There has been a great deal of public debate outside the Soviet bloc about the possible motives behind the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in late December 1979. In general, two broad schools of thought have emerged: the “defensive” and the “offensive”. The “defensive” school sees the Soviet move largely in terms of an understandable desire on the part of the Soviets to safeguard their basic interests. These interests were to protect the USSR’s southern flank and therefore its long-standing, and considerable, political, economic and military investments in Afghanistan in the face of the imminent collapse of an ideologically-allied regime and its replacement by a most likely hostile one in Kabul. The school thus contends that the Soviet invasion has had a limited objective, and that it would be erroneous to view it as the first stage of a Soviet “Master Plan”, whose existence cannot be substantiated, for regional domination. Accordingly, it cautions the West and regional states against an excessive response and proffers diplomacy as the most effective means to resolve the Afghan crisis.

In contrast, the “offensive” school argues that the Afghanistan situation, whether seen in a national or wider context, could at no stage constitute such a security threat to the Soviet power as to warrant the Soviet invasion of the country. Its leading exponents find no acceptable rationale for the Soviet action. While resting their case on a historical study of Soviet behaviour, some members of this school view the Soviet invasion as a first step in what they perceive to be the long-cherished Soviet ideological and imperial design to widen its basic interests, gradually but deftly, in pursuit of a long-term domination of the region in the direction of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. They consequently advocate a hardline response. They note the importance of diplomacy, but call for the adoption of effective counter-force measures
as a prelude to successful diplomacy. To this end, they advocate the strengthening of the defences of the receptive regional states, most notably Pakistan, and substantial aid for the Afghan Islamic resistance forces (the Mujahedins), who have already demonstrated that they represent a great majority of the Afghan people in their struggle against Soviet domination.

In its official version, Moscow makes statements which – perhaps by design – lend credibility to the "defensive" views and rejects outright the "offensive" posture. Its stated position is that there was a "socialist revolution" in Afghanistan, with the coming to power of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) in late April 1978. When this "revolution" was seriously threatened by "imperialist" and "imperialist-backed counter-revolutionary" forces, "a seat of serious danger" was created on the Soviet southern border. The USSR had no choice but to fulfil its international duty and its obligations under the Afghan-Soviet Friendship Treaty of December 1978. It dispatched a "limited contingent" of its troops to help "the friendly Afghan people" secure their "revolution" against "internal and external threats". However, the Soviet troops would be withdrawn as soon as such threats ceased completely.

Whatever the relative merits of the views and prescriptions of the "defensive" and "offensive" schools – and of course a number of analysts fall between the two schools – the stated Soviet motivational reasons are based on totally unfounded premises. It will be argued in this paper that if we base our analysis mainly on a careful study of actual Soviet policy actions rather than their formulation, to which we have little access, we find that the Soviet invasion was the culmination of a long-standing Soviet involvement, with a long-term view of Soviet interests, in Afghan politics. By their invasion, the Soviets have now conflated their basic and regional interests in Afghanistan; and their goal is to transform the country into a Soviet periphery on a long-term basis. If they succeed in achieving this goal, they are likely to achieve a regional capability whereby they would be able to influence events more easily beyond the Afghan borders either in defense of their Afghan interests or in pursuit of their role as a world power. In this respect, of the immediate regional states, the one which remains most vulnerable to the Soviets, is the politically and socially troubled Pakistan. The latter remains vulnerable to Soviet efforts to promote a receptive government there, without any need for direct action.

To put the Soviet invasion and subsequent Soviet actions into the right
perspective, it needs to be stated at the outset that there was no "socialist revolution" in Afghanistan, but simply a military coup in Kabul on 27 April 1978. The coup, a historical possibility rather than inevitability, brought to power a small underground group of pro-Soviet communists under the leadership of Noor Mohammed Taraki, Hafizullah Amin and Babrak Karmal. It was this leadership that proclaimed the rule of the PDPA and a "socialist revolution", and declared Afghanistan a "Democratic Republic", with "fraternal ties" with its "great and selfless" northern neighbour, the USSR. The PDPA itself had come into existence in 1977 as a result of a union between two rival pro-Soviet communist factions, the Khalq (led by Taraki and Amin) and the Parcham (headed by Karmal) – both had originated in the mid-1960s and had become informally active in Afghan politics from then on. Neither of the factions had ever attracted more than a few hundred committed supporters. In fact, even today, the PDPA as a whole does not command more than 3,000 reliable members, although it officially claims a membership of 120,000. Moscow's immediate declaration of full support for the PDPA regime and its "socialist revolution" gave rise to a relationship with Kabul that exposed Afghanistan to the risk of Soviet intervention under "the Brezhnev Doctrine" and in the name of "socialist internationalism".

