

SOVIET ENGAGEMENT AND GEOPOLITICS IN AFGHANISTAN

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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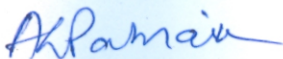
DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "SOVIET ENGAGEMENT AND GEOPOLITICS IN AFGHANISTAN" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of Jawaharlal Nehru University, is my own work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for the award of the any other degree of this University or any other university


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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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DEDICATED TO PEOPLE WHO LOVE ME

AND HAVE MADE MY LIFE SO

BEAUTIFUL.

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All criticism and suggestions are welcome.

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PREFACE

Whether or not history repeats itself, the human mind sees it with lenses borrowed from the past. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan remains an enigma in the sphere of international relations. A single factor or event cannot explain the rationale which drove the Soviets to invade the nation state of Afghanistan in December, 1979. Statesmen and analysts, confronted with Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, harked back to the reconstructed accounts of the 19th century cleavages and collisions to find out how these were handled by diplomacy- in an era when war was the conduct of diplomacy.

The present study is an insight into the Soviet Union in the context of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. It is difficult to reach an unanimous consensus on what impelled the Soviets to invade Afghanistan: was it the age-old Czarist policy of expansion or acquisition of warm water ports or an attempt to demonstrate to the world its newly acquired superpower status or a geo-strategic privileges or simply an innocent good-neighbourly gesture: the answer to this we might not know but surely constitute a contingent body of rationale behind the Soviet move.

History is full of instances to indicate that winning peace is exceedingly difficult compared to winning wars. While the theoretical rationale for Soviet intervention in Afghanistan remains unclear, American military involvement in Afghanistan was surely to confront and contain Communism. The debate is never-ending. What is rather ignored is the fate of Afghanistan, which was victimised time and again, first by the Soviets and then by the Americans in 2001. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan was left abandoned. It no longer captured the world imagination and was relegated to a war-ravaged country just like any other strife-torn conflictual region of the world. Thus, US and the Soviet Union were never really interested in reconstructing the nation, they both used it as a context to cling on their superpower status in the Third World. Was it then justified to thwart a nation without helping it with reconstruction? As US administration plans a complete withdrawal of the Soviet troops, the question might come to haunt us again. I sincerely hope that my research work help the reader see the retrospective and contemporary realities of the world in a better perspective.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMF- Afghan Militia Force

ANA- Afghan National Army

ANP- Afghan National Police

FATA- Federally Administered Tribal Areas

ISAF- International Security Assistance Force

ISI- Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate

JL- Jamiat-e-Islami

LJ- Loya Jirga

NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NWFP- North West Frontier Province

INTRODUCTION

In the introductory Chapter 1 titled **BACKGROUND** i have dealt with the emergence of USSR as a superpower and the areas where its vital strategic interests lay, particularly in the Third World. This chapter also includes a short theoretical background on the theory of geopolitics. In this context therefore, Afghanistan's relative economic failure and periodic crises, however, are also inextricably linked to the eternal, almost intractable, geopolitical challenges created by the country's key location. Afghanistan's economic impoverishment and 'rentier state' status have periodically drawn neighbours into the country who were concerned by the broader implications of such weakness. The geopolitics of this region have meanwhile ensured that Afghanistan is seen as strategically significant only as land bridge to somewhere else, a pawn in the chess game of ensuring wider geopolitical stability, or a stage on which broader international and regional rivalries can be played out. As is thought in many Western academic circles the Soviet Union's only real interest in Afghanistan lay in the fact that it could serve as a transport corridor to warm- water ports, eternally avaricious nature of Russian aggression. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan was correspondingly presented by the American government after 1979, in highly irrational terms, as posing an immediate threat to the Persian Gulf. The international community had little choice but to rally behind the existing superpower to counter and confront the effects of the emerging superpower, the USSR. This in turn, polarised the world deeply and indicated the fact that the new theatre of the Cold War was now in South Asia. In reality, however, Soviet Union had intervened in Afghanistan with great reluctance, caught unawares both by the PDPA takeover of the country and tribal resistance backlash.

Chapter 2 titled **SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN** throws light on the Soviet military action in Afghanistan and its theoretical and geopolitical rationale. The experience of the revolutionary liberation struggle of the peoples showed that at critical moments solidarity with a victorious revolution called not only for moral support but also material assistance, including under definite circumstances military assistance. For the Soviets, to deny support to the Afghan revolution, to leave it face to face with the forces of imperialism and aggression would have been to doom it to defeat, which would have been a serious blow to the entire communist and national liberation movement. In such a case where an extreme necessity arose, Soviet Union acted fully in keeping with the norm of peaceful co-existence written into international acts. In 1973, an influential member of the royal family

toppled the 226- year old monarchy and declared it a republic. In 1978, the communists overthrew the republic and its founder. Soon the whole country rose against the Communists and they had to bring the Red Soviet Army with the result that millions of Afghans were killed and many were internally displaced. After nearly ten years of war and devastation, the Red Army failed to subdue the Afghan resistance and left. The war itself left Afghanistan devastated, and compounded its already difficult economic development. As for the Soviet Union, the gains have been negligible. It not only altered its relationship with Afghanistan but also earned international wrath and condemnation. Thus, the invasion proved to be a decisive factor in precipitating the Soviet collapse in 1991. Justifying their intervention in Afghanistan, the Soviets were of the view that the situation which took shape in Afghanistan as a result of the activity of the armed counter- revolutionary groups which had mostly infiltrated from abroad and were backed by Hafizullah Amin's regime. As a first move to stabilise the situation, Babrak Karmal replaced Amin. Due to the danger looming large over the destiny of the April Revolution and the unity of Afghanistan, it was felt by the Afghan leaders as well as by political analysts who, proceeding from the provision of the Treaty of Friendship, Good- Neighbourliness and Co- operation, signed between the USSR and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan(DRA) signed in December 1978 and in keeping with Article 51 of the UN Charter repeatedly requested the Soviet union during 1979 to send Soviet army units into the DRA. In response to these repeated requests, a limited contingent of Soviet troops was sent to Afghanistan. This is how the Soviets explained their military intervention in 1979. In the given instance, not to come to Afghanistan's aid would signify leaving the Afghan revolution and people prey to class enemies, to imperialism and to feudal reaction and at the same time objectively helping capitalism to extend and make more dangerous the seat of international tension in the South Asian region of the world. (The issue of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its geo- political and strategic reasons have been dealt with in greater details in the chapter, investigating all possibilities for such an action thoroughly).

Chapter 3 titled **DIPLOMACY OF INSECURITY**, explores the responses of US, China and Pakistan to the Soviet invasion. When the Soviet troops moved into Afghanistan, it was seen as the beginning of an inexorable power rivalry between Moscow and Washington (over the control of the Gulf and the Indian Ocean Regions). Consequentially in this sharply polarised world, the western powers and all regional actors, big or small, chose to rally behind the United States, in what i see as an uncomfortable adjustment to the fact that Soviet Union had

now fully and noisily emerged in the international politics as the 'other superpower'. I interpret these happenings as a **BAND- WAGON** effect in which, the major regional actors extend their support to a superpower in contestation with another nation claiming to be a superpower. They act in such a manner because they are well aware of the fact that in case of a confrontation, they will not be at the receiving end and will not have to incur any losses individually as this is a collective grouping. Unlike the United States, however, the Soviet priority was not to achieve economic or commercial benefits, but to consolidate its political, strategic and ideological hold over the region. Highly centralised nature of the Soviet policy framing process makes it quite difficult for the analysts to arrive at some concrete solutions regarding their policy towards South Asia (particularly Afghanistan). One can only form hypothetical conclusions in the light of the past Soviet policies and their existing foreign policy objectives. It would be safe to say that what the Soviet Union tried to do was to gain a foothold in the region of South Asia, anticipating that mutually beneficial bilateral economic and political links would follow. Further, the Soviet Union used Afghanistan as spring board to spread the ideology of communism in the Asian sub- continent. Quite contrary to the case, US interpreted the Soviet Union's move as challenging its sole superpower status and waged a proxy war over Afghanistan to teach Moscow a lesson.

Chapter 4 titled **TRUTH OF RHETORIC AND ACTION** and Chapter 5 titled **AFGHANISTAN TODAY** will attempt to draw a parallel between Afghanistan as it was two decades back and Afghanistan as it is now. This chapter will also attempt to find out how far have the reconstruction and nation- building commitments been fulfilled to rebuild the war- torn country. The reaction of the major powers is clearly floundering leading to greater instability in South Asia. Afghanistan has been in the limelight since the Soviet invasion in December 1979 when it became a geo- political issue in the cold war between the Soviet Union and the USA. Both the superpowers fought their proxy wars at the costly expense of the Afghans. After the Soviet disintegration in 1991, all channels of material and financial aid to Afghanistan stopped, the US too abandoned Afghanistan. The US, a former friend of Afghanistan, had incurred the enmity of the entire nation by abandoning its promises to help rebuild the state and ensure peace after Soviet troops withdrawal. After the fall of the Communist government of Dr. Najibullah in 1992, there was infighting and feudalistic internecine war among the power- hungry warlords and the Mujahideen. It seems that the Soviet invasion had provided an opportunity to all ethnic groups to arm themselves and to learn armed warfare training and experience. As a consequence, their demands for

federations, secession and greater political economy was already weakening the centre, throwing the state into an era of chaos and disintegration. In what emerged as- light at the end of the tunnel- the Taliban arose in 1994, having taken control of almost the entire city, fighting some warlords and bribing the rest. With the emergence of Afghanistan, the war-weary country was relieved and saw this group as committed to restoring law and order and putting an end to factional fighting and widespread drug cultivation. But this relief was short-lived. However, the Taliban rule(1996- 2001) soon ran into trouble due to the strict and inflexible interpretation of the Islamic laws. Taliban's strict interpretation of Islam created many enemies for them both within and outside the Islamic world. Taliban's unquestioned founder and leader, Mullah Omar, shared close relations with Osama Bin Laden who was a suspected mastermind of the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Omar's refusal to hand over Osama to the US for trial caused a deep rift in their relations. What ultimately undid the Taliban regime was the terrorist attacks on America's World Trade Centre and Pentagon on 11 September, 2001. George Bush, the American President launched a global war on terrorism in October 2001, in an attempt to avenge the perpetrators of 9/11. US started bombing Afghanistan, which had been the safe haven for Taliban and brainwashed Islamic fundamentalists till now. The US- backed Northern Alliance succeeded in securing victory over the Taliban. With the fall of the Taliban and death of its leadership, Mullah Omar and Osama Bin Laden, Taliban has now become a rudderless institution. And the government of Hamid Karzai , which is now in power, stands at a crucial juncture. By 2014, as Washington withdraws its troops from Afghanistan, care will have to be taken to see that the country does not slip back into the chaos and lawlessness. This time the major powers will have to remain firm in its resolve to root out terrorism, to sabotage any attempts to forestall a Taliban regrouping. So, Afghanistan is in desperate need of the long haul which can be provided only by the international community and the UN. Countries like US, Russia, Pakistan should in fact assume a greater role in the nation- reconstruction as their responsibility of bringing Afghanistan to such a pitiable state is a known fact. Only a carefully balanced formula of reconstruction, political institutional building and economic recovery can bring about peace, stability and progress to this war- ravaged and devastated country. For once, Afghans must be allowed to plan their own future and make their own mistakes.

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND

(This chapter deals with the emergence of USSR as a superpower and the areas where its vital and strategic interests lay particularly in the Third World. This chapter will also include a short theoretical background on the theory of Geopolitics.)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: It is not possible to ignore the rationale of the Soviet involvement in, and policy towards Afghanistan without considering the theory of geopolitics and geo-strategy in hindsight. The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan perceives a long term pattern of Soviet aggressive intention in the country, modified by the pressures of other Soviet priorities and concerns, restrained by the limitations of Soviet capabilities, concealed by the fear of strong western reaction should they become known, but consistent and openly emergent as soon as conditions permitted. Colin Gray, in his book, *The Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era* has used classic geopolitical terminology: the Soviet Union was the ‘Heartland Superpower’¹, Western Europe and non-soviet Asia were the ‘Eurasian Rimlands’ and the United States was the ‘insular maritime superpower’. The governing force in international relations, according to Gray, was power. The United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in a permanent struggle, the immediate objects were the Rimlands of Eurasia. The control over most of it would have given Soviet Union overwhelming political dominance. For forty years the Soviet Union enjoyed a geographical conventional military power advantage with respect to the Eurasian Rimland. Throughout that period the United States sought to offset this imbalance with nuclear weapons. In the 1970’s, however, in the face of a massive Soviet build-up, US strategic superiority receded into a position of at best ‘parity’ if not inferiority. That dramatic shift in the balance affected the Soviet attitude: it emboldened a more aggressive Soviet foreign policy expressed in the invasion of Afghanistan.

The Soviet concept was comprehensively global and cast in a ‘zero-sum’ mould holding that the loss of American or Western influence and power in a given region reduced the relative global power position of the ‘ imperialist bloc’ thereby commensurately enhancing the relative power position of the Soviet Union and the ‘fraternal socialist states’. In the Soviet context, it can be firmly established therefore that geopolitical concepts do not provide

¹ Harold Mackinder’s theory about the “mastery of the world” consisting in the domination of the Eurasian Landmass, which itself had to start from the control of the Central Asian heartland. Kapur, K.D., *Soviet Strategy In South Asia*, Young Asia Publications, New Delhi(1984).

statesmen with specific policy prescriptions setting forth when it is appropriate to use such tools as military force, economic and military assistance, or covert operations, let alone determining the means and content of diplomacy with allies and adversaries. Rather, geopolitical concepts offer a global framework within which both grand strategy and specific policies can be formulated and implemented.

From being one of the least known countries in the world, Afghanistan had been catapulted into the world limelight since the Soviet invasion of December 1979. In invading Afghanistan, the Soviet Union appeared to be setting a new and more aggressive pattern in its foreign policies. If one compares certain military occupations by Stalin in 1939 and 1940(eastern Poland, the Baltic states, parts of Finland) one must acknowledge that all of these lands once had belonged, rightly or wrongly, to Tsarist Russia. Despite opposition to the USSR rule by the vast majority of their populations, Stalin as the de facto heir to the Czars, could lay claim to at least some historical right to the territories. Afghanistan, by contrast, had never before been conquered or occupied(except for temporary cross-border bridgeheads) by either Tsarist or Soviet troops. The invasion thus represented a precedent of considerable significance, one that seems to presage a willingness by the USSR to project its military power abroad with less constraint than in the past. That it had decided to do so cannot be explained by any single factor and the relative importance of each of the factors² is held and weighed differently in the minds of the Kremlin decision-makers. Firstly, **CHANGING CORRELATION OF FORCES**, in the sense that Soviet perceptions of its own military power and growing relative strength vis-à-vis the West clearly represented an important factor. The temptation to experiment with the USSR armed forces directly(rather than via proxies such as the Cuban troops in Africa) must have been strong. One can even speculate that ranking Soviet military officers could have wanted to expose their units to combat conditions as a means of giving them real life experience obtainable in no other way. Secondly, **STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF AFGHANISTAN**, might have been a propelling force. Though a poor country, Afghanistan's strategic location- at the gateway to the Middle East oil reserves, close to warm water ports, and on the flanks of China and Pakistan- provided both economic and geopolitical incentives for intervention. Thirdly, **IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT**, which implies that once having accepted Afghanistan

² Arnold, Anthony., *Afghanistan: Soviet Invasion In Perspective*, Hoover Institution Press(1981).

into the ranks of the socialist family of nations, the USSR was obligated under the Brezhnev Doctrine³ to prevent any return to a non-communist form of government.

The 1979 Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan, in straight geo-political terms, the Soviet invasion was an aggressive strategic thrust with apparently clear-cut military and economic objectives: closer Soviet proximity to the even more vital Middle East Oil supplies, a step towards the attainment of warm water ports, an increased capability for intimidating all countries in the region (including China's friend Pakistan) and a new link in the Soviet chain of containment being forged around China. As the first Soviet military conquest of territory outside its accepted sphere of influence since Second World War, the invasion appears to have set a new precedent for aggression. Paradoxically, the Soviets did have a defense pact. For Moscow, it is impermissible, ideologically for a socialist state to revert to a non-socialist condition if it is within the power of USSR to prevent it. Afghanistan, a new member of the so-called socialist family of nations after the 1978 coup, was clearly in the process of disintegrating under the attacks of Muslim insurgents in 1979. The rival ideology of Islam appeared to be on the point of overcoming Marxism-Leninism. Worse, this was in a country contiguous to those Soviet republics whose population is culturally and religiously far closer to Mecca than to Moscow. If the insurgents had been allowed to succeed, the dangers of ideological infection spreading across the border into Central Asia would have been clear and immediate, even though there was no known organized anti-soviet resistance there waiting to embrace the Afghan example. Even if the relative prosperity of the Soviet Republics had been enough to retain their loyalty to Moscow, the precedent of successful popular defiance to an accepted socialist regime could not have been permitted to stand.

The interpretation of the event of Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan in the month of December 1979 would essentially require a brief account of the developments, internal as well as external, which led to the crisis. Before we examine the domestic and international influences that caused the turmoil, it would be essential to have a background look into geography and polity which existed in Afghanistan till the Soviets intervened in 1979. The development of any human society depends on the gradual transformation from an obsolete and outdated socio-economic transformation to a more progressive one. But Afghanistan negates the validity of this statement. Modern Afghanistan emerged when Ahmad Shah

³ Srivastava, M.P., *Soviet Intervention In Afghanistan*, Ess Ess publications, New Delhi (1980). The Brezhnev Doctrine based on two models. One is the Iranian model which involves covert intervention and the other is the Afghanistan model wherein the Soviet government on invitation from a local government can mobilize her forces and provide military assistance.

Abdali (1723-73) of the Durrani tribe⁴, created the political structure of modern at Kandahar in 1747 by unifying different autonomous tribes to give his country a definite shape. His domain extended from the Aral Sea to India. Britain, the sea power, and Russia, the land power, were yet to appear for the power game in Central and West Asia. That game began nearly a hundred years later. However, the state authority of Afghanistan, disintegrated by 1818 mainly on account of intra-clan discords. But the position of this little kingdom remained like a wretched boat in the vast stormy ocean of power rivalry, tossed here and there, and likely to be crashed against the rocks of Anglo-Czarist imperialism at any movement. Strategic considerations and trade interests were the causes of Anglo-Russian rivalry in the region.

At the turn of the century, the British apprehended a Napoleonic scheme to sabotage the British land route to India. Russia's support to the claim of Persia to Herat alarmed the British, who looked upon Herat, because of its strategic location, as a barrier against the spread of Russian influence to Afghanistan. Therefore, they viewed the capture of Herat by Persia with Russian help as leading to the establishment of Russian footing in Afghanistan. The position of Herat between Britain and Russia ultimately became the cause of a war between Afghanistan and the British government in India, the First Anglo-Afghan War of 1839-42. Meanwhile, the Czarist Russia subjected Afghanistan to pressure by moving towards the country from the East. Britain was interested in acquiring colonies and tried to increase its influence in Iran, Central Asia and China. Afghanistan, which formed the heart of Asia, was the best seat as a powerful springboard for military and political penetration of the British. They also never wanted that any country should have the advantage of approaching the frontiers of their Indian colony. Both the rivals, Great Britain and Czarist Russia, were interested in the sources of raw material for their capitalist industries and the market for the commodities produced by these industries. Moving along the lines of these interests, in 1869, negotiations started between Great Britain and Russia to create a neutral zone in Central Asia and to prevent the annexation of Afghanistan by any of the two rivals which culminated in the Agreement of 1873, in which Russia declared Afghanistan outside her sphere of influence and liquidated the British opposition. Afghanistan was considered as an 'IDLE BUFFER STATE' and its independence was needed by both. The second Anglo-Afghan war of 1878-79, an attempt to forestall and hold back Russia from Afghanistan, and for the security of Russia, the British Indian authorities waged the Second Afghan War in 1879-81. The Anglo-

⁴ Wakman, Mohammed Amin, *Afghanistan, Non-alignment and the Superpowers*, Radiant publishers, New Delhi(1985). pp. 4-12, Historical Background(for details).

Afghan Peace Treaty in Gandamak in 1879 was concluded by which Afghanistan lost her sovereignty and turned into a colonial appendage of the British Indian empire. The Treaty provided for the control of the external affairs of Afghanistan by the British government of India and their pledge of non- interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. In 1907, Anglo- Afghan issue was settled when Russia declared Afghanistan outside its sphere of influence and agreed to conduct all political relations through the British agencies. Commercial facilities were equally open to both power.

Meanwhile, Czar not only caused the fear in the neighboring countries, but also oppressed the people of his own country. Capitalism, feudalism and imperialism developed to a considerable extent in Russia. In 1904, Russia was full of crises and struggles. The defeat of Russia by Japan adversely affected the Czarist influence both within and outside the country. The revolutionary movement spread far beyond the small groups of the underground socialist parties. Lenin believed that the military defeat of autocracy has produced the effect of Russian freedom. All this resulted in industrial crisis, and also of peasant and workers' unrest. In this state of confusion, Lenin came forward as a great revolutionary and originated the revolutionary working class movement. The First Russian Revolution began in 1905-1907. It proved to be an outstanding event in the history of Russia. The years from 1907-1914 saw the clear signs of new historical trends in the socio- political life of Russia. The working class movement gained strong grounds. In 1914, the First World War broke out and Russia joined the Entente. Economic and political chaos deepened in the country. Capitalism and exploitation continued to grow decisively and at a terrific speed. In 1915, strikes and demonstrations started which acquired political dimensions. The year 1917 ushered in an unprecedented wave of strikes and ultimately, the Czar abdicated and power passed into the hands of the revolutionaries. With the formation of the Soviet Union, a fundamentally new foreign policy was inaugurated which recognized the full equality of people of the East and provided for the friendly support to these people against imperialist expansion.

Afghanistan succeeded to some extent to ease out of the British sphere of influence only after the First World War. The process began with the coming of Amir Amanullah to the throne of Kabul in 1919 and his declaration that Afghanistan was no one's puppet, but a fully independent sovereign state. His demand was rejected by the British. But support came almost immediately from a newly-born state: the Soviet Union. Lenin recognized Afghanistan as a sovereign independent state. In less than a month, the British declared their Third Anglo-Afghan War. An armistice and a peace treaty followed, in neither did the British formally recognize Afghanistan as a sovereign independent state. This however did not deter

Afghanistan from signing a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1921. Following this agreement, Afghanistan concluded treaties with Turkey, Iran, France and Italy. These treaties led at last to an Anglo-Afghan treaty in which Britain renounced control of Kabul's external relations. With the rise of Amir Amanullah, Afghanistan embarked upon a new phase in its foreign policy. He found Bolshevik Russia more sympathetic to Afghan aspirations than Imperial Russia. With the dawn of Soviet-Afghan friendship, Afghanistan thought that she had nothing to fear from her powerful neighbors north and south. During the interwar period, Afghanistan established diplomatic and commercial relations with many countries. Afghan foreign policy was seriously interfered with during the Second World War by the Anglo-Soviet demand for expulsion of Axis nationals from their country. The Afghan King and the cabinet concurred reluctantly with the demand. After the Second World War, the US filled the vacuum created by the British departure from Asia. Afghanistan proposed a policy of equal friendship towards both the Soviet Union and the US. A flow of Soviet and American aid into Afghanistan followed.

The generation of men and women that has grown up in the world since World War II has little knowledge of how Afghanistan dominated relations between the two empires- the British in the South and the Russian in the North- for well over a hundred years spanning three centuries. The course of Russo-British rivalry for Afghanistan was greatly influenced by the drift and scale of war-and -peace diplomacy of the European powers. British power and might was cushioned on the empire, of which India was not the only the largest and most precious jewel but also the strategic heart. Britannia ruled the seas, but the Indian empire was most vulnerable from the historical invasion routes in the northwest; all these routes lay through Afghanistan. The British were determined to secure these invasion routes from Russia; they were also anxious to avoid a war with the Czar over Afghanistan. The two imperial powers never did actually collide over Afghanistan. But the imperialist and reactionary forces in Afghanistan, who held the masses in their grip, never wanted any change in their socio-economic formation and the imperialists wanted her to retain it. However the Soviet approach and disposition to so-close a neighbor like Afghanistan was carefully noted by progressive elements in the country. The qualitative change from an exploited nation to an increasingly self-reliant one could not go unnoticed. Thus, Afghanistan's survival as an independent nation is to be ascribed more to the dynamics of competing British and Russian imperialisms than to the diplomatic or political skills of its rulers.

