslim resistance had strong popular base and the Bolsheviks were worried and tried to project the movement as Basmachi activities or interference from outside. In July 1922 Moscow accused Kabul for entering into Soviet territories and demanded non-interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Thus, one can observe that while Moscow was violating the Russo-Afghan treaty, it was accusing Kabul for violation. Amidst such a situation Britain wanted Afghanistan to abrogate the treaty. But Amanullah was unable to do so. Britain seriously underestimated the significance of the Russo-Afghan treaty for both the contracting parties. In fact, Amanullah was suspicious of Britain's imperialist actions and ratified the Russo-Afghan treaty

3. *Ibid*

4. The Russians called the Muslim combatants fighting against Bolshevik rule as *Basmachis*, See for details: Fraser, Glenda, *Basmachis* In: *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 6, No. 1, (Oxford: 1987) pp. 16-25.

5. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Afghanistan Politics Economics and Society* (London: Frances Pinter 1986), p. 8.

in August 1921. Mahmud Tarzi and Henry Dobbs signed the Anglo-Afghan treaty on November 22, 1921, about which Amanullah himself "emphasized the fact that this was not a friendship treaty but merely one for neighbourly relations".<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the Russians were successful in placating the Afghans from the orbit of British imperialism and convinced the Afghan government that all sorts of Afghan interests would be protected by the Russians and not by the British. The Afghan government took the British Empire as a neighbour because of British India, while it took socialist Russia as a collaborator and friend.

In monetary terms Amanullah was right to characterise Afghan-British relation as neighbourly in comparison with Russo-Afghan relations. After signing the treaty in 1921 the Russians gave 500,000 rubles as the first payment of annual subsidy of one million and two airplanes. Thus Amanullah felt that his friendship with Britain would not help him in the way that the Russian friendship would do. But at the same time, Amanullah was sceptical about Russian ulterior motive and thus sought an option to have some tacit understanding with Britain in security affairs. But Britain was not ready to provide any real help to Afghanistan. Yet "Amanullah was probably certain that, even in the absence of a formal defensive alliance with Britain, the imperatives of the defence of India would compel the British to defend Afghanistan against Russian aggression".<sup>7</sup> This was understood very well by the Russians too, and they tended not to pose any substantial threat to Afghanistan at that time. In December 1925, the Afghans accused the Russians of invading their territory near the Oxus river of the Panjdeh district.<sup>8</sup> But the Russians did not want their relations with the Afghans go sour and quickly signed the Treaty on Neutrality and Non-aggression in 1926 and

6. Abdul Samad Ghaus, *op. cit* p. 43.

7. *Ibid.* p. 44.

8. See for details Helliday Fred, 'Revolution in Afghanistan', *New Left Review* London, November-December, 1987,



another agreement on airline in 1927. Amanullah was given assurance by the Russians that they were the real friends of the Afghans and no problem should spoil their friendly relations.

In 1927 King Amanullah visited Soviet Union, Britain, Turkey and Iran. Role of Pan-Islamism had been weakening because of the abolition of Turkish Sultanat as a formal khalifat in 1924. The secularisation process of Kamal Ataturk was, in fact, much wider and deeper than the secularism in the Soviet Central Asia. Mektebs, Madrasses, Shariah courts and wakf properties were abolished and use of Arabic alphabets for Turk language was prohibited in the same way as in the Soviet Central Asia.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that while in Turkey it was done by the Muslim in the name of modernization, in the Soviet Muslim Republics it was carried out by the Russians in the name of socialism. In 1920s Iran also took the course of secularization, but not so extensively. Thus on religious grounds Amanullah was left with little to argue with the Russians. Moreover, returning from his grand tour of Europe, Asia and Africa in July 1928, Amanullah found that the tribal conflicts were beyond his control and his regime was in grave danger from internal crisis. But he hoped that Russia would help him. Amanullah was wrong in his anticipation. His "Russian friends did not help him".<sup>10</sup> Moscow sent an expeditionary force at the eleventh hour, when Amanullah's fall was inevitable. He left the country for Italy on May 22, 1929. Moscow recalled their force very quickly before generating suspicion of the other external power involved. Here again one witnesses the cautiousness of the Russians in military involvement in Afghanistan. On 15 October 1929 Mohammad Nadir Khan became King of Afghanistan and a Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) reconfirmed his accession to the throne in September 1930. During the turmoil and the reign of Nadir Khan Russian

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9. Shirin, Akiner, *Islamic Peoples in the USSR*, London: Kegan Paul International, 2nd edition 1986, pp. 10-11.

10. Abdul Samad Ghaus, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

material and other assistance to Afghanistan continued. Between 1928 and 1933 the Russians had doubled their export volume to Afghanistan. The neutrality treaty of 1926 was renegotiated in 1931, so that Nadir Khan could not cultivate any closeness with other powers hostile to Russia. In 1932 two other agreements were signed: one was postal accord and other was on appointment of officials to study frontier disputes.

By early 1930s Muslims of Soviet Central Asia were disillusioned with the nature of Soviet Socialist regime and in many places "Muslim communists" also started becoming critical of Stalin regime and many of them were executed.<sup>11</sup> By the mid-1930s Stalin suppressed all its internal revolts, and in 1936 a constitution was adopted declaring the establishment of socialism throughout the entire Soviet territories. Afghanistan ceased to be a big security concern for the Soviets. The success of the Russians in establishing socialism in the Soviet Central Asia made Moscow more ambitious. Afghanistan being a backward country increasingly became helpless in its bargaining capacities with the Soviet Union.

In June 1930 a Russian force penetrated as far as forty miles into northern Afghanistan and Nadir Khan understood that he should come into agreement with the Russians in their terms. In fact, Nadir Khan submitted to all the Russian pressure. "Nadir followed a policy of non-intervention in Soviet Central Asia, and refused to allow northern Afghanistan to be used to promote anti-Soviet, Pan-Islamic, and Pan-Turkic activities."<sup>12</sup> Nadir Shah, however, tended not to succumb entirely to the Russian hegemony. He gradually tried to develop close relationship with all these Muslim States including Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran in order to balance with the Soviets. But Afghanistan's friendship with all these Muslim countries could not boost up his position vis-a-vis the Soviets.

11. Different Issues of *Soviet Muslims Brief*, (Leicester: U.K. The Islamic Foundation) and also see Mizanur Rahman Khan *changing Faces of socialism*, (Dhaka: BISS papers, No. 9, January, 1989) p. 33.

12. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *op. cit.* p. 8.



In 1936 Afghanistan started procuring arms from the Soviet Union. With arms, technology and experts, socialist ideas began to trickle down into Afghanistan.

During World War II Afghanistan tried to maintain neutrality. Moscow kept some constant pressure on Kabul so that Afghanistan could not play against the interests of the Soviet Union. By the end of World War II Afghanistan no more remained a big security concern for Moscow. During World War I and in the 1920s Afghanistan even sometimes entered into direct conflicts with the Russians, but since 1930s it could not even think in those terms. Understanding the weakness of Afghanistan in 1938 Moscow withdrew its diplomatic missions from Afghanistan.

In the war Britain took the side with the Russians. On October 20, 1941 British and Soviet governments presented simultaneous and identical notes to Afghan government to expel all the German and Italian citizens from its territory except the employees of the diplomatic missions. Of course, it was an interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The Afghan government had to fulfill the demands of the two different imperialist powers, who had identical stance on this issue. But Afghan government fulfilled their demand with the permission of Loya Jirga, which helped Afghan government to maintain at least a semblance of its neutrality. Moreover, Afghan government took assurance from the British and the Russian governments so that Axis nationals could make their journey safe through British India and territories under Allied control, carrying with them their personal belongings. In mid November 1941 the Germans and Italians left Kabul.

This was the position of Afghanistan when United States came into formal contacts with Afghanistan. On June 6, 1942 the American legation was opened in Kabul. The Americans were motivated by wartime necessities, but Afghanistan had been trying to establish diplomatic ties with the United States for several years. Apart from the establishment of direct diplomatic relations with the United

States, Afghanistan also exchanged diplomatic missions with China. During world war II Afghanistan expanding its international contacts was trying hard to avoid all sorts of conflicts with big powers, especially Russia.

In World war II the United States emerged as an influential power in the European affairs. After the war its role became more vital not only in European but also in Asian affairs. "In many parts of Asia after the Second World War, the Americans tried to fill the Vacuum left by the departure of the European powers".<sup>13</sup> After the war, Afghanistan tried to maintain balanced relations with the Soviet Union and United States, as it tried before the war with Britain and the Soviets. Here again Britain underestimated the importance of Afghanistan and after the war the United States also failed to foresee the consequences of Afghanistan's dependence on the Russians. That is why the Americans were reluctant to provide any big help or economic assistance to the Afghans. Britain's weakening hold in India in mid 1040s made the US collaboration with the Afghans vital to resist the Soviet threat.

The Afghan Prime Minister, Shah Mahmud Khan, son of King Zahir Shah made it clear in 1946 that he was "convinced that American's championship of the small nations guarantees my country's security against aggression. America's attitude is our salvation."<sup>14</sup> Yet the Americans failed to respond properly to such a situation. The Americans were engaged in Iran more deeply specially because of Russian intervention in Iran. In May 1946 Soviet forces were withdrawn from Iran and the Americans increasingly became involved with Iran ignoring the importance of Afghanistan in that region. Specially after the independence of Indian Sub-continent the Americans failed to fill such a big vaccum left by

13. Quoted in: *Hidden War : The Struggle for Afghanistan*, a Staff report prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, April 1984, (Washington DC, US Government printing Office) p. 6.

14. John C Griffiths, *Afghanistan Key to a Continent*, (London: Westview Press 1981) p. 54.



the British. Whatever the reasons, the United States failed to respond adequately to the Afghan affairs, particularly to Soviet-Afghan relations during and after the world war II.

### **Soviet-Afghan Relations before Military Intervention : Security and Religious Issues.**

After world war II the Soviet Union emerged as a super power that began to lead the entire socialist bloc. Establishment of several socialist regimes in Eastern Europe boosted the socialist system as well as the position of the Soviets. In 1950s the Soviets had been expanding their collaboration with the Muslim countries as well. But at home Moscow did not feel uncomfortable to ignore Muslim susceptibility, which was apparent in the closure of many newly built Mosques in 1940s.<sup>15</sup> Muslims in general were not enthusiastic to socialist ideals in any part of the world, but a section of Muslim intellectuals saw the fulfilment of their aspirations of economic development in the socialist system.

Some sections of Afghan intellectuals gradually succumbed to the ideology of socialism. Under the influence of the Soviets and their supervision the Afghan socialists found a fertile ground to further flourish under an Afghan government dependent on the Russians. Because of its friendship with the Soviet government, the Afghan leadership had very little scope and freedom to deal with its own socialist elements.

Increased economic collaboration between the two governments had some other important implications. In the early years of post-war economic penetration, the Soviet government was employing many Muslims, specially the Uzbeks in development projects in different parts of Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> The Soviet-Muslims were chosen for Afghanistan not only to sooth Muslim feeling but also

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15. See for details Alexandra Bennigsen; S. Enders Winbush, *Muslim of the Soviet Empire, a guide*, (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1986) p. 17-25.

16. John C Griffiths, *op. cit* p. 88.

to convince the Afghans that socialism was not entirely foreign to the Muslims. The influx of only Russian experts could have negative impact in the internal politics of Afghanistan.

In the election results of "liberal parliament" in 1952 out of 120 members, about fifty were leftists.<sup>17</sup> It does not, however, signify that Marxism or socialism was a popular ideology in Afghanistan. The ordinary Afghans even were not aware about the modern election system and they did not go to vote. The Soviets got another opportunity to have a preponderant influence in Afghan government this was the issue of Pakthunistan. The North Western Province of Pakistan shares many similarities with Afghanistan in respect of language, culture and ethnicity; after the establishment of Pakistan, the Afghan government demanded the inclusion of this area into her territory. The idea of Pakthunistan was backed by the Soviets, because like many other quarters, the Soviets viewed Pakistan as "Islamic," while Afghanistan was treated as almost a secular state with a socialist future. Conflicts between Pakistan and Afghanistan were formed and nurtured by the Russians, which Moscow used to maneuver in every possible way.<sup>18</sup> Britain was viewed as a close ally of Pakistan. In 1920s Britain wanted Afghanistan to abrogate Russo-Afghan Treaty of 1921, while in 1950s Russia wanted Afghanistan to abrogate Anglo-Afghan Treaty of 1921. Britain failed to achieve its goals in Afghan affairs, while the USSR achieved its many objectives. As a result in 1954 Afghan government declared the Anglo-Afghan treaty null and void. It was indeed a remarkable success for Moscow.