The whole development, however, could not have materialized if it had not been for Soviet actions – both covert and overt – made in the context of a complex Soviet involvement in Afghanistan since the mid-1950s. This involvement began in the climate of global cold war and on the basis not of any ideological affinity between Kabul and Moscow, for the Afghan monarchy, which presided over a predominantly traditional Islamic-tribal country, had no interest (like the Afghan people in general) in Marxism-Leninism per se, but of the two sides' mutual pragmatic needs. On the one hand, the autocratic Afghan Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud (1953-63), who later in the coup of 1973 overthrew his rival cousin's monarchy and declared Afghanistan a republic, wanted to persevere with the traditional Afghan policy of neutrality, but needed economic and military aid so that he could initiate a limited process of modernization and strengthen Afghanistan's defenses against Pakistan because of a simmering border dispute. On the other, the post-Stalin leadership was extremely worried about the crystallization of the US policy of "containment", with the rapid drifting of Turkey, Iran and the newly founded state of Pakistan into the Western camp, in a region that the Soviets have traditionally regarded as their "southern flank zone of security and interests".
Washington's refusal to give military aid to Afghanistan because the country did not figure as importantly as its eastern and western neighbors in American strategic considerations, provided Moscow with a unique opportunity that it could not forego in the face of the challenges confronting it. While Afghan leaders were led to believe, under Moscow's slogans of "peaceful coexistence" and "non-intervention", that there was little or no danger in accepting aid from the Soviets, provided that Afghanistan also received economic aid from the West, Moscow initiated a generous program of economic and military aid to Afghanistan and supported Kabul in its dispute with Pakistan, as it did also with the more distant non-aligned India.

As indicated in Khrushchev's memoirs and confirmed in Oleg Penkovskiy's secret reports to the West, Moscow made its move purposefully with a long-term view of Soviet interests. The immediate objective was to counterbalance the American penetration of the region, to exert pressure on the regional states not to allow the US to establish missile bases on their soil, and to discourage Western-sponsored regional cooperation. But the long-term goal, as has been demonstrated by subsequent Soviet actions, was to secure Afghanistan as a focal point for widening Soviet interests in an attempt to strengthen Moscow's bargaining position against fortuitous developments in the region. Thus, the Soviets used their aid, amounting to $2.5 billion by 1979, to penetrate rapidly the Afghan armed forces, and economic and administrative infrastructures. Furthermore, as is now evident from eyewitness accounts of leading Khalqi and Parchami figures during their imprisonment by one another since mid-1978, the Soviets discreetly supported, from the mid-1960s on, the development of the Parcham and the Khalq in Afghan politics.

Although from the start the Soviets preferred the urban-based Parcham and its leader, Karmal, over the largely rural-centered Khalqis, for reasons of ideological reliability and political sophistication, they nonetheless found it expedient to back both, despite their intense rivalry on the basis of mainly personality differences. Of course, both certain Afghan government figures and Washington became increasingly aware of the growth of Soviet influence in Afghanistan. However, while the Afghan leaders ignored the possibility of the Parchamis and the Khalqis being able to play any role in Afghan politics because they were too small and conditions in the country were totally against them, Washington remained content with its limited economic aid, which amounted to $532 million by 1979. In addition, as one top Afghan official of the time tells us
now, the Americans constantly encouraged Afghan leaders to keep up good relations with the Soviets, so that Washington could use Afghanistan as a projector, through which it could send signals to Moscow in its desire for improved relations with the USSR.

Nevertheless, by the turn of the 1970s, the Soviets had achieved a comfortable position in Afghanistan. They had succeeded in placing their Afghan agents and sympathizers, as well as over 1000 advisers, in strategic positions in the Afghan administration and, more importantly, armed forces. This was to the extent that no major Afghan governmental decision or military operation from the main bases could be implemented without the prior knowledge of the Soviets. Thus, their political and military capability was at a level which enabled them to protect their growing interests against any possible adverse changes in the country.

At the same time, the Soviets had reason to grow concerned about what was happening in Afghanistan. The Afghan monarchy’s “experiment with democracy” since 1964 had resulted, among other things, in the emergence of two forceful anti-Soviet groups: the Afghan Muslim Youth Movement (AMYM), to which many of the present Mujahedin leaders then belonged; and the Shuli Javid, a small but very active Maoist group. It was against the background of this development and the rise of Islamic, Western-oriented Prime Minister Mossa Shafiq (who was one of the first people to be killed later by the PDPA regime) that the Parchamis and their Soviet-trained sympathizers in the armed forces played a central role in the 1973 republican coup, bringing to power an old friend and an apparent ally of the Parcham, Muhammed Daoud. Moscow was the first to recognize Daoud’s regime and its declaration of Afghanistan as a republic, with “unshakable ties” with the Soviet Union. Daoud’s initial inclusion of certain masked Parchamis and their sympathizers as well as his suppression of the Shuli Javid and the AMYM, forcing many of its leaders to flee to Pakistan, could only have pleased Moscow.