From the 1950's on, Afghanistan had been one of the top recipients of Soviet military and economic aid which progressively increased as a result of Khrushchev's policy⁵ towards the third world. In order to understand the Soviet policy of economic and political penetration in a better way, we need to rewind and have a look at the developments of in the decades (particularly 50's and 60's) preceding the soviet invasion. Let us assume this decade to be the First phase or the initial phase of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan.

EXPANDING TIES, GAINING Foothold (1953-1963)

In the decade of the 1950's, 1953 was an important turning point for Afghanistan both in terms of local developments and because of events far from its borders. The end of the Korean War saw the United States briefly inclined to look more to its domestic situation than to foreign involvements. By contrast, the death of Stalin in the USSR, ushered in an era of more flexible and sophisticated foreign policy. This development was to affect Afghanistan fundamentally. For most Afghans, the most important national event of the year was the decision by the ranking members of the ruling family, the Mohamedzais, to entrust the management of the Afghan state to the hands of Mohammed Daoud. Daoud took office as Prime Minister in 1953 and remained in that position for nearly ten years. Being an authoritarian figure, he appears to have concluded that simultaneous political and economic development of Afghanistan was impossible, and appears to have made a choice in favour of economic growth. As an initial foray into the field of economic assistance, the Soviets advanced credit worth millions for construction projects. The soviets mainly had two objectives in mind: high visibility (the twenty-thousand-ton capacity grain silos in Kabul and Pul-e-Khumri are still by far the tallest structures in each town), and quick results (all buildings were completed in two years), and in accomplishing these, a disguised purpose that was both egalitarian and humanitarian. This first Soviet effort was followed with a technical and credit agreement for the construction of a gasoline pipeline. In 1954, the USSR scored a propaganda coup by agreeing to finance the paving of Kabul's streets, a project that the United States Import-Export Bank had rejected earlier. To this end, the USSR advanced a \$2 million credit to be used for asphaltting and road-building equipment. That same month the Czechs provided a \$5 million loan with which to build cement plants-a project the Afghans had been trying unsuccessfully to negotiate with the Germans and Americans for two decades. While the USSR and its Czech ally were active with these projects in Afghanistan, the United States was engaged in improving Pakistan's defense potential. In the view of their

⁵ R. Ram, *Afghanistan, The USSR and the USA*, ABC Publishing House, New Delhi.

hostile relations with Pakistan over the Pashtunistan⁶ crisis⁷ the Afghans looked with a great deal of misgiving on the US support for its rival military forces. By this time, Afghanistan's closer relations with the USSR would have ruled out any Afghan participation in a regional pact aimed at containing her northern neighbour, even if there had been no tradition of nonalignment to uphold. Whatever the chances of U.S. arms aid to Afghanistan might have been, they were reduced by a renewed eruption of violence over Pashtunistan. In the spring of 1955, Afghan mobs were permitted if not encouraged by the authorities to tear down the flag from the Pakistani Embassy in Kabul and from its consulates in Jalalabad and Kandahar and to loot those establishments. Pakistan promptly withdrew its ambassador, suspended Afghanistan's transit privileges, and unleashed its own mob violence against Afghan businesses and officials in Pakistan. The border remained closed for five months until the United States finally prevailed on the Pakistanis to allow transit of U.S. aid materials and equipments. At any rate, American support to Pakistan had caused Afghan public opinion against the United States to run so high that there were threats of turning the Helmand Valley project to the Soviet engineers. By contrast, the USSR enjoyed a reputable position, in June 1955, the Afghans negotiated a new agreement on duty-free transit of Afghan goods over Soviet territory. Western analysts of the Afghan scene are divided on the interrelationship between the Pashtunistan issue and the Afghan accommodation with the USSR. Some tend to separate the two, ascribing Daoud's move towards the USSR to his desire to achieve a more truly nonaligned position by redressing a purported westward leaning to Afghan economic and political policy under Shah Mahmud (1949-1952). It has been noted that the Soviet offer of aid to Afghanistan paralleled similar offers by the USSR to other countries during this same general time frame.

From the standpoint of the Afghans, acceptance of Soviet loans violated their isolationist traditions far more significantly than had the similar acceptance of American aid for the Helmand Valley project. In the 1930s Afghanistan had solicited foreign assistance on a modest scale from the developed countries, but only from those whose distance from Afghanistan's borders had provided some insurance against a political/military follow-up to the economic investment. Afghan requests for German, Italian, and Japanese technological help before the Second World War, for example, were based less on any pro-Axis political bias than on Afghan unwillingness to give their two most powerful neighbors, the British and the Russians, any kind of economic foothold in their country. The postwar approach to the

⁶ Richard. S. Newell, *The Politics Of Afghanistan*, Cornell University Press, London (1962).

United States was based in good part on the same considerations. The greatest break with tradition, however, came in 1956 agreement on reequipping Afghanistan's armed forces with Soviet material. Of necessity, given the complexity of modern armaments, this agreement involved the training of Afghan officers in Soviet military schools and the stationing of Soviet experts at Afghan military bases. The opportunity this gave the USSR for assessing and recruiting individual officers to serve Soviet political aims is self evident, and it was not ignored. Though many observers of the Afghan scene feared even then that Daoud was leading his country into Soviet vassalage, others perceived in his actions a high-risk gamble to improve his country's lot by playing off the Great Powers against each other. In fact, one analyst termed Afghanistan an 'economic Korea' where the competition between the East and the West benefited a local population without endangering its independence. And indeed, Afghanistan did profit in the short run as a result of competing aid programs : hardly had the agreements with the USSR been concluded than the United States was also offering official aid. The US position in expanding the Afghan share of foreign aid was explicit. It was aimed at securing "maximum internal political stability, promoting friendly economic relations with her (Afghanistan's) Free World neighbors, and minimizing any possibility that Afghanistan might either be a victim of, or a pathway for, Soviet domination in South Asia. In the period 1950-59, U.S. assistance totaled \$148.3 million, while Soviet assistance came to \$246.2 million. While most of the US assistance was in the form of outright grants, the USSR concentrated more on long-term loans. Although the United States did not try to match the volume of the Soviet assistance, the impact of the US projects was considerable, and most western analysts seem to feel that the Afghans benefited as much from the US as from the Soviet. On the other hand, between 1950-60 Afghan dependence on the USSR had risen from nothing to 100 percent for arms, petroleum products and for total foreign trade. Despite the development of these strategic vulnerabilities, Afghanistan continued to maintain its non-aligned status, and Daoud made a point of emphasizing continued Afghan freedom, independence, and neutrality as leading items on his list of national priorities. Economic progress was invariably listed as a secondary aim in his speeches. During the 1950s there was little direct evidence that Soviet ambitions in Afghanistan went beyond ensuring that the country continue to perform its traditional buffer-state role. The strategic significance of the Soviet highway project that ran from the Soviet border at Kushka to Herat and Kandahar, linking up there with the US highway to Kabul, however, was not lost on Western observers. The US commitment to Afghanistan in the last years of the decade was deliberately ambiguous. In early 1957 the visit to Kabul by Special Presidential Assistant James P.

Richards resulted in a communiqué that confirmed US support for Afghanistan's continued independence, but did not state whether or not the country was protected by the Eisenhower Doctrine (i.e., whether it would enjoy U.S. armed support in the event of a Soviet invasion). Insofar as the USSR might have hoped for a political return on its economic investment, however, the signs were not encouraging. A visit to Kabul by President Eisenhower in December 1959 was a widely hailed success. In an obvious move to obtain equal coverage, Khrushchev visited Kabul in early 1960 and reportedly offered to finance the entire Afghan second Five Year Plan if the Afghans would agree to the presence of Soviet advisors in all their ministries. Daoud is said to have rejected this alleged offer outright. Not only was the United States enjoying a good reputation, but it even appeared for a short time that Afghan-Pakistani relations might be mending. Soon after the new decade began, in 1961, Afghanistan-Pakistan broke all diplomatic ties on the grounds of Afghanistan fomenting sedition in Pakistan. The border was again shut down, and as in the past, trade was rerouted via the USSR. Just ten days after the border closed, Daoud's brother and confidant, Sardar Mohammed Naim, flew to Moscow and returned with the promise of a Soviet airlift to remove Afghanistan's perishable fruit harvest which had been stranded by the transportation blockage. Within a month, the USSR again reportedly offered Afghanistan loans and credits totaling \$450 million for their Second Five Year Plan. This was virtually the entire amount needed. If this offer was indeed made, the Afghans understood its implications for the future of their independence and turned it down. Even without their acceptance, however, the break in relations with Pakistan was clearly a desirable development from Moscow's standpoint. Afghan gratitude for the Soviet rescue of their fruit harvest was one benefit. Renewed Afghan isolation and alienation from the West was another, as U.S. aid projects faltered from the shutdown in the flow of supplies. The trend of the late 1950s toward an accommodation with Pakistan was reversed.

Those in power in Kabul were themselves Pashtuns, and could have been under no illusions as to the ultimate disposition of most of the supplies that the Afghan army was dispensing to Pakistani Pashtuns with such a lavish hand. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that the guarantee of the material resources to carry out this program, if not the very concept of the program itself, were of Soviet origin. In fact, the visit of Soviet Marshal Vassiliy Danilovich Sokolovskiy to Kabul in October 1961, the specific purposes of which were never made public, may have had some connection with the program. From 1961 to 1963, diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan remained ruptured. The economic effects of the border closure were slow in coming, but eventually they began to affect the population at

large. The loss of customs duty at the Pakistani border removed the single largest source of government revenue, and the country's hard currency reserves sank sharply. Eventually matters reached such a critical stage that the king asked Daoud to resign, and in March 1963, the latter obeyed. Within two months diplomatic relations were reestablished with Pakistan, and the border was again opened. For the USSR, Daoud's departure was a definite setback. The goals of Soviet economic and military aid programs had been the establishment of an Afghan client- state relationship, with Kabul dependent on Moscow for marketing its exports, supplying its military forces, backing its international political claims (Pashtunistan), and modernizing its economy. On all of these issues Daoud's policies had seemed to be in line with Soviet aspirations, even if they had been neither avowedly nor secretly pro- Soviet. As long as Daoud remained in power and his policies remained in force, the USSR could assume that Soviet influence would grow and Afghan dependence would increase, intensifying whenever the Pashtunistan issue became heated. In the end it could be anticipated that the USSR would come to have a dominating political influence in the country, in both domestic and foreign relations. For Daoud, opening the door to Soviet aid programs had been a calculated risk. It had brought increased U.S. aid to offset the Soviet effort, thus providing a double economic benefit while lessening the dangers of a total dependence on the USSR. At the same time, it had opened the door for Soviet subversion via the Afghan military forces that were trained, equipped and advised by Soviet mentors. Daoud unquestionably, recognized this danger, but apparently believed he could handle it through his own command of the army's loyalty, the patriotism of the Afghan citizenry, and the innate suspicions with which the Afghans viewed Russians. On the flipside, from the Soviet standpoint there were few options available through which they might have salvaged their position. The logical personality around whom a coup might have been staged had removed himself from the political scene and there was no one else of any stature over whom the USSR had adequate influence. Direct military intervention was not an attractive alternative in early 1963, only a few months after the United States had faced down the USSR in Cuba, though analysts at that time completely did not completely rule out that possibility. Economic aid had proven to be an effective foreign policy tool, but by itself it had not been enough to establish a dominant Soviet influence in Afghanistan. For the next fifteen years the economic penetration effort would continue, but manipulation of internal political forces was to occupy an apparently ever more important place in Soviet strategic thinking in Afghanistan. The Soviet began to pursue their drive for political control more vehemently in the decade of 1960s and 1970s

which I have categorized as the second phase for the sake of convenience and for better understanding.

PURSUIT OF POLITICAL CONTROL (1963-1973) : When Daoud⁸ took power in 1953, he established a regime that was intolerant of opposition from any quarter. He had the reputation of crushing the opposition with swift, ruthless efficiency, and although some trappings of democracy remained in Kabul, Daoud ran the country without much recourse to debate or compromise. As a result, an inchoate coalition of disparate elements build up against him and eventually contributed to his resignation in 1963. The very success of his programs and Afghanistan's economic advancement was another contributing factor in his fall; as the economy expanded , there was an even greater need for delegation of decision-making to lower and lower levels. At the same time, improvements in education had led to the formation of a larger and larger body of trained young people who wanted a voice in managing their country's affairs. One man rule was becoming both unpopular and inefficient. In Daoud's place, the king had appointed Mohammed Yousuf, minister of mines and industries, to take over the reigns of the government pending the drafting of a new constitution. The 1964 constitution was the final product of eighteen months of effort by a drafting commission and ten days of intense debate in the *loyah jirgah*. What emerged was a consensus document that appeared to have good prospects of success. Even if there had been no group hostile to the concept of constitutional monarchy and dedicated to its overthrow, democracy would have led a perilous existence during its formative years in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan there was at least 90 percent illiteracy in the country; communication systems were rudimentary; organizations that cut across family or tribal lines were virtually non-existent; loyalties and hostilities alike were fierce, local and personal; and there was no popular sense of national unity or nationwide awareness of common problems. In fact, it is surprising that the democratic experiment did manage to struggle on for ten years before again succumbing to one- man rule.

As educated Afghans wrestled with the new concepts of government, four general ideological positions emerged among the informed electorate: *traditionalists* wished to retain Afghan culture under firm, traditional Islamic principles; *adapters* wanted somehow to meld Western technology and managerial practices with Afghan culture and Islamic teachings; *democrats* looked forward to a democratic republic and put their faith in following Western models more directly; and *Marxist- Leninists* were by definition committed in theory to eventual

⁸ Kapur, K.D., *Soviet Strategy in South Asia(Perspectives On Soviet Policies Towards the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan)*, Young Asia Publications, New Delhi. Chapter8 (Afghanistan: Challenges and Response).

revolutionary overthrow of any non- communist government. To trace Marxist-Leninist roots in Afghanistan we must look back briefly at the violence-prone Young Afghan Movement of the early 1930s and the Seventh National Assembly of the Late 1940s. Although the Young Afghans as a group did not adopt Marxism- Leninism as a creed, in 1947 some of the group's former members formed a successor organization called the Wikh-i-Zalmayan (Awakened Youth) which included a number of pro- Soviet elements. The Awakened Youth was formed in protest against abuses of power by the leading Mohammedzai family members who ran the country, and it went on to play a prominent role in the politics of the Seventh National Assembly. The key figures around whom this opposition coalesced were Mir Ghulam Mohammed Ghubar, Dr. Abdur Rahman Mahmudi. Mahmudi was active in launching the opposition newspaper *Watan* (" Homeland"), the organ of the embryonic Watan party which was led by himself and Ghubar. Another collaborator in the journal was Babrak Karmal, a future Communist leader of Afghanistan. Both in its name and its political orientation (leftist but conceding the practical need for temporary accommodation with the monarch) this paper was a forerunner of the more outspokenly communist outlet, *Khalq*. Soon after Mahmudi died, Nur Mohammed Taraki began holding meetings with other leftist figures to form a new political party. Starting in September 1963, these meetings were to continue through December of the following year. They culminated in a gathering in Taraki's home in the Shah Mina District of Kabul on January 1, 1965, at which the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was officially founded. The host, Taraki, was unanimously elected secretary general. As late as 1960, an American researcher was to base his conclusion that "Soviet political aims in Afghanistan do not seem to differ much from those of the United States" in part on the fact that there is "no open or clandestine communist propaganda in Afghanistan." The specific ideological orientation of the PDPA was clear from the very beginning. A year later, its official organ, *Khalq*, was to declare the PDPA's goal as the 'further development of the October Revolution in Afghanistan.' Given the PDPA's unswerving subsequent support to any and all Soviet initiatives, the source of its inspiration would not have been difficult to deduce even without this declaration. Following its formation as an organization, the PDPA was quick to apply its revolutionary doctrines in practice. By the end of the following summer, elections to the Lower House of Parliament (Wolesi Jirgah) had resulted in victories of a few PDPA officials but many of the leading members of the party and Central Committee members like Babrak Karmal, Anahita Ratebzad, Nur Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin ran but did not win their contests. Due to the numerical insignificance of the leftist representation in the Parliament, PDPA

policy was to sabotage that body's work rather than to operate within it. Pending convocation of Parliament, the King had continued to put his faith in Mohammed Yousuf, the interim Prime Minister who had been acting since Daoud's departure in 1963. After the elections, the king asked Yousuf to form the elections which he did. When the new government was presented to the Parliament for confirmation, however, the proposed ministers were subjected to several days of unbridled abuse by the newly elected members of the Parliament. Babrak and Anahita led the anti- Yousuf protest, which reached such a point of vituperation that Yousuf finally asked that either formal charges be leveled against him and his ministers in a court of law, or an end be called to the denunciations that had charges of bribery, corruption, nepotism, and the like. He requested that his cabinet be subjected to a vote of confidence in three days' time. If the vote had been taken immediately, Dr. Yousuf might well have won it without difficulty. As it was, three days were adequate for Babrak to mobilize his sympathizers among the Kabul student body. A student sit-in staged by him and his supporters forced Parliament to cancel its scheduled meeting on October 24, the day the new cabinet was to be approved. The following day, the Parliament met in closed session, and overwhelmingly voted in favour of the Yousuf government. The fact that the session was closed however, touched off riots in which three students were killed. Yousuf immediately resigned , and on October 29 Parliament elected Mohammed Hashim Maiwandwal as Prime Minister in his place. The student riots were a development that set back the cause of democracy in Afghanistan perhaps more than any other student event in the 1960s. The extent to which the USSR had a direct hand in the riot is open to question. Certainly the PDPA took its overall ideological guidance from Moscow, and it is reasonable to assume that there was local PDPA contact with the Soviet Embassy in Kabul for immediate questions of tactics and strategy. However, this does not necessarily imply a fully coordinated Soviet control over the PDPA, and there is some evidence that the USSR was embarrassed vis-à-vis the Third World by the violent turn the demonstrations took. On the other hand, the same author, writing this time in Russian for Soviet audiences , dealt with the riots less elliptically and with some implicit approval, noting that they followed Leninist teachings on the revolutionary role of the intelligentsia . Although the new prime minister managed to become popular among the students by appearing at the funeral service for those who had been killed, PDPA agitation in the student body resulted in new violence before the end of the year. Starting on December 9, leftist leaders instigated anti-German demonstrations, aimed against the West German educational assistance program and alleged misconduct by West German visiting educators in the science faculty. The Germans have generally been popular among

Afghans, and the anti-German demands made by the student agitators were considered unrealistic by most students and by the population at large. The role of the West Germans as whipping boys for Soviet propagandists of that day, however, may explain this ill- advised choice of target by the agitators. Following an initial period of uncertainty, the Afghan government's response to the unrest was a forthright program of arrests and expulsions from the university of persons thought to have been responsible for fomenting disturbances. This policy had the desired sobering effect on the students in the short term, but it was at the expense of slowing and even reversing the process of democratization in the country. In the spring of 1966, reaction against the government took a new form as six opposition newspapers came into being in response to relaxation of the government censorship regulations. Only one out of the six was clearly identifiable as a communist journal, This was *Khalq* (Masses), published by the PDPA'S general secretary, Nur Mohammed Taraki, and edited by Barez Shafiee, a durable figure in PDPA politics. If there had been any previous doubts as to the politico- ideological orientation of the PDPA, they should have been laid to rest by *Khalq*. Even the phraseology of its writings was alien to Afghan Persian, resembling that found in the political organs of Soviet political apparatus. As for the content, the paper followed the Soviet line both in general ideological terms ("the main issue of contemporary times and the center of class struggle on a world-wide basis is the struggle between international socialism and international imperialism, which began with the Great October Revolution") and even on such specific Soviet dogmas as the demand for socialist realism in art. The government moved quickly to suppress what it identified as a subversive journal; after six issues *Khalq* was eventually shut down. The reasons cited were the paper's anti-Islam, antimonarchy, and anticonstitution lines, but it is probable that the government's real concern was its identification of *Khalq* as little less than controlled Soviet outlet operating on Afghan territory. After *Khalq's* demise there was no officially sanctioned communist journal until Sulaiman Laeq began publishing *Parcham* (Banner) in 1968. Laeq's coeditor on *Parcham* was Mir Akbar Khyber (whose assassination ten years later was to trigger the 1978 communist coup), but its unacknowledged chief was Babrak Karmal. In 1967, the PDPA split into two hostile factions: the Khalqis under Nur Mohammed Taraki and the Parchamis under Babrak. There was no real ideological reason for the break: both Taraki and Babrak remained firmly loyal to Soviet-style Marxism-Leninism, and differed only slightly as to the tactics. The Khalqis put emphasis on class warfare , while the Parchamis called for a united democratic front that was supposed to work within the framework of the existing order. Both of these lines, of course, reflect tactics that communist parties in most countries have pursued

at various times without ever losing sight of the ultimate strategic goal of permanently displacing the indigenous noncommunist government. Babrak and Taraki each commanded the loyalty of about half of the PDPA movement, and each was to maintain an unbroken hostility toward the other for ten years-until 1977 when a seeming reconciliation, very probably imposed from outside, took place. During all this time each maintained firm loyalty to Moscow. In 1968, a new wave of labor strikes and student unrest swept through the country. Again, the degree to which the USSR was directly involved cannot be determined but neither the Khalq nor Parcham was an idle bystander to the violence that erupted. In part as a reaction to these disturbances, a purported massive shift to the right occurred in the 1969 parliamentary elections. For the period of election, *Parcham* and several other opposition newspapers were banned, and there were subsequent allegations that the government interfered blatantly to secure the defeat of leftist candidates. Overall, the left did lose ground but the cause was probably less a matter of government interference than the weakening effect of Parcham- Khalq split on the one hand, and popular resentment against leftist disturbances on the other. The left's popularity was further eroded when, in April 1970, *Parcham* printed an ode to Lenin on the occasion of his birthday praising him in terms normally reserved for the Prophet Mohammed. This resulted in anticommunist demonstrations by mullahs and their followers, which were met by student counterdemonstrations.

As the decade of the 1960s came to an end, Afghanistan's importance as an overt area for playing out the East-West game seemed to have waned, as Vietnam came ever more to dominate the international scene. Year after year the Soviet investment in Afghanistan was cut back. During the same period, US grants and loans fell even faster. Politically, those forces in Afghanistan that publicly supported the USSR became less popular. Despite its publication of the near-heretical ode to Lenin, *Parcham* was allowed to continue publication, but it did not command a large readership. Leftist strength in the Wolesi Jirgah was negligible. The prospects of a communist victory in any free election were virtually nonexistent in the foreseeable future. These trends led some political analysts and experts to conclude that the importance of Afghanistan had been reduced in the Soviet eyes. While this apparent loss of interest was developing, however, Afghan civilian students and military officers continued to be trained in the Soviet Union, where they fell under long-term scrutiny of Soviet intelligence services. At the same time, the decrease in foreign aid had led to unemployment among the restless new intelligentsia that was being turned out in ever larger numbers by the expanded educational program. Afghanistan's fragile democracy appeared

progressively less capable of handling the complex problems of a rapidly developing economy.

It is doubtful that long-term Soviet political plans in Afghanistan had changed between 1963 and 1973. Reliance on “democratic” political instruments (the PDPA, *Khalq*, and *Parcham*), however, had proven as ineffectual an approach for the USSR as reliance on purely economic penetration had shown itself during the previous decade. It was time for a new approach, one that might result in effective Soviet influence on the country’s policies from behind the scenes. The end of democracy in Afghanistan came in 1973 when Mohammed Daoud again took over the country, this time in a nearly bloodless coup that saw the king banished into exile, the constitution abrogated, and civil liberties suspended. Afghanistan had returned to one-man rule.

GREATER POLITICAL MANIPULATION (1973-1978): When Mohammed Daoud came to power for the second time, his takeover was virtually unopposed. Daoud’s swift success can be ascribed to classic coup prerequisites: disaffection with the existing regime by key elements of the population, his own correct perception of the government’s vulnerability to overthrow, secure advance planning by the conspirators, and assurances by the military that the nation’s armed forces would either remain neutral or support the coup. Daoud also recognized the factors that made democracy so frail in Afghanistan—lack of communications, low literacy rate, and the like. Perhaps the single most important weakness was the absence of any pan-Afghan organizations that would have permitted appreciation of truly national problems and inculcated in the people loyalties beyond the immediate calls of family and tribe. The third and probably decisive factor was the coterie of supporters that had gravitated to Daoud during the years since his last term of office. Starting in 1969, he began holding seminars to discuss what had gone wrong during his previous tenure and what might be done to correct both his own former errors and those of the present regime. Young military officers, many of them trained in the USSR and already members of *Parcham* or *Khalq*, attended these meetings, as did more moderate thinkers. However, it would be worthwhile to note that what brought Daoud to power was not ideology but military power. He had the loyalty of key military officers, and he exploited that fact in carrying out the coup. Here again, the individuals who helped him were for the most part pro-Soviet. With this kind of leftist involvement, there is no doubt that the Soviets were at least aware of Daoud’s plan in advance, if indeed they did not actively promote them for their own purposes. There would have been every reason for them to assist him in seizing power.