Pakistan being an ally of western powers took counter measures, breaking its diplomatic and commercial relations with Afghanistan. The latter found herself in a difficult situation, because for a long time it was dependent on vital supplies carried through the territories of Pakistan. Afghanistan asked the United States and Iran to

17. Bhabani Sen Gupta *op cit.* p. 12.

18. Jhon C Griffiths, *op. cit* p. 67.



create transit facilities across the territories of Iran to reach to the sea. Both the governments rejected Afghan request. Then Afghan government in desperation asked the Soviet Union to review the 1950 barter and transit agreement, which the Soviet government gladly did in June 1955. In August of the same year both the governments signed another barter protocol that lead to a huge increase of commodity exchanges between the two countries. Loya Jirga of Afghanistan itself endorsed all sorts of cooperation including military with the Russians. Still Afghanistan tried to appear not fully subservient to the Soviets. But Afghan bellicose attitude with Pakistan on the Pakthunistan issue tended to drift itself towards the Soviets.

In this background in December 1955 Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev played an official visit to Afghanistan, but arms sale agreement was not made public until the middle of 1956. In 1956 Soviet military mission arrived in Kabul and chalked out long term and short term plans. Afghanistan was offered low interest loan for the purchasing of Russian armaments. In March 1960 Khrushchev publicly supported the Afghan claims on Pakthunistan. With foreign assistance, specially from the Soviets, Prime Minister Daoud (1953-63) built up an army, about double the size maintained by Abdal-Rahman, his predecessor.<sup>19</sup> Afghan Army was equipped with Soviet rifles, machine guns, tanks and aircrafts. It was a reflection of post-Stalin Soviet foreign policy towards Muslim countries who asked for Soviet help. The Soviet government through generous arms supply to belligerent nations could build strong support base among them.

The soviets got almost an uninterrupted scope to do experiments with socialist ideas in order to implant socialism in a backward Muslim country like Afghanistan. The Russians were closely familiar with the Afghan governments, socialist parties and groups, and as a

19. See, Tapper, Richard, (ed) *The conflicts of Tribe and state in Iran and Afghanistan* (London: Croom Helm, 1983) p. 106.

whole with Afghan society. They gained a lot of practical experiences in dealings with the Muslims of their own and Muslims in other countries. That is why Brezhnev era is marked by some liberal policies towards religions in general. Another important reason behind such liberalisation is that religions within the country were no more potential threats to the Soviet regime.

This new situation and atmosphere made the Russians less selective in using Soviet Muslims in the implementation of Moscow's ideological, political and economic programmes in the neighbouring Muslim countries. Afghanistan got very close attention by the Soviets in these respects. Collaboration of the Soviets with the socialist and communist elements in Afghanistan was almost open in many respects in 1960s and 1970s. Though an ordinary common Afghan was not aware of or did not take it something new or special but politically conscious intellectuals observed alarmingly the intensive political activities of different pro-Soviet groups. As a whole Afghanistan remained a traditional Muslim society with its tribal legacy. Unlike many other Muslim societies it did not undergo colonial domination and more importantly Afghanistan successfully resisted foreign intervention many times. As a result, Westernisation process is not so deep as in many other Muslim countries. A great majority of the Afghan people feel proud of their Muslim identities. "From 1970, the Islamists noted with anxiety the degree to which the communists, whose methods they were better acquainted with than were foreign observers, were infiltrating the state machine."<sup>20</sup> The communists knew that without controlling the army no socialist revolution or regime is possible, and accordingly they had been working in that direction. Islamists taking counter measures also decided to plant their own cells in the army. Engineer Habibur Rahman and Hekmatyare were entrusted with this task. But they could not do much headway because of the coup led by Prince

20. Olivier Roy, *Islam and resistance in Afghanistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 74.



Mohammed Daoud on 17 July 1973. Parcham, a socialist group, helped Daoud in this coup. Daoud in return made Faiz Muhammad a member of the Parcham group, Interior Minister who arrested a large number of "Militant Islamists".<sup>21</sup>

Since then the communists continuously repressed the Islamists in different ways. "The repression which followed was terrible: hundreds of young people and dozens of "*Ulema* disappeared and were summarily executed. Professor Niyazi was murdered in prison, as was Mawlavi Fayzani. Two hundred militants, including Nasr-tyar, were in prison without trial and were finally executed in June 1979."<sup>22</sup> The communist groups and their Soviet advisers always underestimated the influence of different Islamic groups on the Afghan society and its peoples. "Unlike their communist colleagues, the young Islamist teachers were not averse to working in the backward areas."<sup>23</sup> Activities of the communist groups are mainly confined within the cities and among the intellectual group, while Islamic activities in disorganised ways and means were spread throughout the country.<sup>24</sup> Thus the Islamic activities were in an advantageous situation; they were not alienated from the society and enjoyed a better communication with the masses. The Soviets looked with dismay that persecution of the religious personalities only added hatred to the communists.

Since 1960s the communists in Afghanistan who were working disorganisedly tried to bring themselves under the umbrella of a party. In January 1965 they succeeded to establish the Peoples Democratic party of Afghanistan (PDPA). However, within two years of its inception various groups within it tried to vie for an upper hand within the party. This resulted into division of the PDPA. One was known as *Parcham* led by Babrak Karmal and another

21. *Ibid*, p. 75

22. *Ibid*.

23. *Ibid*, pp. 73-74.

24. *Ibid*, pp. 69-85, 112-20.

faction was named *Khalq*. Both the factions had their own publications in their respective names. Dissensions between these two Marxist groups was mainly the result of personal conflicts rather than clearcut ideological differences.

Daoud coming to power in 1973 found that without the support of Marxist groups in the army, his regime might not survive for long and he expressed solidarity with them. In January 1977 Daoud declared that "socialism which we adopted as our economic policy for the organization of new Afghan society, in fact, represents the way of achievement of social justice and destruction of class differences.<sup>25</sup> But neither Moscow nor the Afghan Marxists were happy with the Daoud regime. According to them Daoud was not sincere enough to the socialist ideology and Afghanistan was moving very slow towards socialism.