However, after consolidating his power, Daoud soon proved to be, above everything else, a self-seeking nationalist. When he sought to reduce his vulnerability to the pro-Soviet communists and the USSR by seeking to reduce his dependence on them, and when he initiated a rapprochement with Pakistan and sought closer ties, in search of alternative sources of foreign aid, with certain Soviet adversaries, such as the Shah of Iran, King Khalid of Saudi Arabia and, most importantly, President Sadat of Egypt, Moscow could no longer regard him as trustworthy. According to eyewitness accounts by some prominent Parchami figures
during their subsequent jailing by Amin, the Soviet embassy in Kabul directly urged the Parcham and the Khalq in 1977 to forego their past rivalry and unite within the PDPA in self-defense against Daoud. This led to the bloody coup of April 1978, enabling the PDPA to seize state power, eliminating Daoud and most of his colleagues, who were immediately denounced by both the PDPA and Moscow as "the enemy of the Afghan people". Although in the aftermath of the coup, Amin contended that the coup plan was drawn up by him and implemented by his supporters, we now have further eyewitness accounts suggesting that the Soviets had a hidden hand in the formulation and implementation of the coup plan.

When the PDPA proclaimed its rule and "socialist revolution", which Amin subsequently claimed to be "an extension of the Great October Revolution", and when Moscow urgently declared its total support for this development, the Kremlin must have known what it was letting itself in for. The Soviets were in a much better position than any other outside power to know what the situation was really like in the traditional, and fiercely Islamic and anti-communist tribal Afghan society. Their personnel had been studying and surveying Afghanistan, with wide access to every corner of its land and aspect of its life, for over twenty years. It is to their efforts that today we owe part of our knowledge about the country. It would be, indeed, naive to assume that the Soviets were not sufficiently aware of the fact that the PDPA lacked legitimacy, party strength, administrative capacity and popular support; that its leaders lacked political sophistication and had developed nothing but factional hatred for one another; and that therefore the PDPA would be incapable of ruling on its own country like Afghanistan, with permeable borders to the non-communist world. Equally, it cannot be said that the Soviets were not in a position to make an intelligent estimate of how the Afghan people in particular, and the regional states and the West in general, might receive a Soviet-backed PDPA rule in Kabul.

In view of this, one may find it only logical to conclude that Moscow from the start was reasonably aware of the responsibilities and risks involved in committing itself to the survival of the PDPA regime. Its subsequent actions could only prove this. As the PDPA rapidly tore itself into pieces in factional fighting, with the Khalqi leaders succeeding in banishing Karmal and some of his top colleagues to Eastern Europe and imprisoning many other Parchamis, and as the Khalqis' reign of terror and ill-conceived policies prompted a majority of the Afghan people to mount nationwide civil and armed resistance, Moscow simply responded by accelerating support to the Khalqis in the name of the PDPA rule. It
not only stepped up its economic and military aid but also allowed its over 8,000 civilian and military personnel to participate in all major administrative and security operations. Meanwhile, it joined Taraki and Amin in labelling the growing Mujahedín-led national resistance as "imperialist-backed", although the resistance received no more than limited outside sympathy at the time.

By late 1978, when Taraki and Amin had undertaken with full Soviet support a systematic attempt to eliminate all political alternatives (except the Parchamis, who were protected by Moscow), leaving Islam as the only emerging alternative, and when it was evident that the Khalqí rule could not go on for much longer, the Kremlin signed a Treaty of Friendship with Taraki and Amin, paving the way for the Soviets to intervene militarily, if necessary. The signing of the Treaty with the leaders of a collapsing government could only signal that probably as early as December 1978, Moscow was coming to view invasion as inevitable. The only major political rescue operation that Moscow mounted to save the rule of its PDPA bridgehead was in September 1979, when it asked Taraki to replace Amin with Karmal. Although the operation failed, with Amin killing Taraki and taking over full leadership of the PDPA, even if it had succeeded, Karmal would have been as unacceptable then as he is today to the vast majority of Afghan people. However, the year between the signing of the Treaty of Friendship and the invasion gave Moscow necessary extra time to mobilize its resources, including strengthening logistic and infrastructural support inside Afghanistan, for the invasion. Although Moscow claims that its troops, who killed the Soviets' former comrade, Amin, as a "CIA agent" and installed Karmal in his place, were invited by Karmal under the 1978 Friendship Treaty, it would be more appropriate to say that the Soviets invited Karmal under that Treaty to legitimize their invasion.