In Mohammed Daoud they had a prospective figurehead chief of state whose noncommunist credentials were impeccable: as a first cousin of the monarch he wished to depose, and as a former Prime Minister who had demonstrated his true non-alignment by encouraging both Soviet and American aid, Daoud would scarcely call forth any strong American objection if he took over. At the same time, the opportunities for Soviet influence in Afghan affairs would be strengthened immeasurably by the coterie of Parchamis and Khalqis surrounding him. Not only might they influence Afghan policies in directions favorable to Soviet interests, but it could not be done without any ideological commitment or responsibility for the actions of 'non-communist' Afghan government. This factor was especially important for the Soviets in relation to the Pashtunistan issue. Ever since Daoud left power in 1963, the Afghan monarchy had made consistent efforts to downplay Pashtunistan and to keep relations with Pakistan as cordial as possible. In 1973, with the reformation of the former East and West Pakistans into Bangladesh and Pakistan, respectively, there was a clear opportunity for further weakening the already somewhat insecure government of Islamabad. From the Soviet standpoint, to ignore such a potential would be to miss an opportunity to undermine a friend of China and an ally of the United States. At the same time, the Soviet Union had to play a delicate game in this regard, for it did not wish to offend other Islamic states with which it had good relations. In Daoud, the USSR had a proxy for helping to destabilize Pakistan without the USSR having to take responsibility for such activity. Daoud's own well-known dedication to Pashtunistan would be enough to mask any Soviet involvement. A somewhat similar problem existed in Iran where the Shafiq government had reached an agreement with Iran over allocation of the Helmund River waters so necessary for irrigating both Afghan and Iranian territory. Some Afghans, supported if not led by Parcham and Khalq, insisted that the monarchy had sold out Afghan water rights to the Iranians. Here again, the USSR had every motive for embarrassing a US ally (Iran being at that time the strongest bulwark of anticommunist defense in the Middle East) without itself taking responsibility for hurting an Islamic Power. Finally, regardless of the results inside Iran or Pakistan, abrasive Afghan behavior could be counted on to alienate Afghanistan from the West and by default drive it into a closer relationship with the USSR. The Soviets, however, had reckoned without the political acumen of the supposed figurehead, Sardar Mohammed Daoud.

With the former Prime Minister Maiwandwal safely neutralized, Daoud assumed charge of the Head of the state of affairs with a predominance of leftists in his cabinet. Daoud's first move was to dissipate the dangerous concentration of Parchamis in the Ministry of Interior. Daoud broke up the Parchami nucleus by sending all of them into Afghan rural districts with

instructions to promote their progressive theories at the grassroots level. This proved Daoud's leftist orientation and a genuine effort to spread Marxism. However, Daoud understood his countrymen and the impossibility of altering the traditional patterns of country life without applying Draconian methods. However, these methods were doomed to failure. Meanwhile, out of communication with each other and with the capital, the Parchamis ceased to exist as a potential political force. Daoud's next move was more cautious and deliberate, but it was certainly unwelcome from the leftist viewpoint. He began reappointing the Leftist ministers to less important positions while himself personally held the vital portfolios of Defense and Foreign Affairs. If Daoud had moved swiftly against the young Parchamis in the Ministry of Interior and cautiously against his own leftist ministers, he was doubly cautious when it came to the military. This was where the real political power of the country lay and Daoud could not afford to offend any group within it. At the same time, it had been Daoud who, in his earlier term of office, had given the military the prestige that it enjoyed in 1973, and he appears to have believed that the key officers⁹ owed true allegiance to him. This belief was to prove a fatal error on his part in 1978.

Meanwhile, in the international arena, Daoud was taking a series of steps that were not in line with Soviet objectives. Initially in 1973-74, he reverted to traditionally aggressive Afghan policies on Pashtunistan. This was fully in line with the Soviet policies designed to disrupt and destabilize Pakistan, especially now that the latter was emerging as one of China's new allies and strategic partner. By 1975, however, Kabul was making overtures to Islamabad to defuse the problem. The efforts continued for over a year until they culminated in the exchange visits between the Heads of the State of both the countries, President Ali Bhutto and Mohammed Daoud, respectively. Relations between both Kabul and Pakistan had improved to a considerable degree. Of equal concern to Moscow was Afghanistan's rapprochement with Iran. In 1974, Afghanistan signed a new development agreement under which Iran would finance transportation and industrial projects whose total value was estimated to be \$1 billion. Surprisingly though, it was inordinately difficult for Iranians and Afghans to reach agreement on projects during this period. Needless to say, the Soviet efforts at actively trying to sabotage them have been brought to light. Whatever hopes the USSR might have had for reaping political benefits from its own continuing economic aid would have been dissipated if the Iranian projects had all gone forward.

⁹ Key officers- Mohammed Aslam Watanjar, Captain Syed Mohammed Gulabzoy and Major Shah Jan Mazdooryar. Received training in the USSR, ironically, each was to command troops against Daoud in 1978 and each was to receive a ministerial post in Taraki's Communist government as a reward.

Even without Iranian investments, Afghanistan was diversifying its requests for aid in other directions. Saudi Arabia, India and China were among those countries that responded, and the influence of Soviet aid projects dropped proportionately. Taking in sum, all the foregoing developments ran counter to Moscow's interest. Even the Afghan political vulnerability to future coups, ensured by the one-man nature of Daoud's rule, appeared to be diminishing. Although Soviet official propaganda still avoided criticism of the Daoud regime, Soviet displeasures with Afghanistan's policies was displayed in January 1977 during a trip by Daoud to Moscow. In a brief, hostile exchange, Brezhnev challenged Daoud to get rid of all those imperialist advisors in your country. Daoud replied coldly that when Afghanistan had no further need of foreign advisors, they would *all* be asked to leave. In 1977, the Parcham and Khalq factions of the old PDPA were officially reconciled and a new PDPA organization was formed. The significance of this reunification, temporary as it turned out to be, can be understood in the context of the 1978 coup. While there is and can be no absolute proof of Soviet involvement in the rapprochement, the intensity of the Khalq- Parcham rivalry was always such that it is hard to conceive of the two parties having reached an agreement without outside pressure. Though such temporary accommodations between the rival factions is not unusual in the West, the Afghan tradition of sworn enmity is one of the strongest in the whole culture. Only the application of some overriding force is likely to submerge such personal animosities as those existing between Taraki and Karmal. The implication is that the USSR stepped in to heal the breach, and that serious, detailed coup plotting- with or without immediate Soviet guidance- can be dated from that event though there are no substantial evidences to validate this link. In the meantime, a series of apparently political assassinations had occurred in Kabul. The final assassination became political, whether or not it was originally intended to be so. On the night of April 17, 1978, Mir Akbar Khyber, a well-known Parcham ideologue and one of the founding editors of *Parcham*, was murdered. The PDPA blamed that assassination on the CIA and surprisingly staged a large demonstration of thousands of marchers for Khyber's funeral. Daoud moved swiftly to arrest the leading leftists but his actions were not decisive enough. There was no concerted move against leftist military officers and Hafizullah Amin, the pivotal Khalqi organizer of military cadres. These tactical errors were to cost Daoud his life within the next twenty-four hours, and ultimately, they cost Afghanistan its national independence.

How much longer the Soviets would have allowed Daoud and his regime to survive anyway?- the opinions regarding this are split into two groups, one who find comfort in blaming the Soviets for causing disturbance and letting the state descend into chaos and the

other group, who put forth the view that if a state is weak and vulnerable internally, external pressures/influences acts on it more easily. By 1977, the USSR must have realized that Daoud could not be manipulated, and from then on it was just a matter of time before they took steps to establish a government more amenable to Soviet aims and control. In giving up its effort to covert manipulation, however, the USSR had to pay a price. Although the PDPA stoutly affirmed its nationalist and independent non- alignment, that line was difficult to put across convincingly. The PDPA's Marxist-Leninist orientation was too well known, and Soviet intentions towards the country were emerging ever more obviously, in spite of continuing efforts to mask them.

PRELUDE TO THE 1978 APRIL COUP : To the foreign observer who is not directly aiding a coup conspiracy, the coup itself almost comes a surprise. It can scarcely be otherwise, for if a disinterested outsider is aware of the plotting, so in all likelihood are the security organs of the regime that hopes to stay in power. Coups, therefore, must be designed in secret, with knowledge of the full plan restricted to the smallest possible group of leaders, individual details portioned out carefully to those with the most essential need to know, and the one vital detail, the timing held secret until the last possible moment. Daoud's waning popularity, the rising discontent among the masses, the deteriorating socio- economic conditions, Daoud's political oppression, his autocratic use of political power, and his persecution of the Leftists made the Parcham and Khalq groups of the PDP, which had been at odds with each other, reconcile their differences and form an alliance in April 1977 to overthrow Daoud. On 27 April, 1978, with the help of Afghan armed forces, they carried out a *coup d'etat* and killed President Daoud and his entire family. Interestingly, the coup can be considered as the first real revolution aimed at a radical transformation of the political and socio- economic conditions in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the Soviet involvement in this violent political change was denied not only by the Soviets but also by both the Parcham and Khalq groups (who were pro- Soviet and were dependent upon the Soviet Union for support and guidance.

The April Revolution Brought about Noor Mohammad Taraki into power as President and Prime Minister of the country. A decree of the new regime declared Afghanistan as a democratic republic. A majority of Taraki's Cabinet ministers were Communists. However, it was Hafizullah Amin who masterminded the coup. He succeeded in influencing the army in favor of the Communists. Infact, during the days immediately before the April Revolution, he was the only senior member of Communist Party to be at liberty. He won a large number of officers and men and ordered them into action before his comrades were brought before the

firing squad. Among those whom he rescued was Noor Mohammad Taraki. Though the causes of the coup were deep-rooted, the immediate provocation was the assassination of the Khalqi veteran Amir Akbar Khyber. The domestic policy of Taraki's government was aimed at structural, economic and social reforms. A number of administrative and economic measures were undertaken to strengthen and consolidate the foundations of the revolutionary Government. The ultimate aim of the government was to make society free from all sorts of tyranny and exploitation. However, the radical reforms which the Taraki Government intended to carry out were met with stiff resistance from the landed aristocracy and powerful sections of the Muslim clergy. However, it proved to be a rather uphill task to introduce socio-economic changes intended to usher Marxism in a tribal, feudal, Islamic society. Besides, the Khalq party had no base among the industrial workers and peasants. In addition, there were intra-party conflicts which obstructed the achievement of party programmes.

The April Revolution was itself in the nature of a coup. There was an overwhelming need for legitimacy and acceptability by the Afghans towards the new regime. It was soon evident that it was not easy to implement any country-wide programme without changing the cadres. Every attempt at implementation was violently resisted by tribal leaders. The abysmal performance with regards to the implementation of the reforms, notwithstanding, the April Revolution was undoubtedly the starting-point of a period of turbulence in Afghanistan, heralding the unfreezing of a traditionalist, Islamic tribal society. It set off a prolonged civil war between the forces of change and secularism and those of traditionalism and tribalism. One of the reasons for the stiff resistance that the Taraki regime encountered was the Government had completely identified itself with the Soviet Union, which in their view was an 'imperialist country seeking to ruin the Afghan tradition of patriotisms and freedom, an atheistic country hostile to Islam. As time went by, the Taraki regime grew pro-Soviet in attitude. It had moved very close to the Soviet Union and was widely considered to be an enthusiastic and loyal supporter of the Soviet Union. Taking the friendship one level higher, on December 1978, the Taraki Government signed a 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation with the Soviet Union. The treaty called for the development of 'all-around co-operation' between the two countries. It would be particularly interesting to note Article 4 of the Treaty. The reason being, when the Soviet Union intervened militarily in Afghanistan in December 1979, the intervention was sought to be justified in terms of the treaty obligations between the two countries. Article 4 of the Treaty was most significant in as much as it sought continually to develop co-operation in the "military field on the basis of appropriate agreements between them". Meanwhile, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, both military

and civilian, also increased after the April Revolution. At the international level Afghanistan adopted policies which were supportive of the Third World allies of the Soviet Union. It supported Soviet allies like Angola, Cuba, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Vietnam and Democratic Republic of Korea.

Soon after the April Revolution, the Parcham-Khalq coalition became involved in a factional struggle. Most of the Parcham leaders were sent away as ambassadors to East European States, many sought asylum in the West or were falsely alleged of plotting to overthrow the Khalq Party and were arrested in Afghanistan. This struggle for power eventually resulted in the elimination of the Parcham group from the main positions of power and a large-scale purge of Parchamis from all high-level governmental positions and their replacement by the supporters of the Khalq Party. A close examination of the socio-economic and political milieu would reveal that a major reason for the persistent failure of the April Revolution to make itself acceptable to the Afghan masses is that, barring a few genuinely dedicated exceptions, the so-called revolutionary leaders were far from representing a monolithic Marxist, Socialist front. They only represented a heterogeneous amalgam of conservative gradualism, liberal reformism, radical nationalism, and plain self-centred craving for power and influence.

Much of the discontent among the masses against, and opposition to, the Taraki Government is attributed to the reign of terror unleashed upon the reactionaries and would-be opponents, as also to the attempted radical social and economic reforms. The discontent led to widespread resistance, to unrest, and ultimately, to uprisings throughout the country. The main cause, however, lay in the fact that despite the pretentious proclamations that it represented the success of a mass revolution, the regime lacked grass-root support of practically any kind or description. As the regime faced growing opposition, it became increasingly repressive. The country had in fact plunged into a sort of civil war within a few months of the April Revolution. The numerous purges and the civil war led to a collapse of the morale of the army. Defections ensued. Increasing interference by Soviet officers also allegedly affected the loyalty of the troops. The Taraki regime was primarily opposed by religious groups, tribes, and feudal landlords. The strongest opposition came from the Muslim Brotherhood. Under the leadership of this organization, most of the anti-Marxist groups co-operated to form a Rescue Front with headquarters in Pakistan. The Rescue Front held that the Taraki Government was the handiwork of some Kremlin servants who had virtually mortgaged Afghanistan to the Soviet Union and who were trying to deceive the Afghan people by denying that they are Marxists. Therefore, the Muslim Brotherhood gave a

call for *jihad* (“HOLY WAR”) against the Taraki regime. This large scale military operation was supported by Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, and by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Thus, the defence of Islam and anti-Sovietism constituted the basis of opposition to the Khalqi Government.

The situation continued to worsen. So much so that a guerilla war began and soon spread to most parts of the country. Thousands were killed. Hundreds of Afghans and dissidents fled from a fear of persecution. These refugees found Pakistan extending an explicit support to them. The refugees were trained and equipped with weapons as well as with money and material liberally made available Pakistan, US, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf countries. Both the Taraki regime and the Soviet Union were convinced that the guerillas were being trained and supported by China, Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and the United States. These viewed Taraki’s Government as a major challenge to their own ideological system and as a threat. In attempt to give concrete shape to their unfounded fears, these nations concluded that peaceful co-existence between a Marxist Afghanistan and its orthodox Islamic neighbors did not have much of a chance of succeeding, especially when neither side was powerful enough to insulate itself from the ideological winds blowing across the frontiers. The socio-economic reforms which the Taraki government was seeking to carry out were a direct threat to the tribal hierarchies and the Islamic orthodoxy of the various states in the neighborhood of Afghanistan. The Soviet Union was aware of the involvement of these external Powers in helping the rebels in terms of material support and training in warfare. From the Soviet point of view, the issue in Afghanistan was not that the Muslims and the Government were at war, but that the people of Afghanistan were forced to struggle against some counter-revolutionary assault groups, trained and armed with money provided by Western imperialist circles. Moscow assured Afghanistan that Soviet Union would stand by it in its hour of crisis. The Soviet Union would not leave the Afghan people in the lurch: it would support their right to build their future as they wished. The Soviets observed that the April Revolution had the support of the masses. Even that consensus and legitimacy did not deter the forces of imperialism to cease their attempts to prevent the progressive development of Afghanistan. They had resorted to interference from outside and were abetting acts of armed subversion. Mostly, the Soviets were critical of the role which the external powers were playing in making the internal conditions of Afghanistan highly unstable and volatile. This role amounted to virtual interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and much of the strife on the borders of the country was primarily due to it. Since the resistance offered by the rebels stood in the way of the implementation of its socio-economic reforms, the Taraki

Government was constrained to resort to stern measures to deal with it. Hafizullah Amin, with a view to assuring his own ascendancy, played a role which was significant in that it tarnished the image of the Communist Government of Noor Mohammad Taraki. After he became the Prime Minister of the country on 27 March, 1979, he consolidated his power within the party and the armed forces. Much of the cruelty and repressive action attributed to the Taraki Government was in fact the result of Amin's planning and initiative. Amin capitalized on the lack of unity in the party and took advantage of it to seize the levers of power. In September, a bloody shootout between the supporters of Taraki and Amin took place in which Taraki was killed. Thus, Taraki was relieved of his Governmental and Party positions and was replaced by Amin as the Prime Minister and President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. This change was soon recognized by the Soviet Union.

CHAPTER 2

SOVIET INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

(This chapter will deal with the Soviet military action in Afghanistan and its theoretical and geo-political rationale).

As one would recollect from the previous chapter, Hafizullah Amin ousted Taraki and assumed Taraki's offices on 16th September. Taraki, the father figure of the Marxist movement in Afghanistan, was a mere figure-head, Amin was the active head of the revolutionary regime. Amin, an ardent Communist, seemed to emulate both Amanullah and Daoud, ardent nationalists. Perhaps Amin also wanted to pursue a Yugoslavia-type foreign policy. He faced real difficulties in the wake of attempting internal reforms particularly agrarian reforms in the country. These reforms dealt a severe blow to the feudal-patriarchal system of the country. His hard line Communism soon grew very unpopular. He moved too fast and too soon away from the traditional socio-economic circumstances of the then Afghanistan. He seems to have been in a hurry to make revolutionary history.

The Soviets perhaps believed that either Amin would be overthrown by the anti-Marxist, anti-Soviet insurgent forces in the country or he would remain in power but pursue policies incompatible with the Soviet interests there. However, this was not destined to happen. After Amin assumed charge of the country, the political situation became all the more tense, and the insurgents became much more active. The Soviet Union now increased its support for the regime so as to enable it to deal effectively with the political turmoil in the country. It assured the Amin regime of all manner of support to put down the rebels. Nevertheless he continued to be ruthless, oppressive and authoritarian. There was a massive flow of Soviet military equipment to Kabul like F-62 tanks, MI-24 helicopters, gunships, MiG-21 fighter planes, armed personnel carriers, and armoured vehicles. The number of Soviet advisers also went up considerably. In the view of the need for Soviet support Amin carried out some political reforms. However, these reforms did not bring about any appreciable change in the political situation.

As the situation worsened, the involvement of the external powers increased. So much so that Soviet Union now felt that it was time to take action. This was increasingly in view of the Afghan Government's inability to find a political solution for the rebellion, the Soviet Union was moving towards direct military intervention to quiet the fierce local uprisings. An interesting dimension of the Soviet foreign policy at this time was to argue for great restraint on the premise that any new government of Afghanistan would have to maintain close relations with Moscow. But set against considerations favouring a Soviet policy of caution

are the dictates of geography and culture. On acceptance of this premise, Russians could not “let Afghanistan go”¹ as any change in Afghanistan would surely bring in a spill-over effect in Moscow, and quite paradoxically, Afghanistan institutions could no longer hope to contain the insurrections, the only possible conclusion was that Soviet Union had to come in forcefully.

Evidently, Amin had not handled the situation of insurgency properly, there was little doubt about the savagery of the civil war in Afghanistan and the ruthlessness of the Amin administration. Amin had acted rather too smartly and independently of the Soviet Union. He was by no means a puppet maintained by Moscow. He had sought to delineate and pursue an independent foreign policy although he was dependent on the Soviet Union for military supplies and political support. As Amin showed too much of independence of action, it did not bode well for Soviet control. The Soviet Union, therefore, replaced him with a man more amenable to their control. Ironically enough, the reasons advanced by Karmal (and the Soviet Union) for removing Amin were precisely the reasons given by Amin for overthrowing Taraki. Therefore, in each case, the leader of the coup had tried to show that he was only purging the revolution of the extremist elements, purifying it, and therefore making it acceptable to the people.

The Soviets were disgruntled by the Amin administration because the latter subjected peaceful residents, specifically in the border regions, to unjustified repressions. Thousands of Afghan refugees fled across Afghan borders. Armed counter-revolutionary detachments were being formed and trained, with Afghan counter-revolutionary leaders receiving lavish material, financial and other assistance from various governmental and non-governmental organizations in the USA, some other western countries and Muslim states. The Soviet Union believed that the forces of the US imperialism and its reactionary allies assumed a hostile attitude to the revolutionary developments in Afghanistan and such developments were made easy due to the repressive policies adopted by Amin. His rise to power was considered to be a setback for the pro-Soviet elements in Afghanistan i.e. for those elements which favoured consolidation of the regime. The overthrow of the Taraki government is presumed to have been a blow to Soviet prestige and the Soviet Union was in a dilemma as to how far it should go in backing Amin in quelling disturbance in a state right on its borders. However, it hardly had any alternative but to send further reinforcements and military supplies. Hence it was

¹ ‘let Afghanistan go’ - MICHAEL KAUFMAN, Pg. 308. *Soviet Strategy In South Asia* (Perspectives on Soviet Policies towards the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan), K.D.KAPUR. Young Asia Publications, New Delhi (1983).

becoming obvious that only by overthrowing the Amin regime it would be possible to translate into practice the ideals of the April Revolution and improve the situation in the PDPA and the entire country. There was no question of its acquiescing in the overthrow of the Afghan government by the insurgents. In the view of its strategic stakes the Soviet Union eventually decided to intervene militarily.

By the end of 1979, Amin was supposedly left without support in the PDPA, in the army and among the people. It was in December 27, 1979, that Babrak Karmal replaced Amin and along with his new Revolutionary Council Presidium a new government was formed. In the wake of heavy airlifting of Soviet troops to Kabul a new Soviet-backed regime under the leadership of Babrak Karmal, a founder of the Parcham group of the PDP and a former Deputy Prime Minister under Noor Mohammed Taraki, was installed. Hafizullah Amin was executed. The change of government was accompanied by heavy deployment of armed forces in Kabul. There are conflicting versions about the whole operation in which Amin was overthrown and Karmal flown in from Prague, Czecho-slovakia, where he had been living as an exile after serving as Ambassador for a while under the Taraki Government. (There are also differing versions as to who invited the Soviet troops: was it Amin or the Revolutionary council or Babrak Karmal after he had come into power on the overthrow by Amin or by both ? Even the legality of the Soviet involvement has been questioned. Whatever the correct version, the fact remains that the Soviet troops entered Afghanistan in support of a particular regime and in response to a particular situation in Afghanistan. An attempt to answer these questions will be made in the concluding chapter).

Babrak Karmal became the newly elected General Secretary of the PDPA Central Committee. The events of December 27-28, 1979 signalled the start of a new stage in the April Revolution. As a result, according to the Soviets, the popular and progressive character of the national democratic revolution as pointed out by the PDPA Central Committee, grew stronger and obtained new and better conditions for development. After Karmal's coming to power in Kabul, it was believed that necessary prerequisites were created for restoring the organizational, political and ideological unity of the PDPA undermined by the divisive actions of Hafizullah Amin, and for restoring in the party an atmosphere of revolutionary principles, sincerity and trust. In foreign policy, the tasks and goals of the DRA at this new stage of the April Revolution envisaged consistent adherence to the principles of peaceful co-existence, non-alignment, positive neutrality and international solidarity and co-operation with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. It was said that the tasks and objectives put forward by the PDPA Central Committee, the Revolutionary Council and the DRA

government were formulated following an analysis of the social, economic and political situation in the country at the initial stage of the national-democratic revolution. Their purpose was to eliminate the harmful consequences of the blinders and crimes committed by Amin and to overcome the harsh legacy of the pre-revolutionary past, to improve the living, educational and cultural standards of the Afghan people, and to establish a firm political alliance between the working class and the peasants, handicraftsmen, intellectuals and other sections of the working people and also all patriotic forces favouring social progress and anti-imperialism. The Karmal regime is said to have done extensive work to attain the Communist objectives. The activities of the Afghan working people and their organizations was stepped up and began to play a growing role in the public and political life of the society. Trade Unions functioning under the PDPA guidance were set up at all state owned and mixed and private enterprises, both in Kabul and in the provinces. This was due to the consistent efforts of the PDPA, the Revolutionary Council, the DRA government and the mass organizations, the political situation in Afghanistan had stabilized and that the revolution could rally the working people and all patriotic forces round the revolutionary leadership headed by Babrak Karmal. Babrak Karmal said that the April Revolution had laid the foundations of an entirely new political system in Afghanistan. In pursuing the tasks of strengthening the party and consolidating its ties with the people, Babrak Karmal claimed that the backwardness and underdevelopment of Afghanistan was temporary. Effecting progressive economic improvements in the interests of the people and with their direct participation and carrying through a programme of deep social and cultural reforms, Afghanistan would become an economically progressive and socially advanced state. It seems that he understood very well the threat emanating from the reactionary situation in Afghanistan. People were dying because of the fratricidal war provoked by the counter-revolutionaries and acts of violence and terror committed by them in the country, and because of the large scale outside interference and the unprovoked and undeclared war and aggression being waged against the government. He believed that the normalization of the situation in Afghanistan, the strengthening of the revolutionary regime and the defeat of the armed counter-revolution would greatly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in the region. The PDPA and the DRA government, it was said would work consistently for building up the unity of all peoples in the common struggle for peace, détente, disarmament, prohibition and ultimate liquidation of nuclear arms, for friendship among peoples, democracy, human rights and social progress, for creating a lasting atmosphere of co-operation and trust in the world, and for the solidarity of the people's in the struggle against the forces of imperialism, aggression and reaction.