On 27 April 1978 Daoud was overthrown and the Marxists headed by N. M. Taraki took over power in Kabul and named it Saur Revolution.<sup>26</sup> In the Soviet propaganda machinery these events were given the image of a real socialist revolution in Afghanistan led by PDPA. The process of power sharing, however, exposed the internecine struggle between the two fractions. Though it is difficult to find out reflection of disputes of these two Marxist group in the Soviet literature, yet the Soviets were quite aware of the fact. "The Soviet Union was increasingly finding itself in the role of a mediator trying to arrange a working truce between the two feuding factions...the Soviets were at a loss as to which faction to support since support for one faction would alienate the other.<sup>27</sup> Thus by the late 1970s Soviet role in Afghanistan became the most deciding factor in shaping politics and economy of Afghanistan. It was

25. Quoted in V. G. Korgun, 'Islami Nationalism V Afghanistane' In: Yu. V. Gankovsky (ed) *Islam-i-problemy Nationalizma V Stranake Blezhnevoi Sregnevo Vostoka*, Moscow: Nauka, 1986) p. 216.

26. *Ibid*, p. 217.

27. Shaukat Hassan, Soviet role in Afghanistan: Problems and prospects for the future', (Dhaka: *BIISS Journal*, Vol. 1, 1980) p. 132.



clearly evident that various groups in the ruling circle in Afghanistan were in a scramble for currying favour with the Soviets.

When the Afghan Marxist groups and the Soviets were facing difficulties in settling internal disputes regarding the different politico-religious and tribal issues. Iran was caught up with an explosive revolutionary situation. This event caused a far-reaching impact on Soviet policy towards Afghanistan.

Situation in Iran was completely different from that of Afghanistan. In Afghanistan the army and the Soviets were the main catalysts for the communist takeover, while in Iran *Ulema* and Islam spearheaded the revolution. What created illusion and optimism about the situation in Iran was the anti-American stand of the revolutionary forces. The Soviets took the events in Iran as a prelude to a revolution similar to that of Afghanistan. But such an analysis was done more from the point of ideology than reality. Initially it was thought that the revolutionary forces and the leaders of Iran had no clear-cut plans or ideas about the future state ideology and state affairs. The Soviets hoped that the socialist Afghanistan would be a model for the Iranians. But by the end of 1979 Iranians came out of their murkiness. The adoption of an Islamic constitution should have disillusioned them, but the Soviets were not hopeless because Iran had a strong and organised communist party and like many others, the Soviets took Iranian *Ulema* as a disorganised fraction of Iranian society, ultimately going into oblivion by the organised force.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in recent history no constitution adopted by any Muslim country was properly implemented, optimistic Russia tried to cultivate friendly relations with Iran with a view to buying some time to have their influence in Iran. As for their position in Afghanistan, they felt that they must entrench themselves.

After the fall of Daoud government the new Taraki regime openly became committed to socialism as the state ideology. Now Islam

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28. E.A. Doroshenko, *Shiitskoe Dukhovenstvo V Sovremennom Irane*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1985), pp. 175-85.

and socialism came into direct conflict in every aspects of Afghan society. State machineries reached into deep rural areas with the socialist reforms directly confronting and undermining the religious and cultural interests of the Afghan people. In the name of socialism many individual rights were either ignored or not allowed to enjoy. Understanding the grievance of the time the Marxist leaders claimed that their government respect Islam and their policies had also been formulated according to the principles of Islam.<sup>29</sup> But such assertions failed to make any impression on the Afghan people. The ordinary Muslims generally remained hostile to Marxist regime. "The revolt was as much anti-state as anti-communist".<sup>30</sup> Which made the soviets angry with the Amin administration. The soviet source says that Amin became dictator who again divided the PDPA.<sup>31</sup>

The Soviets were aware about the conflicts between *Parcham* and *Khalq* and tried to mediate between them. In June 1977 N. M. Taraki and B. Karmal declared their unity which did not last long. The Soviet source admits that "after the victory of national democratic revolution of 27-April 1978 differences PDPA have deepened".<sup>32</sup>

Until now it is difficult to determine who was who in Taraki and Amin administration. But both of them were socialists and their pro-Moscow orientation was no secret to anyone. In fact none of them could form a viable socialist government, acceptable to the people. The Soviet started to be disillusioned with the credibility of the Marxists and began to apprehend that the future is at bay in Afghanistan. Meanwhile the situation developing in Iran was not moving in the direction anticipated by the Soviets. The entire

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29. See, V.G. Korgun, *op. cit.* p. 218.

30. Oliver Roy, *op. cit.* p. 95.

31. See V. V. Zagladina and G.A. Vicelega (eds) *Politicheskie Parti*, (Moscow: Nauka 1981) p. 113.

32. *Ibid.*



Islamic reconstruction process in Iran appeared clearly antagonistic to Moscow as well. The policies of the pro-American government of Ziaul Haq in Pakistan also disapproving of the socialization and sovietisation process in Afghanistan. "By the second half of 1979 the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan found itself in a grave situation, with Pakistan and Iran-based rebels operating inside Afghanistan with impunity and with the US, China and Pakistan providing arms and training."<sup>33</sup> It was completely an exaggeration of the role played by the outside forces in the Afghan affairs. In fact the Soviets were hiding their exhaustion with the situation in Afghanistan. They were trying to use foreign involvement as a pretext for direct military intervention.

On December 28, 1979 Moscow sent its troops to Afghanistan. It was not at all a hurried or accidental intervention, rather it was a logical consequence of at least more than 60 years of Soviet-Afghan relations. Like many others, Shaukat Hassan is right to say that "the 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."<sup>34</sup> If the Brezhnev administration delayed to send the troops in Afghanistan, the entire situation could have gone beyond its control. Moreover, the Soviets did send the regimes troops to rescue endangered Socialist systems in Hungary and Czechoslovakia in the years 1956 and 1968 respectively. More importantly, Americans were so much disgraced by the Iranians that the Soviets in fact had no fear from outside. Pro-American Iran could be a serious deterrent to Soviet advance in Afghanistan in 1979. Just like a god-gifted blessing to the Soviets, Islamic Revolution of Iran liquidated American threat.<sup>35</sup> Almost

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33. Revolutionary *Afghanistan through honest eyes*, (Kabul: Informatio and publication department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan) p. 121.

34. Shaukat Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

35. See, for details S.L. Agaev, *Iranskaya Revolyutsia, USA, I Mezhdunarodnaya Bezonasnost*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1984) p. 145-58.

in a similar situation Americans did send their troops to Panama in 1989 in the absence of Soviet deterrent.

### Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan : Security and Religious Issues

After the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan the Soviets used the same strategy of propaganda as they had done in the Soviet Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s. All blames for oppression and injustices on the Muslims of these areas were put on the Tsarist regime. Similarly in Afghanistan Daoud, Taraki and Amin came under severe criticism by the Soviets and the administration of Babrak Kamal. Criticizing the previous Afghan government for their atrocities and genocide Babrak Kamal revealed that 12,000 people were "officially" dead, but this number only involved them who had disappeared in the prison of "pul-i-charkhi". In all, between 50,000 and 100,000 people disappeared.<sup>36</sup> Amin was projected as an agent of the CIA.<sup>37</sup> Both the Soviets and Karmal administrations went to that extent to get rid of the responsibilities of previous Afghan governments to save Saur Revolution of 1979, and to justify the Soviet military intervention.<sup>38</sup>

After the intervention the Soviets in no way wanted to be identified as the enemies of Islam and Muslims in Afghanistan. Islamic symbols and issues started to be used more frequently than before. The Soviets were by now convinced that "like many other countries of Asia and Africa, Islam in Afghanistan plays a substantial role in shaping social consciousness. It is the speciality of Islam, as a world religion."<sup>39</sup> The Soviets tried to convince Afghan *Ulema* that their military presence would not hinder the religious interests and the interests of religious personalities." In

36. Olivier Roy, *op. cit.* p. 95.

37. *Revolutionary Afghanistan through honest eye*, *op. cit.* p. 5.

38. See A. Yu. Umanov, 'Sotsialno-politicheskie razvitiia Afganistana i natsionalny Vopros', in M.S. Lazarev (ed) *Natsionalny Vopros V Stranakh Vostoka*. (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), pp. 247-48.

39. *Ibid*, p. 244.



June 1980 for the first time in the history of Afghanistan an *Ulema* conference was held with the support of revolutionary force and a decision has been made to create Supreme Council of *Ulema* of Afghanistan'.<sup>40</sup> After the Bolshevik revolution similar kind of conferences was organised with some success in different parts of Muslim regions in the Soviet Union with the direct initiative of socialist government. In fact such a conference was an attempt to create a platform to deal with the religious leaders and elements in Afghanistan. The Afghan *Ulema* were not a monolithic group, their disorganised state presented real problem for communication by the Soviets with them.

In Afghanistan there exist both Shias and Sunnis. According to the Soviet sources Shia Muslims constitute 18 percent of the total population.<sup>41</sup> Olivier Roy tells about a number of strong Islamic groups and their influence on Afghan society.<sup>42</sup> B.S. Gupta says the presence of 30,000 Mullahs in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Thus the Soviets even the Soviet Muslims working for Soviet and Afghan governments were puzzled to determine the place and role of different political and non-political Islamic groups in the Afghan society.

The Soviets tried a different strategy to win the Afghan *Ulema*. They decided to welcome more and more Afghan religious personalities to the Soviet Union. They were optimistic that the Afghan *Ulema* would be impressed by the Soviet achievements in the Muslim areas of the Soviet Union and this would lead them to cooperate with Kabul regime. The policy of pleasing the Afghan *Ulema* paid some immediate dividends from Soviet perspective. Some religious leaders expressed their willingness to cooperate with Soviet authorities and Kabul government in establishing socialist society in Afghanistan. But on the whole most of the *Ulema* shared the

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40. V.G. Korgun, *op. cit.* p. 218.

41. A Yu, Umanov, *op. cit.* p. 249.

42. Olivier Roy, *op. cit.* p. 128-148

43. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *op. cit.* 14.

common Afghan view that Soviet occupation meant the end of sovereign Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup>

Not only the Afghan *Ulema*, even the Soviet *Ulema* sent to Afghanistan were lukewarm to the process of Sovietization in Afghanistan. Soviet Muslim *Ulema* frequently made visits to Afghanistan to find out ways and means of their collaboration with Afghan religious personalities. Since 1981 the Chairman of the Muslim Board for Central Asia and Kazakhstan, Mufti Ziauddin Babakhan played an important role in this respect. After his death in 1983 his son Mufti Shamsuddin Babakhan was made the Chairman of the Board. But such moves by the Soviets did not bring substantial gain not only because the *Ulema* were not enthusiastic in Sovietisation of Afghanistan but also because in the Afghan peoples eyes, the Soviet *Ulema* were no more than Soviet agents there. On the other hand, Moscow blamed Soviet *Ulema* for their failure in Afghanistan. Many Soviet Muslim Board officials including Shamsuddin Babakhan lost their jobs.<sup>45</sup>

The Soviets pinned great hope that their Muslims together with Afghan Marxist would justify the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan and would let know the Afghan people how "nicely" the Soviet Muslims were accommodated in the Soviet socialist society. Here also things did not move in their desired direction. The Soviet Muslim personnel employed to manage Afghan affairs remained always skeptical about Soviet occupation. Besides, they tended to maintain a resigned attitude towards the whole episode because they felt in case of the Soviet defeat it will be the Soviet Muslims who would have to bear the responsibility. Moscow sensing an unenthusiastic attitude of the Soviet Muslims ordered them to go to Afghanistan to fulfill their international socialist duties on compulsory basis. But Soviet leadership experienced that

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44. Abdul Samad Ghaus, *op. cit.* p. 202.

45. See, *Pravda Vostova*, 13, Februara, 1989; *Soviet Uzbekistani*, 15 January 1987.



communist internationalism instead of coming to their rescue only created dissatisfaction among the Soviet Muslims.

In view of its failure in winning popular support base, Moscow now anchored its hope only on the Afghan Marxist elements. As mentioned earlier, long before Soviet occupation an elite group imbued with Marxist ideology was existing with Soviet patronage and blessings. In the name of technical assistance Moscow invited many leading Afghan intellectuals to the Soviet institutions for higher education and offered a large number of scholarships to the Afghan students every year. On 5 September 1963 the Soviet government signed an agreement on Soviet technical help with Afghanistan. To make sure that the Afghans with Soviet degrees got proper places in Afghanistan, on 11 June 1969 both the governments signed a protocol to equalize all sorts of Soviet degrees from school certificate up to Ph. D. with the Afghan degrees.<sup>46</sup> By 1979 the Soviets succeeded to set pro-socialist and pro-Soviet elements in every tier of the Afghan government and army. Every year about 20 to 25 thousand Afghan students and specialists were sent in the Soviet Union during the occupation years.<sup>47</sup> But not necessarily each and every Afghan holding Soviet degree or training subscribed to Marxism and Soviet ideology. Protest meetings organised by Afghan Students in Moscow on the eve of the 1980 Olympics is one of the examples of how a section of the Soviet educated Afghans could react to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, Moscow was not aware of the fact that among the modern educated Afghans there were various Islamic groups engaged in ideological war with Marxist groups. In fact, these groups together with traditional *Ulema* and different kinds of nationalist groups were anticipating Soviet intervention even long before the

46. See, A.B. Teplinsky, *USSR and Afghanistan, 1919-1981*, (Moscow: Nauka, 1982) p. 190.

47. *Soviet Muslims Brief*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (Leicester, U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, September-October, 1987), p. 10.