Nothing said so far should necessarily be taken to suggest that the Soviets planned as early as the mid-1950s an eventual takeover of Afghanistan. What it does suggest is that the invasion was the culmination of a conscious long-standing Soviet drive to secure Afghanistan as a focus for widening Soviet interests vis-a-vis major Soviet adversaries, which in the 1960s came to include China, in the region. Once the Soviets found it imperative to exploit Afghanistan's post-war vulnerability, they thereafter never refrained from helping to create the type of conditions that could enable them to expand their involvement in pursuit of protecting their interests in the country as a prelude to a successful power game in South-West Asia. They did so, with a reasonable aware-
ness of the consequences of their actions, leading progressively to the narrowing of their options, and a readiness to cope with such consequences whenever and in whatever way necessary. When they eventually ran out of political means to build the essential internal mechanisms of Soviet control, they found the application of direct military force as their best option to achieve such mechanisms.

Various analysts, including Soviet Georgi Arbatov, have suggested that the Kremlin made its invasion decision not just in view of the situation in Afghanistan, but also in the context of Soviet perception of threats arising from a number of regional and global factors. These stated factors range from an Islamic resurgence in the region, with the advent of Khomeini’s Islamic militancy in Iran and of Zia ul-Haq’s Islamic re-assertive policies in Pakistan, and the growing ties between Islamabad and Beijing, which had rejected the PDPA regime from the outset, to the US naval build-up in the Persian Gulf with the “Iranian hostage crisis”, the flourishing US-China rapprochement, and Washington’s decision in 1979 to boost its military spending, together with NATO’s decision to deploy Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe.

These factors, however, could not have conceivably figured seriously in the threat perception of Soviet decision makers, given the prevailing weak regional and global conditions. While Khomeini’s Islamic, but anti-American, regime was embroiled in its post-revolutionary turmoil and was facing growing regional and international isolation, Zia ul-Haq’s rule was beset by serious domestic problems and ongoing disputes with one of the USSR’s close regional friends, India – factors which have not changed much since then. Further, Pakistan was still subjected to the American arms embargo of the early 1970s. Similarly, China, while emerging from post-Maoist uncertainties, was heavily preoccupied with the Soviet-backed Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea; and its ties with Pakistan had a very limited military dimension, as seems to be the case even today. As for the US, its regional standing was at an all time low following the fall of the Shah. It lacked the necessary regional capability and support to be able to do anything more than gather a limited naval force in the Persian Gulf in order to exert pressure on Iran for the release of the American hostages. Moreover, its international position under the Carter Administration was marked by an acute restraint in world affairs and by a commitment to the policy of detente, even though Carter’s National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, had warned the President as early as March 1979 about “the Soviets’ creeping intervention in Afghanistan”.
Given this, in fact, the reverse can be argued. It was most probably Moscow’s perception of opportunity from such regional and global conditions, which had already constrained regional states and the US to pay little more than lip service to the problems in Afghanistan, that led Moscow to conclude two things. First, there was not going to be any major regional and global obstacle to its invasion. Second, the invasion could put the Soviets in a stronger position, enabling them to gain from any fortuitous developments which might arise in a chronically unstable region, particularly in the wake of the Shah’s fall. This, together with the fact that the Soviets had all along been well positioned with regard to their knowledge of conditions in Afghanistan, may have helped the Kremlin to make its invasion decision on a measured basis, with an eye on both its short and long-term implications.

Shortly after the invasion, Brezhnev stated that the Soviets made their decision “... in full awareness of their responsibility and took all circumstances into account” in order to make the PDPA-led “Afghan revolution” totally safe from all “counter-revolutionary threats”. Furthermore, he later declared that the “limited contingent” of Soviet troops would be withdrawn only “with the agreement of the Afghan [i.e. PDPA] government” and only when Afghanistan’s neighbors had given “dependable guarantees” that they would respect the legitimacy of the PDPA rule and would not support the “counter-revolutionary gangs” (the Soviet term for the Mujahedin). This represented, as he put it, “the fundamental position of the Soviet Union, and we adhere to it firmly”. Indeed, this position has not changed to date, irrespective of the Soviet leadership change from the “old guards” to the younger generation under Mikhail Gorbachev.