Despite the positive developments highlighted by Karmal, the situation in Afghanistan remained tense all throughout that period. This was due to the fierce retaliation of the counter revolutionaries backed largely by the USA and its ally, Pakistan. The war between the counter-revolutionaries and the government and Soviet forces led to the destruction of crops, granaries, killing of livestock, destruction of farm buildings and dwelling houses, food shortages and ruined irrigation systems, which had build through generations. Several lycees and schools were burned down, bridges were blown up, factories and mines were raided, boring machines, diesel power stations and radio stations were put out of operation. Oil and gas pipelines were also blown up. Centres of co-ordinating armed actions against the DRA were set up in Peshawar and Quetta. The mujahideen, as the counter-revolutionaries, were better known to have received training from various foreign countries. Apart from the USA, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and some other countries in the region rendered substantial financial and other aid which was used for the purchase of arms and ammunition, including anti-tank missiles and anti-aircraft weapons. USA's announcement of its intention to continue providing aid to the mujahideen further strengthened the counter-revolutionaries. The year 1982 was marked by increased armed deliveries as well as by more frequent visits to Afghan refugee camps of highly placed CIA and army intelligence officers and those were followed by the State Department and White House officials. The same year was also marked by a high degree of damage done to the Afghans. It is now clear from the revelations of Brigadier Yousuf², head of the Afghan Bureau of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) that thousands of tons of arms crossed from Pakistan to Afghanistan. These were mainly bought with CIA and Saudi Arabian funds from the USA, Britain, China, Egypt, Turkey, among others. Training of the mujahideen in secret camps and covert assistance by the Pakistani army teams inside Afghanistan to assist guerillas in their campaign of ambushes, assassinations, raids and rocket attacks were provided. All this compelled the Soviets to realize that they could never win. In fact the mujahideen were fed, cared for, and supplied with every necessity and were recruited among thousands of refugees. However, there was also reported disunity between the different mujahideen factions and efforts to unify the insurgent groups ran into difficulty. While the Soviets accused America of overreacting and spoiling the chances of revolutionary transformation of Afghanistan, the war for the Soviets was becoming costly. Daily expenditure for Moscow in Afghanistan was around 10-12 million US dollars and the number of casualties was very high. All this was

² Mohammad Yousaf, and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: Afghanistan's Untold Story*, Lahore, 1992.

leading to feuds and frustration in the military ranks. Soviet bombardment had also wiped out hundreds of Afghan villages in order to combat the counter-revolutionaries. Western media and academic sources accused the USSR of imposing unpopular regimes on unwilling people by military force and that this was a Soviet tradition. Arnold³ noted that the Soviet Union tried to sap foreign effort for the resistance by three overlapping techniques: establishing a monopoly over Afghanistan's foreign trade, applying a direct and indirect political pressure on non-Soviet bloc countries and unleashing a broad campaign of disinformation. However, there was a realization on the part of the Soviets that the costly military intervention was leading to an economic crisis in the USSR. This situation not only provoked countervailing increases in defense spending by the US and its allies but also to isolate USSR. The outcome was increased expenditure without increased security and Gorbachev expressed awareness regarding this on a number of occasions. Gorbachev frequently stated general disbelief in the feasibility of military solutions to political problems. All this ultimately led to the announcement for Soviet troop withdrawal in Afghanistan. Thus the Soviet withdrawal was in contrast to the war launched by the Afghans who were fighting inside their own country in defence of their faith, their homeland, their independence and their honour. This victory can be attributed to the faith that the Afghans have in their values that paved way for the ouster of the Soviets. Oliver Roy⁴ that after the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, the regime altered certain principles whereby they decided to go back to more traditional patterns of power and to give up revolutionary rhetoric. In the constitution, in 1987, the word 'democratic' was dropped and Islam was recognized as the official state religion and tribalism as a legitimate political pattern.

A detailed analysis would help us understand why the Communist reforms failed. There is abundant criticism of the Soviet intervention and the communist reforms from the point of view of Afghanistan's social realities found in western and reactionary sources. There is no doubt that the existing tribal system in Afghanistan was in direct contrast to the revolutionary communist reforms. Big landholders who were also the tribal lords had most of the land under their ownership. Thousands of landless and land hungry peasants were deprived. A threat to such a system definitely shook the big landholders. Several of the important mujahideen leaders like Rabbani and Mujaddidi⁵ were actually owners of huge land property. The Communist land reforms, definitely was going against the landowners who geared up

³ Anthony Arnold, *Afghanistan, The Soviet Invasion In Perspective*, New Delhi, 1987.

⁴ Olivier Roy, *Islam And Resistance In Afghanistan*, Cambridge, 1990.

⁵ Sadhan Mukherjee, *Afghanistan: From Tragedy to Triumph*, NewDelhi, 1984, pp. 142-43.

their anti-communist rhetoric and were actively supported by the USA and its ally Pakistan. Failure of the reforms could partly be explained in the light of major internal squabbles among the Parchami and Khalqi groups and the unwarranted methods used by Hafizullah Amin. There is little doubt about the fact that the Communist reforms were revolutionary and perhaps the Afghan society was not prepared for such radical changes. However the reforms could have in the long run benefitted the ordinary Afghan if there was no external interference. In fact, the Communist government in Afghanistan could have defeated the feudal forces and the clergy, if the latter did not get external support. The failure of the Communist reforms was largely influenced by Cold War politics. The substantial financial and military aid provided by countries like the USA and Saudi Arabia channelized through Pakistan helped the mujahideen forces continue their war against the government.

Any assessment of the Communist reforms in Afghanistan, has to take into consideration important factors like the machinations of vested interests, be it the clergy or the multinational military and armaments industry, who had overriding influence over the socially and economically deprived people and also the active intervention of the US-led western forces in Islamic societies to maintain their economic power and defeat their rival the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. Thus, due to a number of complex factors Communist reforms could not succeed in Afghanistan. Internal opposition as well as external influences combined to defeat the Communists and the Soviets who had send their armed forces into the country to control the reactionary forces. Looking at the country's present state, one wonders what would have happened had the mujahideen did not enjoy external military support. Could Afghanistan, like the Turkey of Kemal Ataturk crush the opposition of the orthodox Islamic clergy, and introduce reforms to secularise the society? Had it been so, perhaps the fundamentalist trends so conspicuous in this part of the world today, would not have taken its present course. On the other hand, if the reforms initiated during the Taraki-Amin period were more carefully orchestrated, not imposed on the populace with haste and repression, perhaps the Afghans would have benefitted by the reforms by now.

SOVIET MILITARY POWER MEETS THE AFGHAN WARRIOR SOCIETY: Till date, the Soviet-Afghan War remains an enigma in the West. Earlier successful military interventions in the Ukraine (1945-51), East Germany (1953), Hungary (1956), and Czechoslovakia (1968), and intermittent Soviet military pressure on Poland demonstrated that the stark military power of the Soviet state was an irresistible tool of Soviet political power⁶.

⁶ L.R.Reddy, *Inside Afghanistan: End Of Taliban Era?*, Aph Publishing Corporation, NewDelhi (2002) ,pp. 42-43.

The West was thankful that the nuclear deterrence maintained the Cold War balance and reluctantly accepted Soviet intervention within its socialist commonwealth and in the Soviet border regions as one cost of that balance. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a repeat of their invasion of Czechoslovakia. For months after the invasion, hardly a political or military expert in the world doubted that Afghanistan was by now forever incorporated as part of the Soviet Empire and that nothing short of a large-scale global war could alter the status quo. And the global war was most unlikely as both superpowers tended to avoid it. Some westerners recalled the British experience in Afghanistan and waited for a Soviet “Vietnam” to emerge, but most westerners believed that the Soviets would ultimately prevail. Some even projected their European fears to Southern Asia and envisioned a bold strategic thrust from southern Afghanistan to the shores of the Persian Gulf, to challenge Western strategic interests and disrupt Western access to critical Middle Eastern oil. The initial active resistance by the Afghan military was confined to a short battle against the Soviet Spetsnaz⁷ storming the Presidential Palace. However, the stunned citizens of this geographically isolated land immediately rose to defend their land. In defiance of the wisdom of the conventional warfare, the citizens armed themselves, gathered into loose formations and began to attack and sabotage the superior occupying force’s personnel, installations, depots, transport with any available weapons. Open resistance flared so quickly that only two months after the invasion, (on the night of 23rd February, 1980) almost the entire population of Kabul climbed on rooftops and chanted with one voice “ God Is Great”. This open defiance of the Russian generals who could physically destroy their city was matched throughout the countryside. :

PRELUDE TO THE FINAL INVASION: Communist power was established in Afghanistan on 27 April, 1978 through a bloody military coup. President Nur Mohammed Taraki, the new President announced sweeping reforms of land distribution, emancipation of women and the destruction of the old Afghanistan social structure. The new government enjoyed little popular support. The wobbly new government was immediately challenged by armed resistance fighters. The Army of the Democratic Republic Of Afghanistan began to disintegrate as bloody purges swept the officer ranks. In march 1979, the city of Herat rose in open revolt. Most of the 17th Infantry Division mutinied and joined the rebellion. Forces loyal to Taraki advanced to and occupied the city while the Afghan Air Force bombed the city and

⁷Spetsnaz are “forces of special designation” or special troops and can include a variety of branches and jobs. In Afghanistan, the highly trained, hardened Spetsnaz were commandos who performed long-range reconnaissance, close combat and special forces functions.

the 17th division. Over 5000 people died in the fighting, including some 100 Soviet citizens. This event may have led the Soviet General Staff to start intervention planning. Soldiers, units and entire brigades deserted to the resistance and by the end of 1979, the Afghan army had fallen from 90,000 to 40,000. Over half the officer corps were purged, executed and had deserted. In September 1979, Taraki's Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, seized power and executed Taraki. However, in due course of time, it was evident that Amin's rule was no better than that of his predecessor and the Soviet Union watched this new Communist state spin out of control and out of Moscow's orbit. The Soviet Politburo moved to stabilize the situation. The Soviet Union had significant experience with stability operations to maintain its socialist empire. Their experiences in subjugating the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 led the Soviets to adapt and adopt new improved techniques. In the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union lost a total of 96 army men. A small number as when compared to the number of casualties witnessed in the other invasions or conflicts involving the Soviet Union. The elements of their invasion plan included the establishment of an in-country Soviet military and KGB element to assist the invasion force in the production of a future invasion. A General Staff Group would tour the country in advance of the invasion, under some pretense, in order to assess and fine-tune invasion plans. When the invasion began, the in-country Soviet military and the KGB element would disarm or disable the national military forces. Airborne and Spetsnaz forces would spearhead the operations and seize major airfields, choke transportation points, the capital city, key government buildings and communication facilities. They would seize or execute the key government leaders. Soviet ground forces would cross into the country, seize the major cities and road networks, suppress any local military resistance, and occupy the key population centres. A new government would then be installed, supported by the armed might of the Soviet Armed Forces. This invasion plan was also used for Afghanistan. Soviet military and KGB advisers permeated the structure of the Afghanistan Armed Forces. The invasion of Afghanistan was launched on a Christmas Eve, not a major Muslim holiday, but a time when the Western world would be unprepared to react. Soviet advisers disabled equipment, blocked arms flow and prevented a coordinated Afghan military response. Soviet Spetsnaz forced the strategic locations, key airfields, and key government communication sites in Kabul to shut down. Spetsnaz soldiers killed President Amin. The Soviet ground invasion force crossed into the country, fought with a few pockets of Afghan military resistance and occupied the main cities while the Soviet government installed their Afghan puppet regime. The Soviets expected the resistance to end here, but in reality, it had only begun. The ability to rationalize an

intolerable situation that pervades the West did not hold in the mountains of Afghanistan. The Afghans' value, faith and love for freedom enabled them to hold out against a superpower, even though they suffered tremendous casualties in doing so.

THE INTERVENTION: On 27 December, 1979, 40,000 Soviet troops intervened in Afghanistan to protect a Marxist regime teetering on the edge of collapse. The Soviet action signaled a new epoch in world politics. An epoch in which the world must reckon with the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global, interventionist superpower. From the fifties right up to the end of Vietnam war, only one world power, the United States of America, had been cast in that role. Now, with the intervention in Afghanistan, a country outside the Soviet bloc and the socialist system, the USSR heralded its arrival on the stage of global politics as a co-equal of the United States. The second superpower capable of directly and effectively intervening in the conflicts of the Third World, and with the demonstrated will to intervene. Its military intervention in Afghanistan showed the sensitivity of the Soviet leadership to the reversal of a process which in terms of ideology was regarded as irreversible⁸ The Soviet action could not have been occasioned more menacingly as far as its rival and adversary, the US, was concerned. For the United States time had been out of joint and it did not seem that the US president, Jimmy Carter, had been born to set it right. The Shah of Iran, America's trusted and pampered ally in the strategically Persian Gulf, had fallen, and Iran had been taken over by a bitterly anti-US religious revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini. In Pakistan, a long-term ally, a mob had just stormed and set fire to the American Embassy at Islamabad. Outside the American Embassy in Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh, a country into which the US had pumped more economic aid than it could digest, another crowd chanted "Down With American Imperialism". As Jimmy Carter found himself a hostage of a surfeit of misfortunes in Asia, many Americans seriously questioned the quality of his leadership and these doubts were shared by America's dismayed allies in Western Europe, particularly France and Western Germany. To make things worse for Carter, his candidacy for the Democratic party's nomination for a second term as President was challenged by Senator Edward Kennedy, on the score of the incumbent's weak-kneed leadership. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, then, occurred in America's worst winter of discontent. A cornered President was instantly tempted to try to turn it into a glorious summer of American muscle and teeth.

⁸ Ram Rahul, *Afghanistan, the USSR and the USA*, ABC Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, pp.42-43.

Russian Empire studied the area and maneuvered against the British over Afghanistan in “the great game” of the last century. The Soviet Union had diplomatic ties with Afghanistan since 1919 and extensive bilateral trade contacts since the 1930s. Soviet economic and military advisers became a constant feature in Afghanistan in 1950. The Soviets built much of Afghanistan’s road network and airfields which clearly suggests that Soviet General Staff must have been quite knowledgeable about the geography, economy, sociology and military forces in Afghanistan. Yet, their force commitment, initially assessed as requiring several months, lasted ten years and required increasing number of Soviet forces. It ultimately proved to be a bloody experience in which the Soviet Union reportedly killed 1.3 million people and forced five and a half million Afghans (a third of prewar population) to leave the country as refugees. Today, the countryside stands ravaged, mutilated and littered with mines.

The Soviet concept for the military occupation of Afghanistan was based on the following: stabilizing the country by garrisoning the main routes, major cities, airbases and logistics sites; relieving the Afghan government forces of garrison duties and pushing them into the countryside to battle the resistance; providing logistic, air, artillery and intelligence support to the Afghan forces; providing minimum interface between the Soviet occupation forces and the local populace; accepting minimum Soviet casualties; and strengthening the Afghan forces, so that once the resistance was defeated, the Soviet army could be withdrawn.

SOVIET-AFGHAN COMBAT: The initial strategic concept, operations plans and tactical methods used by the Soviet military in Afghanistan did not markedly differ from what any strong army would have undertaken anywhere else in the world. Massive firepower, delivered from fixed-winged aircraft, helicopters, artillery, rocket launchers and tanks preceded all advances. Tanks and armored vehicles could cautiously start moving only after their commanders were convinced that no functioning enemy weapons remained in the zone of advance. The Soviet force would then overrun the contested area, firing indiscriminately at any moving object or even just into the air till they were satisfied that their mission was achieved. Initially, the Soviets considered close combat by dismounted infantry and mopping up actions superfluous since they felt that the huge expenditure of heavy artillery and rocket shells combined with the bombing and strafing by their fighter bombers had either destroyed their hungry, naïve and miserably-equipped opponents or panicked them into permanent exile in Pakistan or Iran. In fact, the Afghan freedom fighter came from a traditional warrior society and proved highly resourceful in fighting the Soviets. They saw no point in remaining under aerial and artillery barrages or in facing overwhelming odds and firepower. They were adept at temporarily withdrawing from Soviet strike areas and then returning in hours, days

or weeks to strike the enemy where he was exposed. Over time, the mujahideen morale grew, and they became better equipped with modern weapons taken from the demoralized Afghan Army soldiers and acquired from across the national border. The harsh and inhospitable land and the deadly treatment that the Soviets received from the people in towns and countryside gradually affected the Soviet soldiers' psyche, and the indoctrination they had been subject to during their training soon melted away as they increasingly faced the grim realities of the real war. They realized that they were not fighting against that they were not fighting this brutal war against the imperialists of America and China, but they were set to destroy poor and proud nation which was only defending their freedom, faith and way of life.

Interestingly enough, the Soviets soon learnt the rules of the game and first formulated new concepts for waging war in a non-linear fashion, suited to operating on battlefields dominated by more lethal high-precision weapons. This new non-linear battlefield required the abandonment of traditional echelonment concepts, and a wholesale reorganization of formations and units to emphasize combat flexibility and, hence, survivability. During the early and mid-1980s, the Soviet military altered its concept of the theater-strategic offensive, developed new concepts for shallower echelonment at all levels, developed the concept of air echelon, experimented with new force structures such as the corps, brigade, and combined arms battalion, tested new more-flexible logistical support concepts, and adopted such innovative tactical techniques as the use of *bronegruppa*(armored group). The Afghan war was fought under four General Secretaries- Brezhnev, Chernenko, Andropov and Gorbachev. The Afghanistan debacle is blamed solely on the Soviet political leadership, yet there were high ranking military accomplices who carried out Politburo directives without any protest. And although many in the West view Gorbachev as a liberal democrat and point out that he ordered the Soviet troops withdrawal from Afghanistan, the bloodiest years of fighting in Afghanistan (1985-1986) were under his leadership. Ideologically, the Soviet leadership was unable to come to grips with war in Afghanistan. Marxist-Leninist dogma did not allow for a "war of national liberation" where people would fight against a Marxist regime. So, initially the Soviet press portrayed a happy picture of Soviet soldiers building orphanages – keeping the Soviet populace in dark about the fact that they were involved in combat and ironically enough, in filling up those very orphanages . It was only during the last three years of the war, under Gorbachev's Glasnost policy that press began to report more accurately on Afghanistan. The war in Afghanistan was virtually ignored when compared to other wars in Chad, Iran-Iraq, the Falkland Islands and Lebanon. Inaccessibility and Soviet control prevented the press from carrying the war into the home of the world's citizenry. It is quite

difficult to describe the course of this war because it was not a war of great offensives and counter-offensives, of advances and retreats. The simplest way to interpret it is to suggest that it was a war of communications⁹. The Russians tried to cut the mujahedin caravan supply routes from Pakistan. In return, the mujahedin tried to cut the Russian supply routes, so that the Soviets could not bring in the supplies on which they were dependent. Neither side succeeded. The Russians never managed to close the Pakistan border, the mujahedin never prevented the Russians from getting their supplies through.

Both sides used mines, obvious weapons to use in a war of communications. The mujahedin were particularly adept at laying improvised roadside devices. The Russians also used massive air and artillery strikes, which caused great destruction. Neither side cared much about the collateral damage (dead civilians) Each side ambushed the other, often with success. In large areas of the country, the Russians and the government forces ruled by the day and the mujahedin by the night. It was also a war of intelligence, at which both sides were very good. The Russians had considerable electronic intelligence coverage, and their agents and those of the Afghan government were skilled at penetrating the mujahedin both inside Afghanistan and in Pakistan. But the mujahedin were equally good. They had a network of small boys who watched outside the Soviet bases and on their routes of march, so the mujahedin always knew exactly where the Russians were at any given moment. There were other consequences for the Russians. The Afghan army and police were completely penetrated by the mujahedin: so the Russians did not trust their Afghan allies. When they went out on a joint operation they did not tell the Afghans the objectives of the operation in advance. Mutual trust diminished in consequence. The Afghan army was not, however, a negligible force. But there was a serious weakness. There was a great deal of reluctance to fought so much worse than the enemy Afghans?

THE COMMUNIST PERSPECTIVE: Much has been said and written on the topic of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. It becomes imperative therefore, to know the rationale which impelled the Soviet Union to take such action. Speed and surprise were the essential ingredients of the Soviet military intervention of Afghanistan. Moscow's diplomacy of intervention showed impressive imprints of sophistication- somewhat surprising because Moscow did not previously intervene in any conflict outside the geographical frontiers of the Soviet Bloc. The first impressive element was its astonishing massiveness, and the stunning impact it had on a surprised world. The fact that Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was .now

⁹ Sir Rodric Braithwaite, 'The Russians In Afghanistan', Asian Affairs, vol. XLII Number11, July 2011.

a full-fledged member of the CPSU politburo helped in the orchestration of the military and diplomatic aspects of the intervention. The decision to intervene was taken probably in September after Amin had overthrown and killed Taraki, purged a large number of Parcham leaders and cadres and still totally failed to contain the insurgency which controlled at least half of Afghanistan's 28 provinces. Even Kabul was threatened. *Pravda* reported *after* the intervention that in the autumn of 1979 "the fiery ring of counter-revolution backed actively from abroad became tighter and tighter around the Capital".¹⁰ By the end of 1979, Moscow apparently braced itself to play the role of the revolution's protector.

From this perspective, the operational mechanics of the 'Brezhnev Doctrine'¹¹ which rules Soviet responsibility to intervene in the affairs of a troubled Socialist State, has put forward, before the world, two 'models' of Soviet 'intervention' in the affairs of her Muslim neighbors. The first is the 'Iranian model', which involves 'covert intervention' or Soviet involvement by extending greater assistance to the progressive and revolutionary masses of people, supported by all diplomatic and strategic assistance and thus to prepare the nation for a total revolution. The second is 'Afghanistan model', wherein the Soviet Union, on an invitation from the local Government, strategically mobilized her armed forces, and established a government loyal to her and rounded up the anti-Soviet elements in a planned and strategic way. Both these models fall within the national interests of the Soviet Union and may be accepted within the mechanics of the International Communist Movement. In this context, I would also like to draw the attention of the readers to the military co-operation formalized in December 1978 by the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty. Signing the treaty with Taraki, amidst a fanfare of Kremlin splendor, Brezhnev declared that the accord "will not only provide the foundation for the further strengthening of Soviet-Afghan friendship, but will also serve the interests of peace and security in Asia and, thereby, all over the world." If we analyse from a Soviet point of view, then we find that this treaty had become a necessity because the earlier Afghan-Soviet accords of 1921 and 1931 did not reflect the "qualitative" changes that had visited the relationship since the April Revolution. The treaty was erected on a strong spine of defense collaboration. Particularly Article 4 contained therein, is noteworthy, which laid down that the two parties would consult each other and undertake, by mutual consent, appropriate measures to ensure their mutual security, independence and territorial integrity. Therefore, Brezhnev affirmed later that the Soviet leadership had

¹⁰ Sen Gupta, Bhabani, *The Afghan Syndrome: How To live With Soviet Power*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi (1982), pp.85-86.

¹¹ Srivastava, M.P., *Soviet Intervention In Afghanistan*, Ess Ess Publications, New Delhi (1980). Chapter1, pp.1-15.

affirmed “all” short term and long-term implications of the intervention before taking the final decision, meaning that the action was taken only after the pros and cons were fully taken into account. The terse announcement of December 27 stressed the intervention’s legitimacy as well as objectives. Legitimacy rested on the Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty. The request for military help came from the “political leadership” of the April Revolution rather than from the government then existing in Kabul. The objectives were to “defend the gains of the April Revolution” and to prevent the imperialist powers from converting a neighbourly country with a border of great length into a bridgehead for preparation of imperialist aggression against the Soviet state.