48. See Shaukat Hassan, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

direct military intervention. Though initially ordinary Afghans did not take much interests in such an eventuality, after the intervention the masses gradually joined the forces fighting against the Soviet and Afghan government forces.

At the initial stage of Soviet occupation Kremlin thought that in a short time Soviet military presence could leave behind a sustainable marxist regime in Kabul. Though initially the Soviet understanding was that if Moscow control such vast territories of Soviet Central Asia with the help of some handful of communists, why not Afghanistan? By the mid-1980s the Soviet authorities realised that all their calculations proved wrong. Kremlin understood that with the help of Soviet military it would be almost impossible to save a Moscow-backed Kabul regime. Meanwhile Gorbachev made up his mind to pull out Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan.<sup>49</sup> Afghan affairs would be managed by Afghan Marxists with Soviet material and moral blessings. Such a move would not only make an end to hostile propaganda against the Soviets, but also block inflow of manpower and economic resources. It would, however, be wrong to assume that Afghan disaster was the only reason which made the Soviets to decide for a pull out. Gorbachev was desperately in need of Western cooperation and good will in solving massive economic problems at home. So long Soviet soldiers were in Afghanistan, Gorbachev could not hope to win Western sympathy and support. Gorbachev hoped that withdrawal would bring good will from another quarter i. e. the Muslim world. Such a gesture was necessary to neutralize world-wide Muslim support of the Afghan resistance and also defuse possible non-interference of the Muslim countries in the affairs of Muslim dominated Soviet Republics.

At this stage of Soviet predicament, Gorbachev came to the lime light of Soviet politics. Though he understood the futility of maintaining huge number of Soviet soldiers with its negative ramifications

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49. Pravda, Moscow, No. 2, 1987.



on Soviet domestic and foreign policies, it was rather difficult for him to make a shift in the Soviet conventional policy.

His emergence at the helm of Kremlin affairs marked the end of orthodox Marxism and adoption of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. In external affairs the adoption of the New Political Thinking meant the de-ideologization of the Soviet Foreign Policy. In principle Soviet foreign policy is obviously an extension of domestic socialist policy, about which on various occasions Lenin himself emphasized and advised his colleagues to follow. Though Gorbachev claimed that since 1985 Kremlin adopted a new policy on Afghanistan, in reality still 1988 one could not observe any significant shift from Brezhnev policy.<sup>50</sup> In fact it was not easy to change Brezhnev policy, which reflected the long cherished goal of Kremlin on Afghanistan. But Gorbachev initially adopted some step-by-step changes. Instead of using a large number of Soviet Muslims in Afghanistan, he started to send Soviet-European soldiers there in larger number. These soldiers penetrated into deep areas of Afghanistan, and even to the frontiers of Afghanistan with Pakistan to pursue the Mujahideen forces. But such policy seemed to bring no substantial gain for Moscow. The Mujahideen resistance continued to harass Russian forces.

The sending of more Soviet European soldiers to Afghanistan added another dimension to the complex scenario. The people in Soviet European Republics tended to look to such move by Moscow disapprovingly, if not with hostility. Renowned specialist on Soviet nationalities S. E. Wimbush says that "beyond Central Asia, the war in Afghanistan has been felt in Ukraine and the Baltic states".<sup>51</sup>

The Soviets repeatedly claimed before that "we know that religion will disappear when socialism will be at height. Its disappearance must occur with the social development where education will

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50. See *Problems of Communism* January-February 1986 Vol. XXV, pp. 17-20

51. *Free Afghanistan*, No. 6, Spring, London, 1987 see for details, *Soviet Muslims Brief*, *op. cit.* Vol. 3, No. 2. p 7-3.

play a big role".<sup>52</sup> Moscow thought that accordingly Islam had disappeared from Soviet Muslim Republics and Muslims would help kremlin to implement this policy in Afghanistan. Gorbachev era found the Soviet Muslims not only lukewarm about Afghanistan, but that they were even not following Marxist policies within the country.

Just after coming to power in 1986 Nazibullah government took some steps to boost his popular support within the country. Under Nazibullah's direct supervision "the Kabul regime is trying to adopt a more popularly acceptable Islamic image after years of having been regarded as an enemy of Islam."<sup>53</sup> In his speeches he regularly quotes Quran and Hadith, and occasionally visits the mosques and religious gatherings. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Nazibullah adopted a constitution in December 1987 declaring Islam as state religion and affirming that "in the Republic of Afghanistan no law shall run counter to the principles of the sacred religion of Islam."<sup>54</sup> Just before Soviet withdrawal Nazibullah declared his rejection of communist rule and socialist programmes in many aspects of Afghan life and expressed desire to accommodate Islam and Islamic forces in the ruling system of the country under his broad national reconciliation plan.<sup>55</sup> To neutralize the Islamic and Mujahideen forces Nazibullah took various steps in the popular and religious fronts. On the other hand, with Soviet help Nazibullah administration widened its political and economic activities.

During its occupation Moscow could successfully involve a large sections of Afghans into the different Soviet-sponsored economic and socio-political programmes. Almost all educated Afghan families were, somehow, involved in these programmes. In terms of the

52. Quoted in *Soviet Muslims Brief*, op. cit. Vol. 1, No.2, p. 2.

53. *International Herald Tribune*, 7, October, 1986,

54. *Constitution of the Republic of Afghanistan*, Article 2. Kabul, December, 1987, p. 3.

55. *Afghanistan in the Mirror of the World Press*, Kabul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Afghanistan, 1989). pp. 60, 61 87-89.



population and their interests, the Soviets successfully divided Afghans into two broad camps viz pro-Mujahedeen camp and pro-government camps. The popular base of Nazibullah government is not so small as it was thought earlier. Of course, his strength lies in army and soviet help. But in a poor and devastated economy of Afghanistan, army officials, civil servants and even many private citizens are dependent on government support for their livelihood. This is one of the main reasons why Nazibullah regime is still surviving.