Implicit in these declarations, and in the statement by a senior political columnist in Izvestiya that “we knew that the decision to bring in troops would not be popular in the modern world”, but “we also knew that we would have ceased to be a great power [if we had not acted]”, are four significant points. First, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan with the full intention of settling for nothing less than the transformation of the country into a Soviet periphery. Second, they expected not only the continuation and possibly the heightening of the Afghan national resistance, but also mounting regional and international criticisms, with an increase in outside sympathy and tangible support for the Mujahedin. Third, they anticipated a protracted stay in Afghanistan. Fourth, they foresaw that the defense of their Afghan interests would inextricably be linked to what they could squeeze out of Pakistan and Iran.
Consequently, the strategy that they have adopted for their Afghan campaign seems to have been formulated around these points. It is a long-term, low cost strategy, which so far has not undergone any major structural changes. It appears to be based on two intertwined assumptions. The first assumption underlines a conclusion on the part of Moscow that a limited deployment of its troops, which has remained fairly constant at about 120,000 since mid-1980, would be sufficient over a period of possibly 10 to 20 years to achieve several objectives. It would enable the Soviets to exhaust and starve out the Mujahedin and to pacify the Afghan population as a whole by slowly, but forcefully and systematically, eliminating and banishing into Pakistan and Iran actual and potential opposition. It would also allow the Soviets concurrently to achieve consolidation of the PDPA rule, Sovietization of Kabul and a few other main cities and construction of a comprehensive defense network, which could enable the Soviets not only to establish a permanent structure of control of Afghanistan but also to advance overall Soviet defense regional capability. Furthermore, it would allow time to kill the urgency of the Afghan problem, reducing it simply to a nagging matter in regional and global politics. The second Soviet assumption seems to be that this process will give the USSR a capability in Afghanistan and provide it with a breathing space that it can use to encourage certain changes in regional politics, especially in regard to troubled ... Pakistan; and will also give it an opportunity to pursue a more favorable global correlation of forces.

So far, the Soviets have been largely preoccupied with achieving their first objective: the pacification of the national resistance and the construction of the infrastructure of Soviet control. To this end, their activities have resulted, most of all, in immeasurable suffering for the Afghan people. Assessing the costs is very difficult, but in addition to the destruction of hundreds of villages and urban centres, often through blanket bombing, the people's losses have to date included: hundreds of thousands dead, about 30,000-50,000 imprisoned (particularly in the dreadful Puli Charkhi concentration camp just outside Kabul) and 5 million refugees (more than 3 million in Pakistan and 1 million in Iran). Today the Afghan refugees who consist of both urban and rural dwellers, including a substantial proportion of Kabul's pre-1978 600,000 citizens, and who are dismissed by the Soviets as "nomads", constitute the single largest group of refugees in the world.

At the same time, while realizing that it might be almost impossible to unite the Parchamis and the Khalqis within the PDPA, the Soviets have
earnestly and forcefully begun the construction of an all pervasive Afghan secret police force, called the KHAD (modelled after and controlled by the KGB), as the core operative mechanism of the PDPA rule and Soviet control. They have recruited and trained about 20,000 Afghans for the KHAD and dispatched hundreds more, many of them school age and younger, to the Soviet Union to be trained as future cadres.

They have accompanied this by intense efforts to develop a Soviet defense infrastructure, the purpose of which, to all appearances, exceeds its suggested aim of enabling the Soviets to maintain the Karmal government and to cope with the resistance. In addition to developing a comprehensive defense system for daily operations against the Mujahedin, manned entirely by the Soviets and equipped by Soviet advanced weaponry, the Soviets have added several strategic and missile launching bases to the previously built Bagram and Shindand bases, near Kabul and Herat respectively. These bases, purposely located in the southern and southwestern areas of the country, enable the Soviets to reach important targets in southern and southeastern Iran and in southern and southwestern Pakistan. In fact, from their Kandahar base, they have been carrying out reconnaissance flights over the neighboring countries in the direction of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean for some time. Moreover, they have set up four Soviet Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) sites in Afghanistan. One of these sites is located at Qasideh in the Wakhan Corridor (which has reportedly been annexed to the USSR) near the Chinese border “to monitor Chinese and Pakistani military communications and radar signals”. Another two are placed near Herat to intercept signals and monitor troop movements in Iran and across the Persian Gulf. The fourth site is co-located “with the elaborate Soviet communications centre just north of Kabul” to monitor the situation in Pakistan and that country’s border with Afghanistan. To confirm further long-term Soviet intentions and strategy, it has lately been reported that Moscow has established a Regional Command Centre in Baku to be in charge not only of security operations in the Caucasus and Soviet Azerbaijan but also of the Soviet Afghan operations. This is to relieve Moscow from the burden of military decision making with regard to Afghanistan and allow it to concentrate on wider issues of Soviet foreign and defense policies in the long run.