The focus of Soviet diplomacy in the wake of the intervention was *not* the United States, but Pakistan, Syria, India and Iran in the region in which Soviet military power was so awesomely projected, and France, Western Germany and other NATO members that were more perturbed than enthused by Carter’s belligerent response to the Russian action. The first capital visited by Gromyko was Damascus, the second, New Delhi. The diplomatic offensive against Pakistan was conducted at three simultaneous levels: military pressure on the border, raising the grim prospect of Soviet troops penetrating Pakistani territory in hot pursuit of retreating insurgents; direct diplomatic pressure by Moscow; and diplomatic-realpolitical pressure by the Marxist regime in Kabul. Syria’s help was sought to counter US efforts to arouse Islamic nationalism against the USSR. India was accorded top priority because Moscow needed India’s benign neutrality if it could not obtain India’s political support. France and West Germany became major targets because of their refusal to toe the US line. If détente could be shown as divisible, it would be easier to isolate the Us from its allies and many of its clients and expose it as one lone bugler of cold war and confrontation. When the Soviet diplomacy took on the United States, the focus of Moscow’s attack was Carter’s lurch for dominant American globalism. The burden of Moscow’s carefully orchestrated articulations was that the US was turning a blind eye on the changes that had occurred to the global balance; that it had determined to take the world back to the wasted epoch of cold war; and that this exercise in muscle-flexing would fail because the USSR had emerged as an equal of America and could not be cowed down by threats of military superiority. In the next chapter we will be dealing with the international response to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in greater detail.

Furthermore, Moscow claimed that it had no designs on the West Asian oil and no intention of pushing through to the warm water ports in the Indian Ocean. Reiterating that the Soviets had only responded to requests for help by the legitimate leadership of Afghanistan, *Pravda*

for the first time spelled the condition spelled out the condition for the withdrawal of Soviet troops. “As soon as the imperialist intervention has ceased, the causes which made the Soviet assistance necessary will no longer exist.” Soviet Union pointedly accused the Carter Administration of replacing détente with a new policy of confrontation. The most authoritative statement on the Soviet position in Afghanistan came from Brezhnev. By that time the American campaign against the Russian intervention had peaked and the contradiction between the US and its European allies and Middle Eastern and Southwest and South Asian clients stood more or less exposed. He accused Carter of using Afghanistan as a convenient pretext for unleashing a cold war. Carter and his people knew very well that “there has not been and is no Russian intervention in Afghanistan”. The USSR acted on the basis of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of friendship. That intervention, directed by the US and China, had created a serious threat to the Afghan revolution and also to the security of Soviet Union’s southern border. Brezhnev maintained that while the United States “loudly demands” the withdrawal of Soviet troops, it was, in fact doing everything “to put off this possibility by building up its interference in the affairs of Afghanistan.”¹²

The Soviets reacted sharply against the lifting of US embargo on arms transfers to Pakistan and even more sharply to Carter’s bid to enlist Pakistan’s co-operation to operate his doctrine of containment of the Soviet power. Direct pressure upon Pakistan by Moscow took largely in the form of the threatening incentives. The Soviets sought the help of Cuba and India to dissuade Pakistan from aligning with the US, and the help of Syria, South Yemen, Algeria, Libya and PLO to mollify the Islamic nations’ anger at Moscow’s intervention in Afghanistan. The Babrak Karmal government in Kabul, operating a parallel level of diplomacy, negotiated with Pakistan over the issue of goodneighbourly relations and also apprehended Pakistan for stirring up rebellions among the Baluchis and Pakhtoons, thereby threatening Pakistan with civil war.

As the Afghan crisis is the most important factor in the Soviet South Asian Policy in the 1980’s, I have taken it up as the foremost event. Being the pivotal part of my research, I would like to highlight the schools of thought¹³ and debates regarding the intervention. There are two main schools of thought. The protagonists of the first school of thought have linked the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan with a Russian dream to get a foothold in the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. As the short term policy interests were at stake in

¹² Sen Gupta, Bhabani, *The Afghan Syndrome*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, Chapter 5, pp.89-90.

¹³ Papp.S.Daniel, *Soviet Perceptions Of The Developing World In The 1980s: The Ideological Basis*, Lexington Publishers, USA(1985), Chapter 6(Opening of 1980s And the Soviet South Asian Policy), pp. 110-115.

Afghanistan, it was imperative for the Soviet policy makers to counter the spillover effects of Islamic Revivalist Movement in their own Muslim Central Asian Republics. Such a movement had received impetus with the revolution in Iran. The gaining strength of the Islamic Fundamentalist Movement in Afghanistan and the failure of the regime of Hafizullah Amin to liquidate the Muslim Afghan guerillas left Moscow with no option but to intervene in Afghanistan and protect its short term interests. Nevertheless, there is a third school of thought which rejects the warm-water theory or the protection of short-term interests. The protagonists of this school maintain that the Soviet Union intervened for the first time in any non-aligned, Muslim and non-Warsaw Pact member country as a part of its long-term objective to expand its influence beyond Oxus river. Afghanistan was just a springboard or a stepping stone which the Soviet Policy makers used for accomplishing their long term interests in South Asia. With a political and military foothold in Afghanistan, the Soviets were undoubtedly in a better position to influence Pakistan and India and also to counter the Massive US naval-military strength in the Gulf. Nonetheless, Gorbachev's proposal for Asian Collective Security which was actually floated by Brezhnev in the 1970's can be seen as a tactical move to dislodge western powers from Asia. Without their advantageous position in Afghanistan, the Soviets would not have mooted the proposal altogether.

Considering the logical and rational aspects of the three schools of thought, the third school has more credibility and validity as it neatly fits in with the geopolitical and strategic concept. As far as the warm-water theory is concerned, it may be noted that given the modernization of the Soviet navy, the Soviet policy makers did not need an access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. They had ice-breaker ships and naval fleets and therefore they did not have to opt for such a dangerous action like military intervention in a sovereign country just for warm waters. Moreover, the Islamic Revivalist Movements, notwithstanding the Iranian Revolution or situation in Afghanistan, did not lead to any religious uprising in the Central Asian Republics. At the time of the intervention, a period of 70 years had already elapsed before these republics were brought under a different social and political system. Much had changed since the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Soviet Muslims had somehow or the other been assimilated in the Soviet lifestyle and socio-economic-political systems. It is interesting to note that the Soviets did not intervene in Afghanistan for the protection of their short-term interests i.e., the survival of a pro-Russian regime in Kabul. Was it rational for Moscow to take such a risky step like a full-fledged military invasion merely for the protection of its supported regime in Kabul. Other measures than intervention could have been taken such as reconciliation between the *Khalq* and *Parcham* factions or as a limited military intervention.

However, the validity of this school of thought can not be negated in its totality. Moscow was simply playing the role of a savior for a sovereign nation which by choice had embraced Communism. Religion and faith are matters of the heart and these virtues cannot be supplanted from outside. Moscow therefore was providing them assistance from external imperialist powers who had dangerous ideological designs for the subjugated Afghans. As pointed out earlier, the Soviet Union was interested in South Asia. Its objective was not merely to neutralize the pro-American regime in Islamabad or to counter American influence in South Asia, but to establish a defacto presence through friendly regimes in the region. Close friendship with India was futile until other South Asian countries, especially Pakistan and Bangladesh joined hands with Moscow. The Soviet policy makers were well aware of the level of international and regional condemnation against their intervention in Afghanistan. But they also considered the fact that the durability of such a power base of the Kabul regime would force the South Asian countries to accept the Sovietization of Afghanistan¹⁴ as a *fait accompli*. In such a situation would be easier for Moscow to give a practical shape to its South Asian security approach. Such an approach is integrated in the broad South Asian collective system. In this approach extra regional Western powers, especially the United States, did not have any significant role to play in South Asia. It is only when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, America too employed Pakistan to sabotage the attempt to bring stability. Given these attempts, one can consider the third school of thought as logical and relevant in analyzing the motives behind the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. In this regard, Moscow had followed a steady policy towards widening its influence in South Asia. Afghanistan became a victim of the Soviet military onslaught simply because the country, prior to the Soviet military intervention, was a buffer between the Soviet Union and South Asia. The opening of the decade of the 1980 witnessed some unprecedented geopolitical changes in South Asia. These changes were mainly linked with the Afghan imbroglio. When the Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan in late December 1979, geo-strategic complexion of South Asia had already begun to change. It re-introduced the American factor in South Asia and led to the re-militarisation of Pakistan.

The focus of my research paper is the relationship between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan so it becomes worthwhile to examine the growing body of work that seeks to shed light on the considerations that prompted the Soviet leadership to invade. It is in our knowledge

¹⁴ Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Soviet Policy Toward Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan: The Dynamics Of Influence*, Praeger Publishers, New York, Chapter 8, Sovietization of Afghanistan, pp159-160.

already as we have discussed in the preceding paragraphs that the explanations vary greatly, each analysis being shaped by apriori and implicit (rarely explicit) assumption about Soviet Foreign Policy in the Third World. Briefly, to recapitulate, the Soviet decision to intervene is variously assessed as: a defensive reaction arising from growing concern that instability might possibly spill over into the bordering Soviet Uzbek and Tadjik union republics; An underestimation of the costs of suppressing Afghan tribal resistance and installing a more compliant Soviet satrap; a fear that China and the United States would exploit a Soviet setback in Afghanistan and acquire increased influence in the Muslim world; a response to a target of opportunity that was especially attractive given the U.S. preoccupation with the Iranian hostage crisis, and exploitation of which would inevitably in time vastly improve the USSR's geopolitical position vis-à-vis Iran, Pakistan, and India and a possible future drive to the Gulf; a shedding of restraint occasioned by the deterioration in relations with the United States and the belief that the SALT II was dead; a manifestation of traditional Russian Imperialism, which has always sought to acquire additional territory along with its periphery; a necessary step towards eventual acquisition of warm-water ports on the Indian Ocean that also served to warn nations of the region to normalize relations with the Soviet Union and to avoid too heavy a reliance on the United States; and, finally, a determination argued forcefully in the Politburo by ideologies such as not to abandon a progressive movement to the reactionaries or allow it to fall victim to its own ultraleftist excesses. What we may reasonably conclude from the information that we have at our disposal is that from time to time, Moscow tactfully and diplomatically used the above cited reasons as a *pretext to justify* its invasion.

A discussion on the reasons for the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan would become more relevant if we keep in mind the perspective of the overall state of strategic relations between the Soviet Union and the United States since my research deals mainly with the response of the two Superpowers to the fluid ever-changing conditions in Afghanistan. It is now accepted by and large that the Soviet Union emerged in the 1970's as a global Power endowed with the necessary will and power capability to achieve its perceived foreign-policy goals in different parts of the world. Indeed this growing global power and global ambitions of the Soviet Union constituted the focus of the world's attention. Washington now took notice of the new superpower and was compelled to share the superpower status with the Soviet Union. United States now was seriously concerned about the ways and means of stopping the emergence of Soviet Union as a global Power. The demonstrative aspect of the Soviet power was very convincing; for the Soviet Union intervened successfully in Angola, Mozambique, and the

Ethiopian-Somali conflict. This success was due partly to the parity in the overall strategic balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States. The United States too felt that it was because of the strategic parity of nuclear arsenals and its powerful seven-ocean blue navy that the Soviet Union had been made bold to indulge in interventionist operations, either directly or by proxy in Angola, Mozambique and the Horn of Africa. This strategic parity, together with a number of global developments in which each superpower reacted differently from the other, created a feeling of distrust between the two. Even before the eruption of the Afghan crisis¹⁵ and other developments in South-West Asia, each had started accusing the other of being responsible for the deterioration of relations between them and for the erosion of the spirit of détente.

CONSEQUENCES: The implications of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan have yet to be fully absorbed by policy makers in affected countries. That landmark development had profound consequences for the politics of South Asia in the decades ahead. As we assess the consequences of the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, we cannot afford to overlook one drastic change that has come about with regards to the Soviet Union. Soviet power till the time of the invasion was exercising its military power elsewhere. With this action, it now has acquired the capability needed “to influence events in remote areas and the habit of defining its interest in a global rather than a solely continental basis”.¹⁶ Indeed, the Soviet Union, had for many years, used its growing military capability to assert its influence and establish its presence all over the world. However, apart from suppressing popular uprisings in Eastern Europe, it had generally avoided putting its own combat units into regional conflicts or domestic upheavels. Afghanistan aptly represented the culmination of those trends in that the Soviets were unabashedly and directly using their own forces. Therefore, Afghanistan marked a departure from the earlier Soviet position in as much as the Soviet military power was being used for the first time since 1940 in an effort to extend Soviet dominance beyond its previous perimeter on the Eurasian landmass by preserving a new addition to the Socialist camp. Perhaps the most significance inheres in the advance of Moscow’s military power to the Khyber Pass for the first time in its long imperial history. The USSR’s domains now bordered directly on the Indian sub-continent, and as a result its diplomatic options and political leverage have been enormously increased. Whereas the control of the Wakhan corridor contributes only marginally to the USSR’s policy of outflanking China and

¹⁵ Kapur, K.D., *Soviet Strategy In South Asia (Perspectives on Soviet policies towards the Indian Subcontinent And Afghanistan)*, Young Asia Publications, NewDelhi (1983), chapter8 (Afghanistan:Challenge and Response), pp 318-319.

¹⁶ Sonnenfeldt, Helmut. *Soviet Politics In The 1980's*, Westview Press (1985).

heightening its sense of vulnerability, the frontal advance to the long and exposed Pakistani border unquestionably establishes the USSR as a force to be feared, even more than the 1960s and 1970s, in the foreign policy evaluations of Islamabad and New Delhi. The era is long gone when Pakistan and India (and of course Afghanistan) could contemplate exploiting the us-Soviet rivalry to extract regional advantages. Henceforth, the threat of intrusive and potentially disruptive Soviet power and subversion would play an important role in shaping the foreign policies of the regional actors. The time of the Soviet move, co-incided with the revolution in Iran which implied that there was a possibility for the spread of unrest and instability to the Arabian Peninsula, and marked a new and dangerous step in the ongoing Soviet-American rivalry and a blow to the prospects of détente that the two superpowers tried to fashion in the early 1970s. Time and again, Moscow acted in the Middle East to advance its objectives, regardless of the effects of its actions on its relations with Washington. With extension of the Soviet control over Afghanistan, Moscow signaled the primacy of its regional geo-strategic ambitions over global concerns for stabilizing US-Soviet relations. Whatever short-term difficulties Moscow faced in pacifying Afghanistan were overshadowed by the advantages that might redound to a Soviet Union entrenched on Afghan territory. Finally, but surely the most important outcome which carries special relevance in the assessment of influence, the relationship between Soviet Union and the Afghanistan which transformed permanently. No longer is it a patron-client relationship or that of a powerful neighbor interacting with an economically backward but politically independent client, it was now a relationship of the ruler to the ruled, of occupier to the occupied, of invader to invaded. Afghanistan, which was never before in its history in the Russian sphere of influence, had lost its nonaligned and independent character. The fraternal assistance extended by Moscow was costly, involved shedding blood and had 'negative' as well as 'positive' aspects but its aims were completely different from any that preceded the invasion of December 1979.

Afghanistan, till date, remains an enigma for the West. Afghanistan continues to be a distinctive case in the USSR's quest for influence in the Third World, not because of the Soviet readiness to use its military power outside of the Soviet bloc (since at various times the Soviet Union has deployed combat units in Cuba, Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria and Iraq) but this marks the first time in a Third World setting that Soviet troops have been used to replace on domestic faction with another; and because, notwithstanding the risk of international opprobrium. Moscow set greater store on institutionalizing ultimate Soviet authority through direct interference in the internal affairs of a friendly government than on continuing support for a communist client whose policies it deemed detrimental to long-term Soviet interests in

the area. Contiguity was also a crucial catalyst, and it could occasion a similar Soviet response in Iran, if that revolution were to veer to the pro-Soviet left and then be threatened by destabilization and counterrevolution. However, the massive Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan remains an improbable model for predicting Soviet policy in the Third World lying beyond the borders of Afghanistan and Iran.

CHAPTER 3

DIPLOMACY OF INSECURITY

This chapter will deal mainly with the responses of the US, China and Pakistan to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Though the topic of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has been dealt with in great details in the preceding chapter, it would be imperative to begin this chapter by recapitulating the events briefly to get a better understanding of the international response to the intervention and its far-reaching implications. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the nature and objectives of the international reaction and the extent of the Afghan resistance, as well as to analyse and discuss the impact of international reaction to the Soviet Union itself. By doing so, we can reach an objective understanding of the events unfolding in Afghanistan.

The overthrow of the Taraki Government served a “blow to the Soviet prestige” and Moscow was faced with the dilemma as to how to keep the Amin government in power. The Soviets decided to send further reinforcements and military supplies. The growing presence of internal resistance and the Amin government’s failure to contain it, coupled with his gestures towards the United States with a view to wriggle Afghanistan out of the Soviet bloc were some of the developments which were seriously taken note of in Moscow. It compelled Moscow to take charge of the crumbling situation. The Soviet Union could not afford to let Afghanistan slip out of its hands. Consequently, on December 25, 1979 Moscow sent its troops to Afghanistan, which led to Amin’s overthrow. He was succeeded by Babrak Karmal, a Parchamite who was recalled from Czechoslovakia. Karmal, who was more amenable to Soviet control, became the new Prime Minister and Chairman of the Revolutionary Council of Afghanistan on 27 December, 1979. The emergence of Karmal regime backed by Soviet troops gave a final blow to Afghanistan’s policy of non- alignment. Karmal and the Soviet media defended the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan on the plea that Soviet help was made available to Afghanistan under Article 4 of the Afghan-Soviet Treaty of Friendship of 1978¹. The continued presence of Soviet troops to keep the puppet Babrak Karmal Government in power had given a final blow to the non-aligned stature of Afghanistan. Since the April coup, the traditional status of Afghanistan as a non-aligned country was eroded. The next blow came when Afghanistan signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in December 1978. But the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 and the

¹ Mohammed Amin Wakman, ‘Afghanistan, Non-Alignment and Superpowers, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi(1985),,pp. 122-138.

continued presence of massive Soviet troops finally jeopardized the non-aligned status of Afghanistan and rudely awakened the international community to the military might and strategic parity of the emergent superpower, the USSR.

From 1978 on, events in Afghanistan unfolded with certain inevitability. The Soviet invasion prompted by a gamut of ideological and strategic factors, was undertaken in order to provide the ultimate FORCE MAJEURE² solution one that had already been successfully employed in Eastern Europe. But this model did not work in Afghanistan where opposition not only spread but also sharpened and solidified. Meanwhile, those familiar with the country knew beforehand that no Communist government could survive there without massive outside support; but the intensity, persistence and pervasiveness of the resistance came as a surprise to the Soviets. Through 1978-1979 these qualities called forth even greater political and military counter-measures from the Taraki and Amin governments and from the USSR. These, in turn, only stiffened the opposition, both internally and internationally.

Never before has world public opinion been so intensely exercised about any Soviet action as on the intervention in Afghanistan. On the earlier occasions, that is, during the Hungarian episode in 1956 or the Czechoslovak crisis of 1968 although there had been widespread protests these were not organized at the popular level. The intervention in Afghanistan came as a rude shock to all- friends and foes alike. It was due to the fact that by then, the Soviet Union had come to be regarded by the peoples of the Third World, if not as a natural ally, then certainly as a genuine and reliable friend committed to the policy of non-interference in their internal affairs. The Western world, particularly, the United States of America, which seemed to have advance information about the mobilization of Soviet forces along the Soviet-Afghan border, were stunned by the speed and magnitude of the action. Seen as a recrudescence of the age-old Russian design to reach warm water ports the Western analysts termed it as the beginning of the second Cold War; a grand design for world socialist revolution, the blueprint of by the Marxist leaders in the 1920s.

The international reaction, though quick and sharp, had been a mixed one. While the Western powers and the countries of the Third World, with only a few exceptions had condemned and strongly deplored the Soviet action, the members of the Warsaw Pact, with the exception of Romania had extended full support to the Soviets. Moreover, the Communist parties the world over, except the Chinese Communist Party, had unequivocally supported the Soviet Union. Of the Third World countries, the Government of India had adopted a cautious

²² Anthony Arnold, 'AFGHANISTAN: The Soviet Invasion In Perspective, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California (1981), Chapter 9- Aftermath And Recommendations, pp. 97-107.

attitude; while voicing its disapproval of the Soviet action it had also criticized the continued interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by other external powers.

THE US RESPONSE: The US response to the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had been very sharp and it triggered a major reassessment of the role of United States in the world. As analysed in the preceding chapter, the advent of Russian-backed Communist regime in Kabul was in itself the harbinger of deterioration in the US-Afghan relations. The beginning of the year 1979 was marked by an increased Russian interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The brutal assassination of the US Ambassador in Kabul, Adolph Dubs³ in February 1979, proved a last straw in the wind. The United States had been the first countries to condemn the Soviet action as 'invasion'. President Carter who was an architect of the SALT II, came out with an open attack on the intervention and could not hide his anger which was expressed in unequivocal terms. This kind of response looked reasonable particularly when the effectiveness of the CIA⁴, as an operational force for collecting strategic intelligence, involving the US strategic interests is taken into account. This was particularly significant in view of the developments in Iran and the nature and extent of the involvement of Soviet Strategic interests in Iran and Afghanistan. Particularly, President Carter expressed 'surprise' at the Soviet move, which inaugurated a new era of Cold War. In this context, therefore, was the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan SUI GENERIS⁵ - a class by itself- or was it a response to a series of provocations by the United States? The Soviet Union stuck firmly to its claim that it had merely responded to a series of provocations from the United States affecting the entire spectrum of superpower relationship, and more specifically to US, Pakistan and Chinese intervention against the Afghan revolution. At the other end, President Carter held on to his "Quantum Jump" theory, labeling the Afghan intervention as a new Soviet offensive to threaten the jugular of the Western world. The majority of the Americans shared Carter's view, but a strong dissent minority came from all walks of life- government, the mass media, the universities, business and even the military. West European governments were torn between rejecting the Soviet explanation of the intervention and accepting Carter administration's interpretation of it; on the whole they struck a middle non-aligned posture, indicating that they were less than certain about what it really meant.

³ Mohammad Khalid Maarooof, *Afghanistan In World Politics(A Study of Afghan-US Relations)*, Gian Publishing House, New Delhi(1987), Chapter 6- Russian Invasion of Afghanistan., pp.112-132.

⁴ CIA- Central intelligence Agency, US Secret Service Wing, For details, see, M.P.Srivastava, *The Soviet Intervention In Afghanistan*, Ess Ess Publications, New Delhi.

⁵ Sui Generis- an event, personality or phenomenon which can be considered unique by all standards.

Indeed, for both Washington and Moscow, the Afghan crisis was the culmination of a series of provocations slugged by one to the other over a period of years. For the United States, Afghanistan was a daring climax of the Soviet military intervention through proxy wars in the third world conflict through the seventies, a direct assault on the global balance of power. For the Soviets, the US response to their perfectly legitimate and entirely defensive action in Afghanistan was the culmination of a series of invasions against détente and a thundering herald of the off-season cold war. Let us now study the provocations that compelled the superpowers to assume charge and take the action that they eventually did. As is normally accepted in the Western academic circles, the Soviet provocation was two-fold. Firstly, vigorously outspending the United States over a period of 15 years, a time when America was consumed by the wasting wars in Vietnam- the USSR caught up with it, even edged ahead of it, its adversary in strategic nuclear power. Secondly, it also proclaimed its arrival on the world scene as a global power, with a seven-ocean blue-water navy, military capability to intervene in the 'local conflicts' far away from the borders of USSR and a demonstrated political will to use this capability as a selective tool of the Soviet foreign policy. Under the impact of these two colossal events, the personality of USSR as a world power profoundly changed. It posed an unprecedented challenge to the United States. For 20 years, the United States had dealt with USSR as a JUNIOR⁶ superpower. This great global preeminence of the United States was stolen by the USSR in the decade of the seventies. Therefore, in jeopardy were the world wide security parameters erected by the United States, the strategic and military doctrines nourished since the fifties, the basic concepts and designs of the US foreign policy now were brought to the fore ready to be revamped to suit the changing political situation. To make it worse, the Soviet challenge hit a United States already wounded by a series of economic, political and military blows, and caught in the coils of anguished social change that had a direct bearing on its role as a world power. For America, the decade of the seventies was erected on the smouldering wreckage of the sixties threatening the loss of a way of life. The decade itself turned out to be more revolutionary than any since World War II, one of the bleakest for the American foreign policy and one of the stormiest for its domestic politics. It went down in the American history as a decade of run-away oil-prices, Watergate, two bouts of double-digit inflation meshed with two major recessions in seven years, military defeat in Vietnam, and climaxing all these debacles, the fall of the Shah of Iran, Washington's most trusted and steadfast ally in the Third World. High unemployment,

⁶ Reference to JUNIOR SUPERPOWER- Bhabani Sengupta, *The Afghan Syndrome: How To Live With The Soviet Power*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi(1982), pp 48-65.

continuing fall in productivity, far-reaching demographic changes, decline of public regard for authority as manifested in government, political institutions and personalities combined together to crank the ramparts of optimism of the American Capitalism, and set the limits of the Great American Dream.