### **Afghanistan with New Security Dimensions**

The Soviet withdrawal meant to many observers a total defeat for Kremlin. Moscow, however, took it as a redefinition of its strategy. In fact, Moscow could hardly afford to loosen the grip on Kabul. A hostile government in Kabul is not only detrimental to their security needs, a military defeat would have consequence across the borders of Afghanistan, encouraging the Muslim nationalities of Soviet Union to follow the examples of Afghan combatants.<sup>56</sup> The Soviets continued to provide strong military and economic help to Nazibullah. The exact figure of the Soviet advisers and specialists working with Nazibullah is not known, but their strength appears to be quite substantial. During the final stage of Soviet pullout the Soviet did not allow the Mujahedins to be a party, insisting that it was a case between them and Kabul regime on the one hand, and between Kabul and Islamabad on the other.

However, after the military withdrawal Moscow wanted a peaceful settlement ensuring, of course, her security interest in Kabul. It has started dialogue with the Afghan Mujahideens, offered helps to take back refugee and even not entirely unwilling to replace Nazibullah, provided her interest is not in jeopardy.

56. Sanjay Singh Yadav, 'Changes for peace in Afghanistan' *International perspective*, The Canadian Journal on World Affairs. Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1989, p. 23.

Moscow is now to win co-operation and friendship from Pakistan and Iran. The Soviet government offered liberal economic and technical assistance to Pakistan and Iran. The Soviets are convinced that such generous help would dissipate the warmth between the Mujahideens and the two governments. The Russians want to contract the Afghan problem from an international to a regional issue. They believe that peace in Afghanistan eventually will not dawn, heterogeneous groups will fight to gain upper hand which will consequently make the Russians a forgotten factor in the entire episode. The Soviets could do so easily because the Afghan resistance movement failed to present a united front. The Soviet withdrawal seems to have accentuated the tribal, sectarian and ideological differences among the Afghan combatants. Armed conflicts between Jamait-i-Islami and Hejb-i-Islami frustrated many quarters sympathetic to Afghan Mujahideens. The Soviet Union and Nazibullah seem to have taken full advantage of the internecine conflicts among the guerillas. Ahmad Soah Massoud, a renowned guerilla commanded and the leader of Jamait-i-Islam appears to have made some tacit understanding with Kabul regime with his authority over the five provinces on the edge of the Hindu Kush: Takhas, Badakhshan, Konduz, Baghlan and Kapisa. "The conflict between Massoud territory and Kabul is a big surprise for the visitor. The Mujahideens are given money, food, fuel, even weapons, in exchange for a promise not to attack government convoys or outposts".<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Hejb-i-Islami established financial links with Kabul regime. May be such links helped him to come to a deal with former defence Minister General Shanawas Tanai to revolt against Nazibullah on March 6, 1990. The Kabul regime is aware of its risk of having commercial transactions with Mujahideen groups. But it needs such links to

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57. *The Economist*, 16-22 December 1989, p. 25.



sustain the economic system and also to use one group against another.<sup>58</sup>

The situation has been compounded further by the failure of the Mujahideens to clarify the nature of their cherished government and their attitude to the people working under Moscow-backed Kabul regime. An Afghan working under Kabul administration might not necessarily be a supporter of Moscow, communism or Nazibullah government. Apart from economic reason, ordinary Afghans have other compulsions such as social and political, to work under Nazibullah. Nazibullah took advantage of this predicament by publicizing that in case of victory by the Mujahideens, unknown misery will befall on those remaining inside Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup> Thus the scenario does not present an optimistic future for Afghanistan.

America, once the enthusiastic supplier of arms to the Mujahideens seems to have lost their earlier warmth and in fact, the US seeks a political solution of the problem. Against the backdrop of demise of the cold war between the Soviets and the USA, the two super powers seem to have made some accommodation regarding their foreign affairs. As the Soviets are maintaining a low profile regarding American role in Latin America, the Americans are maintaining similar attitude with regard to the neighbouring countries of the Soviet Union. That is why Moscow got freer hand in Afghanistan. Almost unconditional support of President Bush to Gorbachev's policies on Azarbaijani and Tajik affairs and talk between Mr. Baker and Mr. Shevardnadze held on 7 February 1990 in Moscow showed that Washington would help Gorbachev in implementing his Afghan policies.<sup>60</sup> Thus the Soviets are in better situation in dealing with Afghan affairs, not bothering much about the reaction of Western powers.

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58. *Newsweek*, February 19, 1990.

59. *Afghanistan in the Mirror of the World Prss*, op. cit. pp. 28-30.

60. *The Economist*, 10-15 February 1990.

For Pakistan Soviet occupation of Afghanistan posed real problems. Not only there were millions of refugees, but a real security threat from Afghanistan was hanging on Pakistan for alleged Mujahideen support from Pakistan.<sup>61</sup> But President Zia capitalizing the Afghan issue achieved many political, diplomatic, strategic and even economic goals. With Soviet withdrawal, military threat from Afghanistan has subsided which meant corresponding diminishing of benefits for Pakistan. With the accession of Benazir to power, Islamic rhetoric no longer plays high profile in Pakistan's governmental policy. Thus with Soviet withdrawal and change of leadership in Pakistan, the latter's policy towards Afghanistan made a substantial shift. The government in Islamabad now wants a quick political solution to the Afghan problem so that they can get rid of the 3.6 million Afghan refugees. They are blamed for many odds in Pakistan even to the extent of illegal drug and arms trafficking, which of course, is partially true. Benazir can not overtly be unfriendly towards the Afghan cause. For political and strategic reasons she has to support Mujahideens, otherwise she would be identified as anti-Islamic, which she can not afford. The Afghan crisis has now put Pakistan in an ambivalent situation.

The Mujahideens, on the other hand, argue that the new 'secular' government of Pakistan is creating dissension in the resistance groups and "Afghan attempts at creating unity between the parties have been deliberately obstructed by Pakistan".<sup>62</sup> It is difficult to ascertain how far their allegation is true. But it is true that Pakistan government may have some likings among different groups in showering its patronage. Moreover, integration for the Afghans in Pakistani society is difficult not only for reasons of ethnic and cultural differences, but also for competition over scarce employment.<sup>63</sup> However, apart from Benazir's cool attitude for Islamic

61. Rogers, Tom, 'Refugees a threat to Stability' *Conflict Studies*, London, p. 14.

62. *Ibid*, p. 26.

63. *Ibid* p. 7.