Meanwhile, the Soviets have sought to recoup some of their financial costs in Afghanistan by exploiting the country’s natural resources, which Soviet experts have been surveying since the early 1960s. These
resources include, most notably, natural gas from northern fields, and copper and iron ore from the Aynak and Hajigag deposits. Although there are no reliable statistics available on the export of Afghan commodities to the USSR, according to an Afghan source, the export of natural gas alone in 1983-84 totalled 2.4 billion cubic meters out of a total output of just over 2.5 billion cubic meters. It is also lately reported that the Soviets have secretly begun mining uranium in the mountains near Kabul, the Khakriz area of Kandahar and Mir Daoud Koh between Herat and Shindand; and that they are soon to begin exploitation of oil from the Angot and Ak Darya fields. Concurrently, the Soviets have undertaken to construct major communications delivery projects. These projects include a railway network linking Kabul with the Soviet system at Hairatan; sophisticated bridges over the Amu River, forming a lengthy natural border between Afghanistan and the USSR; and additional gas pipelines to permit an increased supply of natural gas to Soviet Central Asia. The railway and bridges were the very projects that the pre-1978 Afghan governments and carefully avoided.

Nonetheless, despite their brutal pacification and intense infrastructure building efforts, the Soviets have thus far scored very poorly in subjugating the Afghan people. They remain far short of the type of success that some analysts suggest. They have succeeded neither in building a credible PDPA government in Kabul nor in reducing the Mujahedin resistance and the public support for it. While the PDPA and its core operative mechanism, the KHAD, still command a very small group of reliable members and are continuously riddled with Parchami/Khalqi factional fighting, and are penetrated by the Mujahedin at all levels, the Mujahedin not only control most of the countryside and small- to-medium sized towns but also operate extensively in the major cities, particularly Kabul, and govern many areas as “liberated zones”. Even the Soviet embassy and residential compounds in Kabul have not been immune from their attacks.

It is true that the Mujahedin are divided along ideological and ethnic-tribal-linguistic lines and some of their leaders, who have their headquarters in Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province, have been locked in personal and power rivalries – something which the Soviets will continue to exacerbate and exploit. However, they are not nearly as divided and demoralized as the Karmal government, nor as exhausted and dehumanized as some of the Soviet troops. The fighting Mujahedin, now under dedicated and increasingly experienced commanders who are not as politicized as some of their Pakistan-based leaderships, have
managed to cooperate, particularly in moments of need, under the banner of their common Islamic faith and in the face of a militarily superior enemy, to a much greater extent than is realized abroad. No doubt, their struggle has continued to be a popular one. They have been able to achieve a level of national resistance which few analysts of Afghan politics and society predicted at the start of the Soviet invasion. They have made the Soviet adventure a fairly costly one, with the estimated Soviet monthly casualties and daily expenditure now amounting to 400-500 and $10-15 million respectively. As the war has intensified, particularly with increased Soviet offensives since early 1984, the Mujahedin have learned the necessary means and ways to cope with Soviet fire power more effectively. Their leaders have also increasingly come to the realization that their unity may well be the key to the continuation of the Afghan struggle. In recognition of this, after several previous unsuccessful attempts, they forged an Islamic Confederative alliance in early 1985. This alliance seems to have more chance of survival than any of its predecessors, given its more appropriate confederative structure.

Although, as the Soviets anticipated, the Afghan problem has lost much of its primacy in the world's agenda of crises and virtually all Western political and economic sanctions against the USSR over the problem have dropped, the outside world's increased sympathy and some tangible aid to the Mujahedin since the invasion have not necessarily diminished. While still meeting most of their arms needs from what they salvage from the Soviet and Afghan troops and produce locally, they have received a growing amount of outside light arms, which lately have come to include some ground to air missiles and advanced mines. Among the regional states, Pakistan's logistic support to the Mujahedin and hospitality to the Afghan refugees have proved to be crucial to the Afghan resistance; and this may continue to be the case. However, it must be noted that, given the nature of resistance, which finds its strength in the hearts and Islamic faith of a majority of Afghans, its continuation would by no means be entirely dependent on outside assistance. All this assistance has done is to help the Mujahedin to minimize their own losses and maximize those of the Soviets. This augurs well for the continuation of the resistance.

However, given the Soviet's long-term strategy, determined methods of building infrastructures of Soviet control and of offsetting Soviet costs, this does not mean that the Mujahedin would eventually be capable of dislodging the Soviet power on their own. Nor does it mean that Afghani-
stan has become as draining on the Soviets as Vietnam became for the Americans, or that the war costs are likely to reach an unacceptable level for the Soviet leadership unless there is greater increased regional and Western support for the Mujahedin. While the Kremlin is not subjected to types of democratic constraints which influence the foreign policy of its Western counterparts, the current rate of Soviet casualties is small enough not to confront it with any major domestic repercussions.