Soviet parity in strategic power, Soviet capability to wield a global foreign policy, and the binds on American power provided the backdrop to the efforts of US presidents Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger to erect détente as the infrastructure of world politics in an era of negotiations. As Nixon was still grappling with the problem of how to manage the emergence of the Soviet Union as a superpower; what lay demonstrated in front was the global changes of 1975, mainly the demonstrated Soviet ability to help the MPLA in Angola with arms and weapons and a Cuban expeditionary force win the civil war against forces backed by South Africa and gingerly by the United States and establish a pro-USSR regime in strategic southern Africa. The changed power relationship called for a new balance of power. Kissinger was ready to concede a balance of strategic power based on parity; this parity provided the base for the slow- moving SALT process. But the real trouble lay somewhere else, it lay in the 'gray areas' of the Third World where the United States was neither in a position to preserve the western dominance nor in a mood to yield to Moscow's sustained pressures. To get over this problem, Henry Kissinger crafted the 'LINKAGE THEORY',⁷ which in one form or another, had remained till 1981 the principal US concept of a new relationship with the Soviet Union. Kissinger offered Moscow institutionalized strategic parity- the SALT treaties- but demanded Soviet restraint⁸ in the Third World. Thus linkage became synonymous with an overall strategic and geo-political view. The Soviets rejected the linkage theory outright . In Soviet thinking, détente stemmed from not from subjective sentiments of peace and goodwill among nations, but from the objective reality of decline of the capitalist and the rise of the socialist power. The 'battle of ideas' and the national liberation struggles could not be sacrificed at the altar of détente; thus we see that if anything, détente accelerated both ideological polarization and the struggles of the Third World for political, economic and social emancipation. The next US President, Jimmy Carter, shied

⁷ Linkage Theory – Henry Kissinger's brainchild. Seen mainly as a concept which formed the foundation of the American Foreign policy. According to the US perception, linkage existed in two forms: first, when a diplomat deliberately links two separate objectives in a negotiation, using one as a leverage on the other; or by virtue of reality, because in an interdependent world the actions of a major power are inevitably related and have consequences beyond the issue or region immediately concerned.

⁸ The Basic Principles of US-Soviet Relations, proclaimed at the 1972 Moscow Summit laid down that the two powers "will always exercise restraint in their mutual relations" and agreed that efforts to obtain unilateral advantages at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, would be inconsistent with the objectives of détente.

away from Kissinger's balance of power strategic thinking labeling it 'too cynical' a game of power politics, bereft of idealistic objectives. With Zbigniew Brezinezski, as National Security Adviser and as its main architect, Carter's foreign policy started with allocating a low priority to the relationship with USSR; his first summit with Brezhnev came in the summer of 1979, nearly three years after his election. As Carter's principal foreign policy strategist, he separated SALT from the rest of the superpower relationship.

From a geo-political and strategic point of view, 1979 turned out to be the most turbulent period for American Foreign policy. Carter's popularity nose-dived with the fall of Shah; his leadership qualities were seriously questioned both by Americans and the West Europeans. He became all the more vulnerable because of the approaching presidential elections. A majority of the foreign policy decision-making elite, within and outside the US government, came to the conclusion that the most effective answer to the twin challenge of Soviet global power and regime instabilities in the 'arc of crises'⁹ was a rapid enhancement of America's own global military power. The US also observed that the basic Soviet strategy was to achieve a maximum degree of influence(in the Gulf and Southern Africa) and the gradual reduction of US's own world position. America felt that now was the opportune moment to take the right action as US inaction in one conflict area after another would shake world confidence in American leadership, and the Soviet Union would certainly press to the limits of its geopolitical strength as that essentially was the nature of a great communist power.

Following the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in the last week of December 1979, the United States took effective measures to meet the challenges posed by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Exhibiting supreme swiftness, the Carter Administration issued a notice to the Soviet Union stating that the invasion was considered as a hostile act that threatened the détente. He observed that " the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and attempted forceful occupation of that fiercely independent, non-aligned Moslem nation has had a profoundly negative impact on the international community¹⁰". The specific US responses to the Russian actions in Afghanistan were announced by President Carter in his message to the nation suggesting the following US measures in that regard.

⁹ Arc Of Crisis, National Security Advisor to US President, Jimmy Carter. Z.Brzezinski in a political statement in 1978 had stated that the contours of new confrontation would be staged in the ' arc of crisis' by which he meant, a number of countries that had different internal causes of instability but cumulatively were facing widespread regional imbalances.

¹⁰ USICA, Chronology Of Afghanistan Events: A Retrospective, (New Delhi, 1980), pp.242.

1. Blocking grain sales to the Soviet Union beyond the 8 million metric tones already contracted. This meant withholding an additional 17 million metric tones which the Soviets had already ordered.
2. Stopping the sale of high technology and strategic items to the Soviet Union, including computers and oil-drilling equipment.
3. Curbing Soviet fishing privileges in the US waters. The catch allowed to Soviet fishing fleets in 1980 would be reduced from 350,000 to 75,000 tons resulting in an estimated Soviet economic loss of \$55 million to \$60 million.
4. Delaying the opening of a new Soviet consulate in New York and an American Consulate in Kiev.
5. Postponing new cultural and economic exchanges between the two countries, which were then under considerations.
6. Boycotting the 1980 summer Olympics in Moscow.

Though these measures received only partial support from the US allies and other friendly countries, they certainly created a discomfort for Soviet Russia. Meanwhile, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had accelerated the process of reinforcements of some form of qualified globalism for the US policy. The invasion appeared to challenge the United States to create a new policy based on a new national consensus, one that required the necessary military power to support whatever role it was determined to play.

CHAPTER 4

TRUTH OF RHETORIC AND ACTION

This chapter draws a parallel between Afghanistan as it was two decades back and Afghanistan as it is now. In this chapter, an attempt will be made to find out how far have the re-construction commitments been fulfilled to rebuild the war- torn country. The reaction of major global powers towards Afghanistan is clearly floundering leading to greater instability in South Asia.

When the Soviets changed the leadership from Babrak Karmal to Dr. Najibullah in May 1986, the new leader was told that the Red Army could not stay indefinitely in Afghanistan and would have to withdraw. The Soviet leaders received the green signal regarding withdrawal in February of that year when the Soviet Communist Party in its XXVIIth Congress asked for the withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan. The cost of the war was mounting for the Soviets. However, they kept taking consolation in the fact that with its new leadership and its new policy of ‘national conciliation’¹ and the training of its cadres was strong enough to fight its own war. Pressure was mounting on the Soviet Union internationally and domestically from within its borders, especially when their casualty figures began to be uncovered and revealed to the public through several well- researched and extensively publicized examples of investigative journalism. Of the twin policies of Glasnost and Perestroika initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev, Glasnost (policy of openness) worsened the condition. Glasnost was a policy meant to give the Soviet populace an insight into the Soviet bureaucratic and administrative apparatus and enhance the credibility of the CPSU, backfired. It failed to deliver the desired result. It instead opened the floodgates of complaints and grievances which undermined the stature of the Soviet government within its own people. The Soviet populace for the first time could see the difference between rhetoric and reality. Furthermore, Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and the expansion of the government’s counter- operative forces increased government expenditure far more than the combined sources at its disposal. As the Soviet Union was the major source continuing to foot the bill, it drove itself bankrupt in the process. This was immediately apparent after its collapse in 1991. In 1984, a year before the build- up of all these pressures, the Soviets had appointed a new leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, whose comparatively liberal views on Glasnost and Perestroika, restructuring and openness were making headlines. Gorbachev in his Alma Ata, Kazakhstan

¹ Afghanistan: Political Frailty and Foreign Interference, Dr.Nabi Misdaq, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, USA/2006, pp 164- 165.

speech promised to withdraw from Afghanistan and in his 1986 famous Vladivostok speech, he called the war in Afghanistan “a bleeding wound”. The war in the first two years of Gorbachev’s rule intensified. Most observers concluded that he was giving the Soviet generals their last opportunity of proving themselves against the Afghan resistance. But the continuing Red Army atrocities further hardened the Afghan resolve. In this regard, it is worthwhile to mention that for the Afghan resistance forces, the Stinger missiles were the turning point in the war. Before the arrival of the Stinger, the Mujahideen forces gave the impression that they were fighting a local war, in their own tribal and ethnic regions and that there was a lack of overall national scheme. With the arrival of Stingers, for whose training and distribution the CIA and the ISI were responsible turned the war into a nationally planned and executed project with a considerable amount of technical, material and financial help from the external powers. As the Soviet casualties and pressure from the international community increased, the Soviets were compelled to start pulling out their troops, quitting Afghanistan completely in 1989.

After the Communist government of Dr. Najibullah fell in April 1992, the resistance entered a new phase of struggle, this time attempting to seize power on a national level. Till this point, all resistance parties, despite not having a common leadership, shared the common cause of overthrowing the Communists driving the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, from this point onwards a new stage of vicious accountability based on ethnic and religious ties emerged. This chapter would also deal with the internecine warfare among the Islamists and the remnants of Islamists and the Taliban. The vested interests of Pakistan and Iran, with money and arms from America, Saudi Arabia and the Soviets for the two opposing sides helped the resistance from its embryonic stage to its later development. It was during those years that the resistance acquired the training, experience and the resources for the destructive war that was to follow them.

In the Geneva Accord of 1988, the Red Army agreed to withdraw from Afghanistan in phases, and complete the evacuation by 1989. Once the Communists and the Soviets as a common enemy had gone, Afghanistan was left in the hands of a multiplicity of factions led by warlords who had networks of support based on ethnicity, language, religion, political ideology, kinship, regional affiliations and so on. They also had access to arms, money and external resources. Hence they turned public property into private killing fields. The same external powers that waged a proxy war against each other at the expense of Afghan lives replaced Afghanistan’s central power with their favoured bands of armed groups. This

situation provided the grounds for the fractured nature of the Afghan society to reach a boiling point, playing havoc with the lives of thousands of Afghans and reducing the nation to a rubble. The US, a principal actor in the war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, having achieved its strategic objective, left the post-war handling of Afghanistan to its junior partner Pakistan, among others. US allies like Saudi Arabia and China dittoed the choice, considering that Pakistan is Afghanistan's nextdoor neighbour and has a clout in that country². Strangely enough, what did not occur to them was that a failing state like Pakistan was ill-equipped to reconstruct a war-ravaged country! Whether Pakistan carried the clout and the influence to re-build Afghanistan remains doubtful, but it goes to Pakistan's credit to make the warring groups clamour for political power in Afghanistan sign the Peshawar agreement of April 1992. Under this agreement, power was to be shared between two main contending groups. In 1993, when Burhanuddin Rabbani took over as President under the Peshawar Accord from Prof. Sibghatullah Mojadidi, Afghanistan started making independent gestures towards countries like India, much to Pakistan's discomfiture. Around 1994, the managers of Afghanistan in Pakistan establishment decided that they could not depend on the traditional leadership of Afghans, and new groups needed to be created which would be completely dependent on them and also remain loyal. To this end, Taliban was created.

By February 1989, the last Soviet armoured columns were pulling out of the Republic of Afghanistan, as part of a negotiated international peace process (the Geneva Accords). Despite the post-war claims that they had been humiliatingly defeated, the Soviet forces in reality withdrew in good order, and left in place a regime in Kabul with (in principle) more than sufficient military force to defend itself. The Soviets had also managed to complement their military retreat with a facilitative local political agenda from 1986 onwards, in which the then-recently appointed (and Soviet-backed) Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah publicly went on record as being ready to negotiate the declared enemies as part of a new 'National Reconciliation Policy'³. It is important to mention here that the Soviet-trained Afghan armed forces continued to be undermined by corruption and desertion eroding the very base of the Najibullah government; while the Geneva Accords contained significant political loop-hole, given that they committed neither the Soviets nor the Americans to reducing military deliveries to their respective clients. With both the government and the mujahideen receiving significant funding from abroad, the internal military-political

² Article: The Taliban: A Seven-Year Wonder? (ed) Sreedhar, Afghanistan In Transition, Indian Council Of World Affairs, New Delhi, 2003. pp 26- 27.

³ AFGHANISTAN: How The West Lost Its Way, TIM BIRD & ALEX MARSHALL, Yale University Press, Orient BlackSwan Publishers, 2011. Chapter 1- The Great Enigma: Afghanistan In Historical Context, pp. 24- 25.

situation in Afghanistan remained deadlocked, and Najibullah was unable to make any significant progress with the National Reconciliation Policy. Initially there were promising signs as the number of mujahideen who defected to the government side rose sharply. But unfortunately, it fell much faster too. This meant that, 25 per cent of all non- government armed units had signed conciliation agreements and several units had signed ceasefire agreements, yet the overall reconciliation process lacked significant forward momentum, an experience that in many ways mirrored NATO's experience in 2009- 10. Yet the mujahideen also proved incapable of overwhelming the well- armed Afghan regular army, even when occasionally supported by cross- border Pakistani army artillery fire. The key to the collapse of the Soviet- backed government in Afghanistan therefore lay not in some well- organized mujahideen military victory, but in the ongoing political disintegration of the Soviet Union itself, with the last official Soviet foreign minister pledging in September 1991 (barely two months before the dissolution of the Soviet Union) to cut off all military and economic aid to Najibullah by January 1992.

By March 1992, UN negotiators had persuaded Najibullah to step aside, with the Afghan president publicly announcing his resignation and willingness to hand over power to a transition government. Reading the writing on the wall, one of Najibullah's most capable military commanders in the north of the country, the Uzbek General Dostum, defected the very next day to ally his 40,000- plus military contingent, including artillery and armoured vehicles, with the followers of the indefatigable Takik insurgent Ahmad Shah Masoud. Kabul fell rapidly to both men's combined forces the following month. Having earlier evacuated his family to India, Najibullah was reduced to seeking refuge within the tenuous security of the UN compound in Kabul. Four years later, the Taliban broke into his compound and brutally tortured and murdered him in one of the most vivid displays of the nature of Taliban public justice.

The 1992 collapse of the Najibullah government in the wake of the withdrawal of Soviet military and economic support was followed, with depressing inevitability, by a mujahideen civil war over the division of the spoils. The mujahideen movement that had emerged during the war against the Soviet- backed PDPA government in Kabul had long been marked by internal divisions. The most obvious was the gulf between the eight predominantly Sunni parties based in Pakistan. These geopolitical distinctions were then further compounded by internal divisions within both fronts between royalists and political moderates on the one hand, and Islamists on the other. Against this backdrop, the Islamist groups in Pakistan possessed an organizational advantage, since they had already established a nascent political

infrastructure there prior to 1979. They were also favoured by a powerful actor, a player whose influence and effects on events in Afghanistan and Pakistan resonate to this day: the Inter- Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) of the Pakistani military.

THE MUJAHIDEEN FRAGMENTATION: The Mujahideen movement that grew up in the refugee camps in Pakistan rapidly came under the wing of the ISI. Established in 1948 as the successor to the Intelligence Bureau (IB), manned and controlled exclusively by the Pakistani military, and charged since its creation with gathering and analyzing both external and internal political intelligence in the region, the ISI by the 1980's had evolved into one of the major players in Pakistan's government. The role and scale of the ISI Afghan Bureau's efforts during the 1980's was reflected in the fact that over 80,000 mujahideen passed through ISI training camps, hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons and ammunition were distributed, and disruptive operations were planned and carried out in twenty- nine provinces in Afghanistan. However, if as the tragic story of the post- 2001 intervention unfolds, Afghanistan, like Kashmir, was, in the eyes of the ISI, merely a pawn in the wider struggle against what it perceived to be the Pakistan state's main opponent- India. During the 1980's, the ISI served as a vital intermediary in funneling foreign arms and aid, in what rapidly became the largest global covert operation in modern intelligence history. In particular, the ISI acquired a monopoly over the actual in-theatre distribution of funds and weapons, with arms being issued to the mujahideen not only to carry out operations, but also a reward for success. On ground itself, the ISI distributed arms to those groups which it felt most closely conformed to Pakistan's own military and political goals for Afghanistan. The royalist parties quickly lost out in this process, due to Pakistan's insistence, fuelled by its wariness of Pashtun nationalism, that only religiously oriented parties and leaders could operate on its soil. The enormous institutional footprint of the ISI in Pakistan, and its immense overall political and economic influence in directing this process, reflected Pakistan's own dysfunctional evolution. Ever since the state's creation, the military had eluded civilian control, and took its self- designated status as guardian of the nation as sufficient justification to frequently seize the reins of power. The Pakistani military dictator General Zia-Ul-Haq, following his takeover in 1977 vigorously pursued the increasing Islamization of Pakistani public and political life, while simultaneously propagating his own strategic vision for the wider region. Zia foresaw Afghanistan becoming 'a real Islamic state, part of a pan- Islamic revival that will one day win over the Muslims of the Soviet Union. Nor did Iran hesitate to ruthlessly pursue its own national interests with regard to the mujahideen factions based on its territory. Afghan moderate nationalists were repressed, but thousands of young Shi'ite

Afghan refugees received training in Iranian religious schools aimed at fostering the emergence of a pro- Ayatollah Khomeini camp among Afghan Shi'ites.

During this time, the ISI identified Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's rigidly centralized Hizb- i Islami-yi Afghanistan (HIH- Islamic Party of Afghanistan) as its most favoured client. This marked the beginning of a close relationship between Hekmatyar and elements of the Pakistani security bureaucracy that persists to this day – a further example of a lack of fastidiousness when courting allies deemed useful in Pakistan's strategic calculations. Hekmatyar's organization fully met the ISI's requirement for a disciplined military institution that would do what it was told, and only HIH's subsequent inability to fully mobilize the Pashtun tribal leader belt later led the ISI to shift its focus to the Taliban. The fragmentation of the Afghan mujahideen – generated by the need both to cultivate external sponsorship and to remain in favour with the ISI- was further compounded by the political and physical distance separating Party leaders based in Pakistan or Iran (the external front) and field commanders actually fighting within Afghanistan itself (the internal front). Consequently, the image of unity which the leaders of the political 'external front' attempted to present to their various foreign backers never reflected the reality of the fighting within Afghanistan itself, which was frequently characterized by 'turf war' struggles between rival factions. For pressing economic reasons, commanders on the ground usually aligned themselves with one or other of the external parties. For instance, the Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud was dubbed 'The Lion of Panjshir' by the Western press, and probably the most effective mujahideen field commander to emerge during the whole course of the war, affiliated himself with Burhanuddin Rabbani's Jama'at Islami-yi Afghanistan (JIA). However, the mass of mujahideen in the field owed their loyalty to their commander along horizontal lines of local social (*qawm*) networks, rather than along vertical lines of political loyalty. Most famously, Massoud unilaterally concluded a personal truce with Soviet forces in 1983. ISI's distrust of Massoud's independent ways meant that he was destined to receive only eight examples of the American- supplied Stinger anti- aircraft missile, the single most important and technologically sophisticated weapon provided by foreign aid to the mujahideen after 1986. In spite of retrospectively mythologizing and harping on the fact that all groups were fighting for a common cause with uncompromising determination, the mujahideen inter- party fighting ended up inflicting as many casualties within Afghanistan as Soviet or PDPA military activity, with relations becoming particularly bad between Rabbani's JIA and Hekmatyar's HIH. Against this backdrop, mujahideen efforts to establish a unified government in the wake of Najibullah's fall from power always looked fragile. The ISI, with

Saudi backing, continued to back Hekmatyar over other leaders. During 1990, Hekmatyar launched two unsuccessful bids to hasten Najibullah's collapse which was eventually halted by protests from the US State Department. Kabul eventually fell to the Massoud- Dostum alliance in April 1992. However, fighting soon broke out within the city between Massoud's forces on one side, and Hekmatyar's HIIH on the other. Between May and August 1992, Hekmatyar periodically bombarded Kabul with rockets, killing over 1500 civilians and, according to UN estimates, turning more than 50,000 people into refugees. As the year drew to an end, over 5000 people had been killed and perhaps a million had fled. Kabul itself, the epicenter of Soviet investment in the country, and formerly a significant modern conurbation (enjoying clean water, gas, electricity, an airport, schools, a university, modern housing, decent roads and an effective sewerage system), was reduced to rubble. In the process, the city was also transformed into a neo- medieval micro- state, whose every inch was disputed and fought over by rival warlord factions.

Caught in the midst of the fighting between Hikmatyar and Massoud around Kabul was the one, notably unsuccessful, attempt to form a coalition government by mujahideen moderates. As early as January 1988, Washington had voiced concerns that the predominantly secular and well-educated Afghans living in the Communist-controlled regions of the country might so dread the potential social consequences of an extremist like Hekmatyar seizing power that they would support Najibullah remaining in office over the longer term, even in the wake of the Soviet pullout. Such concerns eventually triggered a gradual overall rethink of American policy towards Afghanistan. This, in turn, led to a shift by 1990 towards encouraging the creation of a future governing coalition of 'Afghan' moderates, one that excluded both Najibullah, at one end of the political spectrum, and Hekmatyar and extreme Islamist groups at the other. The 'National Commanders Shura'(NCS) of mujahideen leaders was then formed in May 1990. Briefly speaking, therefore, this policy appeared to promise the emergence of a nascent 'third movement' in Afghan politics, located between the Najibullah government and the ISI's closest clients. Those leaders who remained within the NCS were quickly invited by Massoud to Kabul in 1992 to help form a transitional government. In April of that year they agreed to create an interim government with a rotating presidency, within which Massoud served as defence minister, while Sebghatullah Mojadidi served as the head of state for two months, and Burhanuddin Rabbani for four months. However, this process brought to the fore long-simmering tensions between the 'external' and 'internal' fronts of the mujahideen movement, with a disillusioned Massoud soon declaring that the external front leaders had failed to work out a coherent unified programme of government. A multi-

polar war of 'all against all' then broke out, involving the Iranian-backed Hizb-i Wahdat (in alliance with local Hazaras), Hekmatyar, Massoud's Tajiks and JIA forces, and Dostum's Uzbek forces, which played all sides, first defecting from Massoud to ally with Hekmatyar, before then ultimately rejoining Massoud's 'Northern Alliance' in the wake of the eventual fall of Kabul to the Taliban. Predictably, those who suffered the most from this civil war were, the civilian population in Kabul, with the Mujahideen becoming completely discredited in the eyes of many Afghans as 'worse than the Russians'. However, this chaos also placed under threat Pakistan's rich cross-border trade with the Central Asian States, an energy and economic transit corridor in which the new government of Benazir Bhutto, maintained a strong and growing interest. A nexus of concerned power brokers within Pakistan began to view this growing chaos with increasing disquiet. Unfortunately, this led to a fateful decision to lend support to a growing force on the Afghan scene: the Taliban.

To assess the Taliban regime, one has to understand the collective political psyche prevailing in Afghanistan and the roots of its origin. The Taliban has always represented an enigma. The Western intelligence community has failed to establish a consensus as to the nature of this new phenomenon. What exactly was the Taliban? And who are the Talibanis? Was the Taliban an organic offshoot of the 1980's Afghan Mujahideen; a tribal coalition; or merely a proxy of the ISI? Western analysis prior to 2001 viewed the Taliban as backward, medieval, fundamentalist barbarians, more adept at radicalizing the Afghan society, than conducting modern warfare. This portrayal soon underwent a sharp change during the subsequent decade, and their coalition opponents soon realized that the Taliban was not only capable of demonstrating remarkable tactical flexibility, but were often more proficient at information warfare than they were themselves.