"chauvanism", the Afghan refugees and combatants with huge arms, might be a political problem for Pakistan. Benazir apprehends that the fundamentalist forces in Pakistan might use them against her government.

Two million Afghan refugees which are maintained with little international help has made Iran a concerned party to the Afghan issue. Existence of the headquarters of Shia guerilla groups further bolstered Iran's position in any kind of settlement in Afghanistan. Initially it could not pay much attention to the problem because of its war win Iraq. Later she was ignored by the international community in peace negotiations. Iran wants a peaceful settlement of the issue which would ensure return of the refugees, unity among the guerillas with a considerable influence of Shia Muslims and non-interference from America. Iran enjoys a unique position in the negotiation process because it has already better bilateral relations with Islamabad and Moscow. Abandonment of orthodox Marxism as the state ideology in Russia further facilitated Iran to improve its relations with the Soviets. Nazibullah, however, wants to downplay the role of Iran in Afghan affairs. He wants that instead of a fundamentalist neighbour the negotiation process should be under the brokerage of a distant non-fundamentalist state. Nazibullah recently invited Saudi Arabia and former Afghan king Zahir Shah to come forward for a settlement. Saudi Arabia maintains very good relations with Pakistan and Mujahideens.

Previously under the auspices of Saudi Arabia talks between the Soviets and Mujahideens were held in Taif. Though these talks did not bring any result, they provided some credibility to the Saudis. The entry of Saudi Arabia in the negotiation process added a new dimension to the Afghan peace settlement. Saudi Arabia is keen to be a party to it firstly, because this would highlight its self-proclaimed leadership in the Muslim World, and secondly, it wants to counterbalance the new assertive role of Iran. America would welcome Saudi role, as it does not want Iran to play any

significant role in the Afghan settlement. Though Saudi Arabia has no formal diplomatic relationship with Moscow, the Soviets are not against any role played by the Saudis in the negotiation process. On the other hand, under the auspices of Iran Pakistan-based Mujahideen leaders have been holding talks with Iran-based Shia Mujahideens leaders and now at least they are recognising each other's separate entity and trying to sort out their differences. Thus it is apparent that Afghan problem, which was mainly a concern of the Super Powers, has transformed into a problem for the Muslim countries.

During the years of Soviet occupation Muslim countries and Muslim international organizations failed to play a significant role in any early withdrawal of Soviet soldiers from Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> After the Soviet withdrawal again they are failing to play any substantial role to bring all concerned parties to the negotiating table. Not only Afghans or Mujahideens need a political settlement, Moscow also now needs an Afghan solution, which may save at least \$300 million dollars per month, being spent for sustenance of the Najibullah government.<sup>65</sup> Moscow is no more willing to keep Afghanistan as a losing economic concern, as within the country it is facing ever mounting economic crisis. This opportunity might be used by the Mujahideens and Muslim countries to reach an honourable agreement with Moscow, facilitating the establishment of peace and a broad-based government in Kabul.

### Conclusion

From the preceding discussion it is apparent that invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet Russia was not sudden or accidental, rather

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64. Abdullah al Ahsan, *The Organisation of the Islamic Conference*, (USA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Nerdon 1988) pp. 64-5.

65. *International Herald Tribune* 16 February, 1990. Also see *Dhaka Courier* Feb, 1622, 1990, pp. 27-29.



the continuation of a long policy of seeking hegemony and influence in the neighbouring areas. The establishment of domination over Afghanistan was not only because of doctrinal imperatives, but for security and strategic reasons. Because of its having six Muslim Republics and Muslim population of 55 million, the Muslim factor is a vital ingredient in formulating million, the soviet foreign policy towards Afghanistan. This often led the Russians to de-emphasise dogmatic approach towards it. A failure in Afghanistan might have unpalatable ramification in the Muslim Republics of the Soviet Union.

Initial Soviet strategy was to win Afghan friendship through bilateral relationship. Under the umbrella of massive soviet group drawn from upper Afghan society came into being and flourished. They penetrated into all tiers of the government and became a vital factor in the decision-making process. Soviet grip on Afghanistan became complete when the Marxist themselves captured power in 1978. But not only they failed to take the masses into confidence, their internecine squabbling stood in the way of running a smooth government. The Soviet intervention became necessary to salvage Marxist government from immediate collapse. This was not the sole reason for soviet intervention. The effects of the events outside Afghan border is very often overlooked. Islamic Revolution in Iran and rhetoric of Islamisation in Pakistan further reinforced soviet worries.

Compared with soviet successes in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Afghan intervention proved to be a total miscalculation. Not only they failed to forge the desired unity among the Marxists, their direct involvement engendered the violent manifestation of Afghanistan's Islamic and traditional identity. Externally the Soviets lost credibility and gained the image of an "Evil Empire". Against the backdrop of massive economic burden on the Soviet treasury and failure to combat the guerillas, there was a deep soul-searching in Kremlin about the viability of Marxism in Afghanistan.

Gorbachev therefore came up decisively in favour of pulling out Soviet troops from Afghanistan.

An attempt has also been made in the paper to show that Soviet withdrawal did not mean the abandonment of soviet interests in Afghanistan. In fact, Gorbachev tried to demonstrate to the world that its security and geo-strategic imperatives demand a friendly government in Afghanistan. As a result, the withdrawal was just a new stage set forwarded to cultivate Soviet influence in a new manner. At present Marxism is given low profile and Islamic symbols are given more exposure. This has succeeded to some extent in delaying the much predicted downfall of Nazibullah. Furthermore Gorbachev's move seems to have weakened the position of the Afghan resistance in the sense that they remain still plagued by internal disputes and personality clashes that prevent them to present a United front after Soviet departure.

Currently the Afghan scenario does not portend an optimistic future; the situation does not indicate that either Nazibullah or Afghan Mujahideens would gain a conclusive victory. Better sense seems to be gradually prevailing over all the concerned parties. Huge drain of resources is forcing the Soviets to make an honourable settlement, of course, not making a total sellout of their interest. Najibullah in fact rejected Marxism as a state ideology of Afghanistan and expressed willingness even to step down after a peaceful political settlement. Pakistan wants to get rid of the refugee problem, and for Benazir the Afghan problem is no longer a trump card in the political dynamics of Pakistrn. For Iran Russia is no longer a political ideological threat and is in a better situation to start a dialogue on the Afghan issue. Thus the concerned parties, if they can make some accommodation of their respective interests, peace can dawn on the war-torn Afghanistan.