All in all, Moscow at this stage finds neither the costs of its Afghan campaign too burdensome nor the tangible economic and strategic gains from it too small to inhibit it from pressing on with its long-term strategy of dominating Afghanistan. It is also clear to Moscow that a withdrawal of its troops would result immediately in the collapse of Karmal’s skeleton administration and its replacement by an Islamic one and, therefore, in the defeat of the objectives for which the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the first place. As long as this remains the case, it will not be interested in a viable political settlement of the Afghan problem. Its consent to the UN-sponsored indirect “Geneva talks”, which started between the governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan in June 1982 as a means of finding an effective political solution, is simply to help the Soviet long-term strategy. Its continued insistence on the legitimacy of the Karmal government as a non-negotiable matter basically confirms its real position concerning Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, Moscow has a good reason to be interested in a negotiation process, which as a mechanism in itself could serve Soviet interests. It could help them to buy more time for the Soviets and the beleaguered Karmal government in the hope of achieving a number of goals: to camouflage its intensified military operations in Afghanistan; to cause more dissension within the Mujahedin; to reduce regional and global criticisms of continuing Soviet military presence and brutal operations; to forestall any major increase in outside assistance to the Mujahedin; and, above all, to neutralize Pakistan’s important support for the resistance.

Undoubtedly, since the Soviet invasion no other regional state has assumed a more crucial position in the matrix of the Afghan crisis than Pakistan. As the invasion has led to a conflation of Soviet basic and regional interests in Afghanistan, the long Afghan border with Pakistan has become the focus of Soviet basic interests. Given this and the General Zia ul-Haq regime’s active anti-Soviet stance on Afghanistan and its acceptance of substantial economic and military aid, largely from the US and partly from China and conservative-moderate Arab states, as
well as its policy of Islamization of Pakistan, Pakistan has increasingly become a major factor in Soviet political and strategic considerations. The Soviets believe that it has been mainly the Zia regime’s support for the Afghan resistance that has made it very difficult for them to crush that resistance. They have alleged that under “false” slogans of “Soviet threat” and “burden of Afghan refugees” the regime is committed to a policy of “moving Pakistan into the orbit of US imperialist interests and turning the country into an outpost of aggression and anti-communism in South Asia”. They therefore see no redeeming features, not even along the lines of the Khomeini regime’s “anti-imperialist” stance, in General Zia’s rule. They would, consequently, be pleased to see the Zia regime replaced by a receptive one. Yet, Zia’s eight-year-old rule is vulnerable to the Soviets in several fundamental ways.

First, Pakistan is demographically a very divided state, suffering from a fragile social-political structure. Of Pakistan’s four distinct national groups, the Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans and Baluchis, the last two share kindred ties with Afghanistan and elements among them have at times exhibited secessionist tendencies. Successive Afghan governments since the early 1950s, with at first direct and from the mid-1960s indirect Soviet support, have backed these tendencies in Afghanistan’s border dispute with Pakistan and in support of a wider claim for the creation of an autonomous “Pushtoonistan”, comprising Pakistan’s North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan. It is today largely the NWFP and to some extent Baluchistan that provide a haven for the bulk of the Afghan refugees, house the Mujahedin headquarters and channel outside material support to the Mujahedin. The Soviets are well aware that in the long run this development not only would cause serious social and political problems for Pakistan but would also make the NWFP and Baluchistan widely vulnerable to infiltration by Soviet Afghan agents in pursuit of destabilizing the area and reviving the whole issue of “Pushtoonistan”.

Second, Zia’s rule is beset by serious domestic opposition, led by an alliance of eleven banned parties, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD). The leading and two other components of MRD are: the centre-left Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), with a wide base of support, particularly in the provinces of Sind and Punjab; the National Democratic Party (NDP), with a strong popular following in the North-West Frontier Province; and the Pakistan National Party (PNP), with its base in Baluchistan – the last two are closely linked. These parties are not communist, but do have a fairly good rapport with Moscow. While the
PPP's vice-president visited Moscow in mid-1985, the NDP and PNP leaders have often visited Kabul, where they have reportedly held meetings with both the Karmal government and Soviet officials.