The roots of the Taliban movement lay in the network of religious *madrasas*⁴ that sprang up in Pakistan's FATA territories during the Islamization campaign that had characterized Zia ul- Haq's regime. Such intensive was Zia's Islamization drive that by 1988, the number of *madrasas* rose from 244 in 1956 to 2891 in 1988, most of which belonged to the puritanical Deobandi movement much favoured by external Saudi sponsors. These schools, which provided free room and board and a monthly salary with which students could support their families, became a magnet for children from the Afghan refugee camps. The camps themselves, located miles from any town, made it extremely hard to find legitimate civilian jobs. Consequently, students (*talibs*) at these religious schools frequently participated in the

⁴ Madrasas (Islamic seminaries)

anti-Soviet and anti-Najibullah *jihads* as members of the mujahideen parties based in Peshawar. They took part in the fighting, managed the religious affairs of the mujahideen groups, and performed prayers over the dead. The Taliban were therefore already participants of the 1980s mujahideen movement. The future leader of the Taliban movement, Mullah Mohammad Omar, was one of the many *jihadist* war veterans. According to another version about the emergence of Taliban, in 1993, when Burhanuddin Rabbani took over as President under the Peshawar Accord from Prof. Sebghatullah Mojadidi, Afghanistan started making independent gestures towards countries like India, much to Pakistan's discomfiture. The following year, in 1994, the managers of Afghanistan in Pakistan establishment decided that they could not depend upon the traditional leadership of the Afghans, and new groups needed to be created which would be completely dependent on them and also remain loyal to them. Therefore, to this end Taliban was created. The ISI is said to have handpicked an anti-Soviet *jihadist* Mullah Omar to head the infant organization, with the help of Jamaat-i-Islami. Yet another story presented by the Taliban folklore, accredits the emergence to Mullah Omar's moral disgust at mujahideen leadership failings, and his subsequent decision, in the spring of 1994, to take up arms and, along with thirty *talib* followers armed with just sixteen rifles between them, liberate two young girls who had been abducted and repeatedly raped by a local warlord commander. In reality, however, it seems to have originated with outraged religious leaders mobilizing their local followers, with Mullah Omar only subsequently meeting the concerned clergy involved and agreeing retrospectively (after several petitions from them) to head the movement. Therefore, Mullah Omar and his group of students from the madrasas had got disgusted with the atrocities being committed by the warlords in Afghanistan and had decided to put an end to it with the help of God. Most people in the region knew by then that Pakistani armed forces in the guise of Taliban were assisting Mullah Omar. But no one seemed to pay heed and looked the other way instead, because of the prevailing anarchy in Afghanistan.

The Taliban as a movement attracted significant media attention with its seizure of the truck stop and border district centre of Spin Boldak on 12 October 1994 and gradually moved on to acquire a military momentum. A wide variety of actors saw potential in the movement, as a means of advancing their disparate interests. These interests were economic as well as political. For example, though the shortest route to Central Asia from Peshawar ran through Kabul, the Salang tunnel and Mazar-i-Sharif, Nasirullah Khan Babar and the Quetta transport mafia became keen advocates for an alternative north-western route to be opened up via Quetta, Kandahar and Herat, and on to Ashkhabad, the capital of Turkmenistan. The Taliban

became defenders of an advance convoy sent into Afghanistan to symbolically pioneer this route in October 1994. In a further demonstration of its relative skill in addressing external agendas, the Taliban project had by this time also attracted the attention and support of the US oil company Unocal and its Saudi counterpart, Delta, with Unocal successfully lobbying Washington to give Islamabad the green light over backing the Taliban, while Delta financed the provision of several hundred Toyota pickup trucks, which were converted into excellent high-speed advance convoys by Taliban troops.

Substantial help came to the Taliban from two unexpected quarters. The expatriate Afghan population in places like the United Arab Emirates, who had import/export business to and through Afghanistan, extended ready help to the Taliban for the latter's efforts to bring peace to the country. The Taliban consistently stated that they themselves did not want power, lest they give the impression that they, like all previous Mujahideen groups, were there solely for personal interests. The movement emphasized that as long as the next government continued to be Islamic and applied Islamic laws and regulations, they would hand over power to them. The Saudis came readily to help the Taliban expecting it to be a cat's paw to check mate the Iranians. Taliban's Islamic overtones gave clear indications of it being a Saudi handmaiden, which could become a pressure point vis-à-vis Iran and de-glamorize the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. The US chipped in, eyeing the prospect of pipelines for Central Asian oil and gas through Afghanistan, and throughout the 1996 even urged countries like India to recognize the Taliban government. The financial hub of the Persian Gulf provided an excellent background for the Taliban's success. But the Taliban and their mentors in Pakistan underestimated the capabilities of anti-Taliban forces, popularly known as Northern alliance. The degree of stiff resistance offered to the Taliban by these forces can be gauged by the fact that it took the Taliban twenty-four months (September 1996) to capture Kabul, and another twenty-two months to capture Mazar-i-Sharif, the stronghold of anti-Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan. Even so, the Taliban were controlling only 85-90 per cent of Afghanistan. The anti-Taliban forces managed to retain Panjshir Valley and offered stiff resistance. This prolonged confrontation, spread over four years, brought in its own dynamics. The Taliban not knowing how to govern a state, and their mentors in Pakistan thinking in terms of yet another experiment in governance, brought to the fore a whole set of new issues. The whole world learnt of the Taliban's actions like gender discrimination, human rights violations, ethnic cleansing, etc and was horrified at what the Taliban were doing and what they could do to international security. This issue will be dealt with in greater detail when we analyze and assess the period of Taliban governance.

The fall of Kandahar to Taliban forces in November established two methods of operation that went on to become critical to their wider strategic success. First, the Taliban's key potential opponent in Kandahar, Naqib, who commanded an estimated 2,500 men, did not resist, being persuaded to surrender instead, possibly for a bribe. This exemplified the Taliban's skill at exploiting local *qawm* networks to break away weaker and more vulnerable regional commanders, and their ability to threaten militia leaders with separation from their supporters. Money here was arguably of much less importance than local knowledge of the social networks concerned. Secondly, the fall of Kandahar meant that significant quantities of modern military equipment fell into Taliban hands, including tanks and MiG fighter jets. The Taliban therefore quickly demonstrated that they could expand their numbers exponentially, utilizing culturally traditional Afghan *lashkar* formations, and that they could effectively employ modern military equipment. Clashes in January 1995 between Hekmatyar's HIIH forces, situated around southern Kabul, and advancing Taliban troops led to yet further Taliban victories. The Taliban had by now grown to a force of at least 10,000 fighters, backed by perhaps as many as a hundred operational tanks. In addition, they had demonstrated a strikingly efficient command and control network, and a willingness to mount daring night operations. The movement also employed a notably accurate military arm, serviced by ex-communist military officers with specialized training. All this served to turn the Taliban, within the span of a few months, into a devastatingly effective hybrid force. Many international political observers suspected ISI help that might have co-ordinated the Taliban campaigns. The 1996 campaigning season was dominated by battles around the approaches to Kabul, with the Taliban again relying on a combination of high-speed advances along multiple axes, and the organized defection of waves of significant regional militia commanders. This double line of assault simultaneously disoriented and demoralized their opponents. On 26 September, Massoud elected to abandon Kabul, conducting a skilful retreat that allowed him to preserve and evacuate most of his armour, artillery and air power, but granting the Taliban the ultimate political prize. Thus, the Taliban phenomenon had swept all players from the national political scene, thanks to its military and political flexibility.

The international community struggled to explain the Taliban's achievement, particularly when they compared the skilful and highly adaptive military campaign it had waged with its almost rudimentary and neo-medieval leadership structure. The whole Taliban movement continued to run by two major councils: the Inner Shura of six members, led by the founder-leader of Taliban Mullah Omar and the subordinate nine-member Central Shura.

The Taliban were now in control of most of the country, but they did nothing to revive economy of the country, their economic model lay essentially rooted in the parasitic shadow economy, with the bulk of their revenues raised from taxes (zakat) on the opium crop and the Afghan transit trade. Furthermore, in the wake of their success in seizing Kabul and Kandahar, the Taliban began to stagnate. Like most revolutionary movements, the zeal and enthusiasm associated with insurrection faded in the face of the more difficult demands of everyday governance. Moreover, as a predominantly Pashtun movement, the Taliban found campaigning in the north of the country against the Shi'ite Hazaras, Dostum's Uzbeks and Massoud's Tajiks altogether harder going. In 1997, the Taliban suffered their worst defeat. A deal struck with a local commander, allowing their forces to enter Mazar-i-Sharif rapidly went sour. Caught off guard in the centre of the city, an approximate 600 Taliban were massacred, with top ten Taliban leaders either killed or captured in the bloody street fighting that followed. One of those captured and killed was the Taliban foreign minister. Fighting in the north increasingly took on the characteristics of ethnic terror, verging at times on genocide, with quarter neither asked nor given by either side. When the Taliban recaptured Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998 (by bribing and arranging defections within Dostum's forces), the UN estimated that the subsequent total death toll from Taliban-led revenge massacres at between 5,000 and 6,000, with Shi'ite Hazara troops being a particular target. At the same time, the murder of eleven Iranian diplomats in the local consulate caused quite a stir in the bilateral relations between Iran and Afghanistan and almost brought Iran and Afghanistan to the brink of war. The Taliban's growing intolerance of Afghanistan's ethnic and religious minorities was also on display the following month when, after the siege and fall of the Hazra centre of Bamyan, they used explosives, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and aircraft rockets to destroy and deface the massive local Buddhist statues in the region, declaring them an un-Islamic abomination. As the formerly fluid military lines became increasingly static, however, the loosely organized *lashkar*-style Taliban military administration found itself struggling to man frontline trenches permanently. To meet this requirement, during 2001, more and more foreign fighters from the Central Asian Republics, Uighur separatists and Arabs from Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda were incorporated into the Talibani fold.

The Taliban's fortunes started declining after August 1998. The bombing of the US embassies in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi and the US decision to fire cruise missiles at the Taliban camps suddenly brought them to the centre-stage of international security environment. Though the Taliban were not directly involved in these incidents, the international community started looking at Taliban-ruled Afghanistan as the nerve centre of

terrorism. Their reluctance to hand over Osama Bin Laden and his group, the prime suspects in the East-African bombings, for trial in the US on one pretext or another, increased the international community's suspicion and concern about Taliban's intention. Meanwhile, the Taliban became unpopular in the entire neighborhood for the way they behaved when they captured Mazar-i-Sharif in July 1998. The killing of Iranian diplomats (as already mentioned above) in the Iranian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif and dilly-dallying with the killings (first denying any such incident, followed by saying it was a mistake and finally, when Iran threatened punitive action, apologizing and handing over the bodies to Tehran) projected the Taliban as a rogue regime.

This was followed by a failed attempt by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan on the life of Uzbek President Islam Karimov in February 1999. President Karimov accusing Pakistan and Taliban for acts of terrorism and violence brought the Taliban into disrepute in the Central Asian Republics. That was soon followed by the hijacking of a commercial flight of Indian Airlines from Kathmandu to Kandahar in December 1999 and allowing the hijackers to slip into Pakistan, which further alienated the Taliban from India. While internationally, the Taliban was getting isolated, the domestic situation in Afghanistan was none too happy. The prolonged drought (1997-99) brought untold misery to the people in the areas under Taliban control. The Taliban's misbehavior with international aid workers brought down the international aid that Afghanistan was receiving. Meanwhile, having no legal or reform-oriented recourse to revive the economy, the Taliban had resorted to poppy cultivation. If we sum up all these factors, we can conclude that there are six contingent factors which brought about the Taliban downfall, and their one-time admirers like the US becoming their bitter critics.

1. LACK-LUSTRE AND POOR LEADERSHIP: Mullah Omar, in spite of the media projecting him as a leader greater than Ayatollah Khomeini, was merely a midget in the Afghan Islamic milieu. Declaring him as Amirul Momineen (Leader of the Faithful), in April 1996, did not change the Afghans' perception of him as semiliterate and without political vision. His mentors, mainly Pakistanis, therefore quietly replaced him with Osama Bin Laden after the latter came to Afghanistan in May 1996. Osama's right credentials made him a charismatic leader and people like Mullah Omar happily surrendered all Taliban initiatives to Osama. In the process, the Taliban lost their relevance and became an appendage of Osama's Al-Qaeda organization. Furthermore, Mullah Omar made no attempts to endear himself to the Afghan populace and remained inaccessible. He was rather short-sighted to neglect domestic consolidation before seeking to expand his sphere of influence, succumbing to Osama's

grandiose plans of establishing a Caliphate from Turkey to Morocco. Thus when the retaliation came from the great powers post 9/11 attacks, an overwhelming majority of the Afghans welcomed the overthrow of the Taliban regime.

2. ETHNIC DIVIDE: The Taliban were always considered a Pashtun movement. No Taliban leader thought on the lines of enlarging its political consensus with other ethnic groups. Though the Taliban co-opted various groups, this was done mainly with the idea of increasing its manpower, and the key elements in the power structure remained with the Pashtuns. Pakistan saw this as an opportunity to consolidate Pashtun loyalties on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, making the rulers in Afghanistan more amenable on the issue of Durand Line. This condoning of the ethnic divide by Pakistan and, to a lesser extent the US, united non-Pashtuns to oppose the Taliban movement. Afghanistan neighbourhood was also mobilized to oppose the ethnic division of the country. Also, the ethnic cleansing by Taliban in places like Bamiyan and Herat further hastened the process of the neighbor's political and diplomatic support to anti-Taliban forces.

3. PAKISTAN PROTEGE: Throughout their existence the Taliban were seen by others as a creation of Pakistani intelligence agencies. Many viewed Mullah Omar as pursuing Pakistan's agenda for Afghanistan. Towards the end, Taliban seemed to be suffering from a split-personality disorder: on the one hand Taliban allies like Al-Qaida talked in terms of the "Satan's oppression of Islam"; in the same breath the Taliban were being made to look like a creature of the same "Satan".

4. LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE ISLAMIC WORLD: The Taliban expected that the tactical support from the custodians of the Holy Shrines of Islam, Saudi Arabia would give them the much-needed legitimacy and manoeuvrability in the Islamic world, ignoring the dynamics of the Islamic world in terms of Arabs versus Persians and Gulf Arabs versus North African Arabs, etc. The recognition of their regime by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the UAE reinforced their perception. But the Organization of Islamic Conference had consistently refused to recognize the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan. Interestingly, when the US and its allies launched a war against Taliban post 9/11 on October 2001, the entire Islamic world, including their mentor, Pakistan distanced themselves from them, to appease the "satanic forces". Thus, the Taliban's "holy warriors" overnight came to be seen as terrorists, and their jihad as terrorism.

5. AI-QAIDA NEXUS: Whether the Taliban's welcoming Al-Qaida was a tactical move or a strategic move imposed on them by Pakistan is not yet clear. Osama's Al-Qaida took shape in 1988, six years before the Taliban. Certainly therefore, there is no denying the fact that the

Taliban rulers and Pakistan would have been aware of Osama and his Al-Qaida activities. In May 1996, when Osama and his men shifted Al-Qaida headquarters to Afghanistan, the Taliban and Pakistan might have looked upon him as a savior: Osama was financially sound, the Bin Laden family was close to the Saudi royal family, and above all, Osama was one of the many mujahideen fighters who fought against the Soviet Red Army, in 1979-89. Osama had the needed aura, was given a hero's welcome and was positioned in the top echelons of the Taliban leadership. Once a triumvirate was established-Pakistani elements, the Taliban leadership and Osama's Al-Qaida-a new agenda of action emerged in the form of the International Islamic Front for Jihad against the US and Jews (IIFJ). After launching the IIFJ, the triumvirate launched a series of actions to demonstrate their clout. These included:

- a successful attack on Mazar-i-Sharif which marked the complete occupation of all important towns and cities by the Taliban (The anti-Taliban forces were driven to a corner in Afghanistan).
- a suicidal attack on the US embassies in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi in 1998 by Al-Qaida sympathizers.
- a failed attempt on the life of the Uzbek President Islam Karimov.
- an unconventional war with India in the Kargil heights in May 1999 by Afghan-trained Pakistani terrorists supported by regular Pakistani armed forces (this attempt failed due to the overwhelming international and regional support extended to the Indian nation, hijacking of an Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu in December 1999 (to regain some of the pride and prestige lost humiliatingly crushing defeat inflicted by India on the Kargil heights) by Pakistan-based terrorist organizations in collaboration with the Taliban. The Taliban brokering a deal with the hijackers, surprised India and the world. This sudden incomprehensible change in Taliban's agenda and acts of violence and terrorism invariably invited the attention of the international security managers.
- The final act, by doing which they seemed to have signed their death warrant, was the attack on the World Trade Center in New York and the Command and Control Wings of the Pentagon in Washington, DC, on 11 September, killing more than 3,000 people.

Presuming that Osama's connections in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's support would bail them out of this new situation, the Taliban did not condemn any of these actions. This brought the Taliban under scrutiny of international security managers, and coercive measures to force the Taliban to accept the international norms of behavior started being applied. These included

Taliban-specific actions by the UN and stopping of all international assistance except humanitarian assistance. Had the Taliban confined their agenda to Afghanistan and not joined Pakistan and Al-Qaida, probably they would have survived and had their way in Afghanistan.

6.LIMITED WAR MACHINERY: With the exception of the Mazar-i-Sharif, the Taliban or their partners never fought any major battles. Their entire campaign to capture province after province in Afghanistan was conducted through “cheque-book diplomacy”, that is, bestowing favours on the leadership of their adversaries. In Taliban’s perception, they had managed to defeat the Soviet Union with the “Sword of Islam” during 1979-89, and their highly motivated mujahideen could defeat anyone in the world. The killing of Iranian diplomats at Mazar-i-Sharif brought Afghanistan on the brink of a war with Iran. It was then that the Taliban realized that they did not have the resources to fight a conventional war. The story was repeated in Kargil,1999 which convinced them further that any war with India/Iran was not a feasible and a practical option. In post9/11, 2001period, the US unleashed its airstrikes in the first phase, the Taliban leaders talked in terms of teaching a lesson to the US in the ground operations, but they were ill-prepared for the US air-land battle. Their equipment of the 1950s and 1960s was wiped out in the first phase of the US air attacks.

The Taliban had been forged in the crucible of Afghan and Pakistani politics. For many, their significance was local, or at the most, regional. Indeed, the world had displayed little consistent interest in the affairs of Afghanistan since the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in 1989. However, in 2001, all that was to change, radically. The consequences of fragmentation of Afghanistan were now about to manifest themselves on the world stage, and in the most dramatic fashion imaginable.

Everyone, everywhere, will always remember the moment the airliners struck the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001. The horrific events of 11 September 2001 in New York City, Washington DC and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, rocked the US and the world. It is a historical event that will be embedded in our emotional psyche for all time and will mark our era as the dropping of the nuclear bomb on Japan or the Vietnam War marked the earlier times⁵. There was a strong sense that the attacks were a manifestation of wider global forces and linkages, to which the US needed to respond. This coalesced within the administration’s thinking into a belief that a triad of threats had come together to form a potent and dangerous brew that posed an existential threat to the US in particular and to the West IN general: terrorist groups with a global reach, the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

⁵ Ahmed Rashid, *Descent Into Chaos: How the war against Islamic extremism is being lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, Penguin Publishers, USA, 2008.

(WMD), and the malign influence of the 'rogue states'. Together, these were seen as constituting as dangerous an environment as anything the Cold War had produced.

The media had captured the shock, terror and confusion of the bystanders, as well as the chaos, emergency and relief services rushed to the scene. Discomfort at the almost voyeuristic experience of witnessing such scenes was compounded by US President, George Bush's national address from the White House regarding the national tragedy which included a memorable line: 'We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.'⁶ The draining nature of these events was worsened, for those planning the policy response over the succeeding weeks and months, by the outpouring of grief. Memorial services, meetings with victims' loved ones, commendations to those who acted heroically on the day and a seemingly endless stream of heart-rending tales would keep open the emotional wounds. However, what ratcheted the tension up more than anything else was the fear that the attacks were just the first wave, and could be followed by even more devastating acts. The question that reverberated around the world was: who could be responsible for such attacks? As the US President and his key advisers, at this time, were thinking broadly as to who might claim responsibility. Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Iran were specifically mentioned in addition to Afghanistan. Gradually, this apparently clear line of responsibility became clouded, as a range of issues and actors were included in the list of malign factors that required attention as part of the unfolding response. However, the specific responsibility for the attacks was quickly established, the President's intelligence briefing laid out the evidence that pointed unequivocally to Osama Bin Laden and Al-Qaida. The administration thus formulated some strong ideologically rigid views on the nature of threat environment and the appropriate way in which to engage with it. However, the nature of the response was also shaped by some deeply embedded assumptions and beliefs within the administration about foreign policy and the appropriate role of the military.

Thus, in the post-9/11 aftermath, US intelligence sources considered Osama Bin Laden and his Al-Qaida group to have been behind most anti-American terrorist attacks since 1992. The co-ordinated bombings of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania led to a picture of Laden as the culprit. He was also alleged to have been connected to the failed attack on an American destroyer in Aden Port in 1192; the Ramsi Yousef attack on the World Trade Center in 1993; Yousef and Abdur Rahman's attack on a New York tunnel and bridge the

⁶ Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way, Tim Bird & Alex Marshall, Orient Blackswan Publishers, 2011. Chapter 2, pp 54. (Full speech titled: US President National Address 9/11, 2001 available at <http://edition.cnn.com>)

same year; the attack on the USS Cole in Aden in October 2000 which killed seventeen sailor; and finally, of course, for the New York and Washington attacks on 11 September 2001 with around 3,000 dead and the subsequent attacks within Saudi Arabia on American, foreign and Saudi-government targets. Concerned with the ever increasing influence of Bin Laden in Sudan, America and its allies especially Egypt, put pressure on the Sudanese government who finally asked Bin Laden to leave in 1996. Laden decided that it was time he returned to Afghanistan; to try his influence with the mujahideen leaders in a bid to establish an Islamic Caliphate-based government in Kabul. The CIA had the golden opportunity to capture or bomb Laden's plane on its way from Sudan to Pakistan, but did nothing. In fact, before the tragedy of 9/1, the US never mounted a serious attack against Bin Laden or his men in Afghanistan. Yet after the tragic events in New York and Washington in 2001, it was this man who was the most wanted person by American authorities.

Bin Laden was popular with several Mujahideen groups who operated from Pakistan during the ten years of the Soviet occupation. But for the Taliban, his name and fame carried even greater weight. The Soviet defeat left a power vacuum in Afghanistan and the warring groups were only too pleased to find a source to help them win their cause. For the Taliban, Osama was not just a rich man, he also had a proven record of being able to train, arm and mobilize large number of fighting men, which could be a great asset to them. When the US started putting pressure on the Taleban to expel Bin Laden and close his training camps, the Taliban always denied the existence of such camps and asked for proof of Bin Laden's involvement in the East African embassy bombings, the USS Cole attack and others. The Taliban always used the Pashtun tradition and Islam as reasons for not handing over Laden to the Americans. As per the Pashtun code of honour, the Taliban could not hand over one's guest over to his enemy. Arguing their case on Islamic grounds, they proposed to try Bin Laden by a Shari'ah Afghan court or other such Islamic court with judges from Afghanistan. But the US always refused. America was exerting its power and influence to have its way and this behaviour looked bullying to most nations, since there was no diplomatic relation between the two countries, no extradition treaty, no concrete proof of guilt and most annoying to the Muslims, the blank refusal to accept from amongst the choices presented, thus giving the impression that America about the sacred Shari'ah law. As a solution to the political deadlock between the two nations, the Taliban organized a meeting of Islamic scholars to decide the fate of Osama. The *ulama* issued a fatwa stating that Bin Laden should be asked to leave of his own accord, which avoided going against both Afghan tradition and Islamic edicts in such a matter. However, the US seemed to have not understood this hint or deliberately ignored it.

The Taliban then concluded that Osama was simply an excuse and that America was basically against their regime and what they stood for. (This was true to a very large extent. The decision by the Bush government to replace the Taliban was taken in a secret conference in Berlin in July 2001. That gathering was attended by America's closest allies and it was decided that if the Taliban did not expel Bin Laden, allow the oil pipeline from central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan, and agree to a broad-based government, they would be bombed in October of that year). It was this atmosphere of tension between the Taliban and the US in the aftermath of the events of 9/11 that led to the bombing and subsequent defeat of the Taliban and the occupation of Afghanistan by the US in October 2001. Thus, it was of little wonder then that when the WTC and Pentagon were attacked on September 11, 2002, before the dust had settled the finger was pointed at Bin Laden and the fate of his Afghan hosts was thus also sealed.

In its war in Afghanistan, the US did not want to repeat the mistakes of the Soviets by invading with a large land force, which would have been doomed. Instead they sent the CIA men and Special Forces agents to use the loosely held together Northern Alliance, especially Massoud's opposition forces which would have prepared the ground for aerial bombings. The opposition Northern Alliance, who had by then, cornered the Taliban to a small territory of Afghanistan's north-east region, considered the possibility of an American invasion as a God-sent opportunity to save them from extinction.