To focus public discontent on Zia's rule, they have frequently drawn on issues such as "the burden of the Afghan refugees", "the presence of the Mujahedin bases" in Pakistan and "the US support for Zia's regime", and their consequences for Pakistan's domestic politics and foreign relations. They have also voiced from time to time a consensus amongst themselves that in the event of coming to power, they would lean towards a negotiated settlement of the Afghan crisis on the basis of an agreement with Moscow. They have suggested that they would recognize the Karmal regime, close the Mujahedin bases and return the refugees to their country. Meanwhile, some analysts of Pakistani politics have contended that the MRD would be capable of winning government if there were a genuinely free election. Moscow would certainly prefer an MRD government over that of Zia. Third, Pakistan is embroiled in long-standing disputes with India, which has close ties and a Treaty of Friendship with Moscow. This picture has certainly not changed much under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who appears to value close relations with Moscow just as much as his mother had done. The continuation of Indo-Pakistan disputes could only provide Moscow with an anti-Pakistan leverage.

At the same time, there are presently a number of major constraints on Moscow's behaviour towards Zia's regime. These include: the entrenchment of the military in Pakistani politics and its growing ties with the US and China; the strict adherence of a majority of Pakistani people to Islam and their concern over the Soviet presence in Afghanistan; and a more vigilant US and China, which, together with many regional states, have become increasingly inquisitive about the possible motives behind the Soviet Afghan adventure. Of course, it is on these factors that the Zia regime has relied to attract increased foreign aid, resulting in the generation of a higher level of economic activity in Pakistan and in further contentment on the part of the military to sustain its central role in Pakistani politics; and to secure a commitment from Washington and Beijing to view the Afghan-Pakistan border as a most important dividing line between their interests and those of the USSR. Another constraint relates to the fact that India likes to have the Soviet Union as a close friend, but preferably a physically distant one.

Consequently, while still deeply preoccupied with building the structure of their control in Afghanistan, the Soviets so far have not found it in
the best of their interest to exploit their opportunities in ways that would exacerbate these constraints. The Soviets do not wish to heighten the Pakistani people's anti-Soviet Islamic feelings and provide more justification for General Zia to prolong his rule, and thus weaken the chances of the MRD gaining power. Nor do they want to alarm further the regional states and the West, particularly at a time when Moscow is eager to develop ties with more of the Persian Gulf states, to become a major party in any future negotiated settlement of the Middle East conflict, and to improve its relations with China and the West, especially the US.

To all appearances, they have appropriately tied their policy toward the Zia regime to the long-term Soviet Afghan strategy. It is a policy of "active expediency", which rests on two main pillars. On the one hand, they have carefully sought to develop close ties with the receptive components of the MRD, and carried out cross-border raids and KHAD-led operations in pursuit of the Mujahedin, and to cause instability in the NWFP and Baluchistan only to the extent necessary to encourage the opposition to maintain its anti-Zia agitation and let the Pakistani people be aware of the serious implications of "American-backed" Zia regime support for the Afghan resistance. They have also sided with India in its disputes with Pakistan, and have given all possible economic and military assistance to the country to offset similar US aid to Pakistan.

On the one hand, Moscow has made offers of increased economic and industrial aid to Pakistan and has repeatedly called for a negotiated settlement between the Karmal government and Islamabad, including endorsement of the "Geneva talks", and has given rhetorical assurances that it has no designs on Pakistan. In this way, "Moscow seems to hope that with the strengthening of its position in Afghanistan, it can influence Pakistan's domestic environment gradually but prudently, without having to take direct action, to give rise to a receptive government".

If Moscow succeeds in achieving its Afghan goal and in helping indirectly Pakistan shift to its favor, then the USSR would undoubtedly be placed in a much stronger position vis-a-vis the Indian Ocean than is the case today. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has obliged the UN Ad Hoc Committee, set up in the early 1970s to work on the declaration of the Indian Ocean as a "Zone of Peace", to postpone its holding of an international conference for realizing its task in deference to an argument by the United States and its allies that the conference cannot proceed without an improvement in the current political and security climate. A Soviet success in Pakistan would certainly kill any chances of the Indian Ocean becoming a Zone of Peace for a long time to come.
To improve the regional situation, a *viable* solution of the Afghan crisis must be secured. Since the Soviets do not currently intend to allow Afghans to determine their own future, it is imperative for the world community to continue its help to the Afghan resistance in such a way as to enable the resistance to raise the cost of war for the Soviets to such a level that Moscow would no longer find its Afghan adventure cost-effective and would therefore opt seriously for a negotiated settlement. In the wake of increasing Mujahedín successes, it would be incumbent upon the permanent members of the UN Security Council and regional, particularly Islamic, states to act as guarantors of the security of all regional states, including the USSR, so that the Soviets could withdraw at little or no risk to their *basic* national interests. Meanwhile, a substantial UN peace-keeping force should help the Afghans to create a non-aligned government of national unity over a period of 3-5 years.