In the attack that was planned, the US set itself the following aims: to destroy Al-Qaeda's infrastructure in Afghanistan and to eliminate or capture its leaders; to bring down the Taliban regime; to strengthen forces within Afghanistan hostile to Taliban regime; to arrest or kill leaders of the Taliban's military and civil administration; to set up a US-friendly government in its place; to create a broad based government; to involve the UN in giving legitimacy to American occupation and finally to deploy American, coalition and Afghan forces to achieve these objectives.

With these objectives in mind, the US waged a war on the Taliban (**OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM**). It started on 7 October, 2001 after they refused to give in to President Bush's ultimatum of surrendering Bin Laden and his followers and destroying his training camps. After thirty-four days of carpet bombings, the Taliban evacuated Kabul and took to the mountains from where they continued to fight. In order to win the war, America not only needed to place its submarines and aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean, but also required the support of the former Communist states like Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, as well as Pakistan for the use of their airspace and the placing of troops and air-power in

their airports and bases. All the nations contributed generously and provided money to support thousands of Alliances troops. America continued to use its most devastating weapon against the Taliban and the Al-Qaida forces and forced them into a retreat. After the Taliban were bombed into a retreat and then hiding, the US began to appreciate the need for a compliant government in Kabul to see their occupation through. However, a fact which clearly emerged now was that the US did not want the Northern Alliance to fill this vacuum. Meanwhile the US leadership initiated the process of 'nation-building' by stating that they were interested in having a leadership in Kabul that represented all the Afghan people. As far as the Bush Administration was concerned, there were two elements in Afghanistan which they could bring to a good use. First was the Northern Alliance which they still used as their proxy soldiers. Secondly, the Pashtuns, a group to which most of the Taliban also belonged. The Americans could use the minorities (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Shiah and others) but they were well aware of the fact that this arrangement could not bring peace without a Pashtun participation. This remains quite atypical of the history of Afghanistan which has been illustrated time and again.

In the course of two months of bombing it became clear to the Bush team that they could not, in the short term, bring Pashtuns on board without forsaking the Northern Alliance. They had to work out a compromise which would, to a certain extent, satisfy both of the above elements. The Northern in or at least tolerable, to the Northern Alliance. One such person was Hamid Karzai, a Pashtun belonging to the dominant Durrani tribe, from Kandahar (young, well-educated and liberal in his vision of Afghanistan) who had been, according to mujahideen sources, in contact with American authorities since the Soviet war period. Despite long association Karzai's track record with the US authorities, the US administration did not put all their eggs in Karzai's basket. They had for all intents and purposes divided Afghanistan three ways: The North was given to an infamous Uzbek warlord, Rashid Dostum; the west to another warlord, Ismail Khan and Kabul to Karzai. However, there remained a tussle for power, which added to the uncertainty.

The US-led administration gathered in Bonn in December 2001 to work out a framework for the future of a beleaguered Afghanistan for a period of six months. Hamid Karzai was chosen to lead the administration. The Karzai administration became the country's transitional government for a period of eighteen months after the approval of the Loya Jirga in June 2002. The successful holding of the Loya Jirga is the first major landmark in Afghanistan's march to democracy. June 2002 was probably the high water mark of optimism and hope in post-Taliban Afghanistan.

From the Bush administration's viewpoint, the war in Afghanistan was multi-dimensional. For the US domestic consumption it was meant to assure the public that the terrorist infrastructure was gone, its leaders and their Taliban hosts replaced. Furthermore, they had been asked to pay the price and America was once again safe. For the international community, the message was that anyone daring to oppose the world's sole superpower would face similar consequences. And for the Afghans, it was meant to bring peace, stability and democracy by chasing away Al-Qaida and their hosts, the Taliban regime. For the Afghans, the US policy of working with the various notorious warlords, paying them and their militias and including them in the Karzai government and its military operations, killing thousands of innocent Afghans, has done nothing but give way to discontent and disillusioned with America's approach. The feeling on the ground is that OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM was yet another phase in the two and a half decades of war, insecurity and destruction in the country.

Afghanistan cannot be governed without the consent of its people, who will simply not tolerate a government whose composition owes more to foreign states and clandestine power deals than to a homegrown authentic Afghan governance. Such a government would inevitably find getting to grips with ruling a country suffering from such incomparable devastation very difficult, but with time they would surely rise to challenge. In view of such historic, and political realities, if the Bush administration, instead of simply eliminating the Taliban, had spent a fraction on reconstruction and nation-building programmes in Afghanistan, the Taliban and the Pashtuns, who have a track record of centuries of wars in the region, would have become America's surrogate troops and through them, the US could have exerted great influence not just in Afghanistan but over the whole region. This cannot be said of either the fractious Northern Alliance or the Karzai government which they installed.

With the ending of formal operations against the Taliban in March 2002, the international attention on events in Afghanistan quickly shrank against the backdrop of, and outbreak of, coalition military operations against Iraq from March 2003 onwards. Among the main events in Afghanistan that captured international media attention during this time were the adoption of what subsequently proved to be a fatally flawed new Afghan constitution in January 2004, the holding of Afghan presidential elections, which brought Hamid Karzai to office and the parliamentary elections the following year. The cynosure of international media was Iraq, a nation invaded by the US in 2003. Despite the relative

media neglect, the period of 2002-2005 in Afghanistan was pregnant with developments destined to carry weightier long-term consequences.

The political-military approach to Afghanistan taken by the international community in general, and by the United States in particular, was, during this period, dictated by two fundamental and overarching approaches. The first was the 'light footprint'⁷ approach. Second was the US government's own fundamental lack of interest in nation-building. The Bush administration's distaste for nation-building, soon was destined to attract such international opprobrium in the wake of the unfolding disaster apparent in Iraq from 2004 onwards, was already highly visible in both its public and in private statements regarding Afghanistan as early as 2002. Force structuring on the ground further reflected these in-built prejudices. The whole purpose of ISAF⁸ was, after all, to provide the diplomatic cover of a 'peace-keeping' force which would then leave American troops free, as part of OEF⁹, to concentrate on purely military ground combat operations. This tactical move was considered widely crucial both to avoid provoking heightened Afghan resistance and for engineering an early exit from the country. Between 2002-06, however, the reluctance of the Bush administration to take on larger peace keeping commitment, conjoined with the very evident sluggishness of the aid-distribution process and the diversion of a great many military resources and intelligence-gathering equipments to the war in Iraq, condemned Afghanistan in interim to a minor hell of broken promises and shattered illusions: a perfect breeding ground for the Taliban revival. Preliminary evidence of Taliban reorganization began to become apparent from 2002, early 2003 onwards. These were soon supplemented by bolder ambushes, assassinations and full-scale assaults on isolated outposts. The Taliban expansion was facilitated by the re-entrenchment of command and control structures, as well as by some preliminary forms of shadow governance. Also around this time in 2004, the Afghan presidential elections took place which had been widely touted by the American administration as a major watershed of 'success' and 'progress' in the country, perhaps because they simultaneously marked the symbolic official end of the Bonn process, enshrined the Bush administration's own democratization agenda, and coincided with domestic elections in the United States itself. In reality, the deeply flawed Afghan constitution under which these elections occurred embodied in microcosm the wider developmental crisis that was now beginning to grip

⁷ Light-footprint approach- How the West lost its way in Afghanistan, Tim Bird & Alex Marshall.

⁸ ISAF- International Security Assistance Force.

⁹ OEF- Operation Enduring Freedom

the Afghan state. The most striking anomaly of the new constitutional arrangement, however, was the setup Karzai himself, following his election to office, then adopted for the subsequent elections to the two-chamber Afghan National Assembly. By allocating seats to the provinces in proportion to their estimated populations, this system actively worked against the emergence of coherent national political parties. The upshot was a strongly Presidential system by which Karzai kept the power to distribute favours and operate with relative autonomy, as long as he retained support of various warlords, religious leaders and drug traffickers. By 2009, when Karzai won a second term on the basis of massive vote-rigging, even American political commentators began to recognize that the Afghan constitutional system was deeply flawed, to the point where it was actively undermining the establishment of longer-term political stability.

If the period of 2000-05 saw incoherent international policy and strategy waste the opportunities that the overthrow of the Taliban and the scattering of Al-Qaeda had presented, the year 2006 heralded the beginning of the period of consequences. The strategic incoherence and lack of clarity that marked the intervention from the start was to continue unabated. In the ensuing paragraphs, we shall see that while the coalition approach in 2006-08 did not cause the downward spiral in Afghanistan, it did nothing to arrest it, and in fact actually accelerated the pace. This development went hand-in-hand with the decision of the American administration to broaden the role of NATO in Afghanistan. This was a rather short-sighted solution to the problem without taking into consideration the complex and fraught intra-Alliance politics. To a large extent, NATO policy was driven more by concerns over what Afghanistan could do for NATO, than what NATO could do for Afghanistan. However, by 2006 cracks were already beginning to show in the coherence of the Alliance approach. It was clear through 2007-2008 that the situation went from bad to worse. Barack Obama succeeded George Bush as the next US Presidential. As a campaign issue Obama used Afghanistan and questioned the very rationale of Bush ordering policy reviews and deferring its implementation to its successor. Obama committed himself to a revived US-led coalition effort in Afghanistan and sought to bring some strategic order to an effort widely perceived to have lost its way. As he left office, Bush warned that the security situation in Afghanistan was spiraling downwards at a steady speed. Having said so, Bush passed the buck to Obama. But all this was forgotten as the new President Barack Obama took office on January, 2009. Obama was entering a policy quagmire to which too little thought and attention and action had been paid. The reviews of the situation in Afghanistan that Bush had ordered

were now awaiting Obama's attention. President Obama narrowed the stated core US objective in Afghanistan to 'disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaida in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent its return to either country in the future'. However, the means towards achieving this goal included an almost impossibly broad series of necessary steps. These included creating a capable, accountable and effective government in Afghanistan, tackling corruption, breaking the link between Narcotics and insurgency, ensuring civilian control of the government and a vibrant economy in Pakistan, bringing the entire international community on board, and lastly, encouraging an important role for the UN. If the aim was simply to prevent Al-Qaida acquiring a safe haven, this appeared to be a rather expensive way to go about it. In an era of growing financial austerity and shrinking domestic support, it seemed incongruous that a more cost-effective way could not be found to deter a few hundred terrorists, particularly when those self-same terrorists could potentially find alternative sanctuaries such as Yemen and Somalia. Hence this ostensibly focused programme reverted to an impossibly complex web of interrelated factors, linking development to security reform and state-building, all of which NATO and the international development community had already spent trying and failing to resolve, and which implied decades of further effort. The Obama administration seemed to be slipping seamlessly back into the pattern of strategic incoherence that had characterized the intervention from its inception. Another recurring pattern was soon to reappear: the subordination of policy and strategy to fashionable operational and tactical military concepts. Whereas in the early days of the intervention this had been the Bush administration's desire to 'redefine the war in our terms' through a transformation agenda, in 2009 and 2010 it was to be the application and subsequent execution of the counterinsurgency theory¹⁰. The effects of this will be examined in the ensuing paragraphs.

The year 2009 was marked by a number of new developments in internal Afghan politics. To begin with, 2009 was dominated by the Afghan presidential elections, at which Hamid Karzai sought re-election after his almost uncontested victory in 2004. At the 2004 elections numerous voting irregularities had largely slipped under the Western media radar; the 2009 election, however, was destined from the outset to be highly controversial. The declining security situation in the country had increasingly focused Western media

¹⁰ Counter-insurgency theory- counter insurgency theory forwarded by the US administration provided a justification for US invading Afghanistan in 2001, stating that the long-term goal of the invasion was not only to bring the culprits of 9/11 to book, but also to combat terrorism in all its forms.

on the corruption and inefficiency of the Karzai government and on Karzai's own limitations. Even before the elections began, the Afghan politicians were predicting a corrupt and rigged election, with reports pouring in that voter registration cards were being counterfeited on a massive scale. Karzai retained his reputation as a political conciliator, but by now, the focus of international opinion had shifted towards the view that this trait represented a weakness rather than an asset.

Tragically, Obama's near-exclusive focus on military engagement prevented greater discussion of important strategic issues: Afghanistan's economic, political and social future; peace talks with the Taliban; and US policy towards Pakistan. In March 2009, Obama announced his plan of sending an additional 21,000 troops to Afghanistan. This was a military attempt to roll back the Taliban insurgency. Obama provided two contingent factors for the deployment of additional troops, the first was counter-insurgency and the second was to protect the 2009 Afghan presidential election and widen the appeal of the government. What Obama administration chose to ignore was the fact that in the elections, rigging defied even the worst expectations. In 2004, the UN had control over the election, but this time Karzai had demanded that the UN hand over control to the Afghan-run Independent Election Commission (IEC), which was beholden to Karzai as he appointed its members. The international community's biggest mistake was to agree to this demand. Some US and UN diplomats warned of massive rigging but were not listened to. Thus, Karzai won his second term as President. He never offered an apology, showed any remorse for the rigging, and never offered conciliation to those Afghans who had been defrauded of their votes. But eventually, the political price that he, his government, the international community, the UN and the United States would pay was heavy.

All this would have an enormous negative effect on the transition from US and NATO forces to Afghan forces. The political crises continues to this day, with no resolution in sight. The election undermined the very surge that had been designed to protect it. Countries hostile to the US presence, such as Iran and Pakistan, saw the election as Obama's failure, as did the Taliban and their supporters. By declining to hold Karzai accountable for the elections, the United States had strengthened him immeasurably. The US assumption that he was a weak leader was wrong: he had become a strong president in a weak or barely existent national system. Once again the Taliban took advantage of the political crisis and launched a series of attacks in Kabul. The lack of fair elections, the inequitable distribution of seats among ethnic groups, the war and the continued

economic deprivation have only intensified Afghanistan's long-standing and unresolved ethnic problems. The division between the Pashtun and non-Pashtun nationalities that make up the complex weave of Afghan national carpet remain deeply entrenched. The corruption and incompetence of the Karzai administration are still to benefit the Pashtuns. Clearly, therefore, the rapid US build up of security forces has been a major boon to the minorities, but the new Afghan army cannot defeat the Taliban without more Pashtuns in its units and the Pashtuns are unlikely to be recruited as long as they are intimidated by the Taliban. Thus, the failure of the Afghan electoral process has not only nullified the agenda of deployment of additional US troops into Afghanistan, it has endangered the very process of transition and exit of Western forces, weakened the government's authority and diminished Karzai's standing. On the flip side, it has contributed to ethnic and political polarization inside Afghanistan that has the potential to erupt into another civil war. Ultimately, Obama's authority, and the US reputation of being able to find its way through the Afghan thicket, have taken a beating.

Confusing as it might seem, in December 2009, Obama announced the dispatch of an extra 30,000 troops over the following six months but with the caveat that US troops would begin to withdraw from Afghanistan by July 2011. Simultaneously announcing the planned date of a future draw-down and implementing a troop increase was a controversial step, one that was quickly criticized by conservative groups as evidence of the President's alleged lack of resolve. However, Obama was determined to avoid what threatened to become an intractable quagmire, and wanted to ensure that the Afghan government did not expect an open-ended US commitment. The Western timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan was drawn up at one of the largest NATO summit meetings in Lisbon in November, 2010. In 2011, Obama announced that the US and Nato troops would leaving by the summer of 2012, making a final departure by 2014. By 2014, Americans will have been fighting a thirteen-year war-longer than the First and the Second World Wars combined. The truth is that the West can no longer afford to fight in Afghanistan. A global recession began in 2008, and even before it ended, another one was around the corner in 2011. Between 2001 and 2010, the United States spent a total of \$444 billion in Afghanistan, the costs of economic development and for the Afghan security included. The recession at home, and not major successes on the battlefield, will determine the endgame in Afghanistan.

What is worse is that the Taliban insurgency is more intense than ever, the present Afghan government is weaker than ever and Pakistan is more vulnerable and lacks a

positive relationship with the United States. As for the Afghans, who have been at war since 1978, are exhausted. Most Afghans want the US troops to leave but are divided between wanting a peace settlement and wanting to share power with the Taliban. While the Pashtuns favor a total US withdrawal and a deal with the Taliban, the non-Pashtuns in northern Afghanistan and many of the 5 million population of Kabul prefer to see the war continue until the Taliban are defeated. The new urban elite does not want to see the United States abandon Afghanistan as the Soviets did after their withdrawal in 1989. Many Afghans fear that once the West leaves, the country will plunge back into civil war. However, the most important question here is that whether the Afghanistan's powerful neighbors continue their interference in the landlocked country or agree to a stability and non-interference pact?

After a decade, neither NATO nor Obama has achieved any of its strategic aims-rebuilding the Afghan state, defeating the Taliban and stabilizing the region. Certainly, therefore, there are no assurances that this situation might change by 2014. The West had rapidly built up the Afghan army and police, but the bare bones of a functioning country are still missing. Primarily the United States and NATO have failed to create an indigenous Afghan economy that is not dependent on foreign aid or on employment on US bases and gives the Afghans real jobs with real incomes. Furthermore, if the bare bones of an Afghan state are still missing, so is the Afghan leadership. President Hamid Karzai has lost the trust of many Afghans and the international community, as he failed to improve governance, tackle corruption and carry out elections in a transparent manner. He seems pathologically unable to maintain a reasonable working relationship with the American and NATO officials. If there is to be an effective transition towards self-government, then clear-headed visionary Afghan leadership is needed. Despite the grandiose plans for a transition, nobody in Washington or other capitals can agree upon or visualize what the "end-state" in Afghanistan will look like.

Stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan and ensuring that Al-Qaeda plays no role in either country has become even more vital in the aftermath of the revolutions sweeping through the Arab world in 2011. The Arab Spring has given the heart of the Muslim world a real opportunity for faster economic progress, democracy, literacy and stability. But it has also given the Al-Qaeda enormous opportunities to re-enter the Middle East or disrupt or co-opt the ongoing revolutionary process. The only organized political parties were the Islamists in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, where autocratic rulers were overthrown through mass movements. The fear looming large is that Al-Qaida could

return on the backs of these Islamist parties. A state failure in Pakistan or Afghanistan, unleashing a flood of extremists from these two countries would quickly destabilize the Middle East and destroy the chances there. Instability in Afghanistan-Pakistan (commonly known as Af-Pak region) would also have far-reaching implications in the South Asian sub-continent. As the end-game approaches, intense competition has developed among Afghanistan's six neighbors: Iran, China, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan¹¹. These countries have a long and a bloody record of monumental interference in Afghanistan. Now they seem to be preparing to move in once again, recruiting their proxies among the Afghan warlords and spreading money and influence in the country. Afghanistan cannot be stable unless its neighbors- and its larger, more powerful near neighbors, India, Russia and Saudi Arabia-agree on non-interference. Washington sought to employ regional diplomacy to win over the situation, but very little has been accomplished since then. If the West is to depart Afghanistan by 2014 and leave behind relatively stable regime, it will need a multi-dimensional political, economic, diplomatic and military strategy.

Despite the poor track record of successful predictions in Afghanistan, it is possible to venture some reasonable assumptions. The Karzai government will never be capable of exerting anything that resembles control of the country, and Afghanistan is doomed to remain an essentially 'rentier state' for the foreseeable future. A clear-cut victory over the insurgents in the south and east of the country is unattainable. Pakistan will never fully control the lawless tribal areas that border Afghanistan, yet no long-term solution can be viable that does not recognize and genuinely take into account Pakistan's strategic concerns. Elements of the Taliban will eventually be brought into some sort of political settlement on terms that the West may find comfortable. The important strategic question that must be addressed, even ten years late, is to what degree all this matters. Most answers, as we shall see, highlight two broad problems. The first is the possibility that the groups with an international terrorist agenda might find the sort of safe havens in Afghanistan and the border regions that were so helpful to them previously. The second is that Pakistan itself, with its nuclear capability, could succumb to the complex forces threatening it and collapse into state failure.

The first problem is a lesser-order threat. Al-Qaida has lost the leadership and the infrastructure that it once commanded. Osama Bin Laden is dead. The Taliban are down

¹¹ For better understanding, kindly refer to the Map of Afghanistan.

but not out. The US military action has destroyed the Taliban's infrastructure in Afghanistan only, but their leadership and cadres, after suffering some casualties, have quietly moved into neighboring Pakistan, and are waiting for the opportune time to return on the world scene. Thus, for now, Al-Qaeda is no more capable of turning the clock back than is the coalition. Al-Qaeda achieved success on 9/11 partly because competing priorities and perspectives in the US, in particular, meant that successive administrations had previously had insufficient incentive to take the political risk associated with decisively dealing with the Al-Qaeda threat. That is not the case today or likely to be in the future. In addition, the value of fixed safe havens is dubious in contemporary environment. They make very tempting and attractive targets for a US military no longer hamstrung by concerns over diplomatic fallout or legal minutiae when it comes to Islamic terrorists, particularly in Afghanistan. The related risk of a Taliban takeover is relatively low risk. The US can prevent any such occurrence even more easily than it overthrew the Taliban in the first place; any Taliban force attempting to march on Kabul would face the same fate at the hands of the US air power as it did in 2001. Tajiks, Uzbeks and Hazaras would also react ferociously to such a prospect, and could be mobilized once more as a robust anti-Taliban ground force.

The second problem, Pakistan is more troubling. However, it is simply not in the West's gift to fully control events. Al-Qaeda finds Pakistan more congenial than Afghanistan precisely because the West cannot operate there with impunity, and they have established a complex network of relationships within a bewildering array of radical groups. Only a broad regional approach can provide the beginnings of a coherent strategy-an approach in which competing political and military concerns are genuinely addressed, rather than lip-service merely paid. Tensions between the United States and the Pakistan military escalated through 2010 and 2011. For the army, the killing of Osama-Bin-Laden (1st may, 2011) was the humiliating last straw, and a deep chill set in, just when the two countries needed more than ever to work together. In 2011, the region appeared to be more divided than it was a decade earlier.

The calamitous events of September 11, 2001 (9/11) led to the occupation of Afghanistan by yet another superpower, this time the United States of America. It is of utmost historic and political importance to try to shed light on why events took such a course, one which saw a shift in the US role from helping to liberate Afghanistan from the clutches of the Soviet Union to becoming the occupier itself.

America's invasion of Afghanistan has not brought the security, prosperity or democracy that it had promised. Almost a decade after the American invasion and even after the presence of some 20,000 American and coalition forces plus 6500 UN now NATO peace keeping forces have had little impression outside the city of Kabul. Thousands of innocent people have been killed. \$4.5 billion raised by international sources for the first three years of the Karzai government have vanished without making a cent's worth of change to the lives of ordinary people; a fact which is indicative of the deeply-entrenched corruption prevailing in the Afghan society. Power is deliberately shared between Karzai and the warlords. Initial efforts to unite the country have waned, which is why Karzai has little control outside Kabul and the warlords retain absolute rule over their fiefdoms in the provinces. The opportunity to unite the country and form an integrated government after two and a half decades of war has been missed. Therefore, it is not surprising that forces loyal to the Taleban, Hekmatyar and remnants of Al-Qaeda have resurfaced and enjoy support, especially in the south and east of the country.

So long as the warlords are around, arms are not collected and Afghanistan's peace-time army of 70,000 and police force is not trained and put in place, security cannot be guaranteed. When there is no security, no durable improvement can be made in the lives of the Afghan people and thus the vicious cycle continues. Karzai is not personally corrupt, nor has he any preconceptions about such important issues as ethnicity, language or religion in Afghanistan. He can exert a great deal of influence with the Washington administration, the US military in Afghanistan as well as the NATO forces there, however all too often he seems to be unwilling. Whether this is due to his lack of experience as an administrator, or perhaps his well-documented personal safety issues, he has not accomplished a great deal so far in terms of progress for the Afghan people as a whole. A country which has been through nearly three decades of war requires firmness and resoluteness. It must be said that so far, Karzai has lost the support of much of his own tribe and various other Pashtun tribes. And he still hasn't won the confidence and trust of the non-Pashtun groups who dominate the government.

The presence of America in Afghanistan should be utilized to build the country and unite its people across ethnic and religious barriers. If America has its own interests in mind with regards to its presence in Afghanistan, Afghans themselves should be intelligent enough to use that presence simultaneously to further their own interests as best as they can. This is an opportunity which will certainly not last for long as war-weariness is slowly showing its effect and America intending to make a troops withdrawal by 2014. If

America is committed to bringing democracy from the outside-in, then the Pashtuns, who are the majority and are now (like always in the past) providing tough resistance against the occupation, should take the opportunity to gather around one of their own parties or movements, win those elections and form their own kind of government, all the time making good use of the American resources and know-how to change the standard of living for all people in Afghanistan.

Two recent examples of former imperial states, who were helped by America to make fundamental changes in their foreign policy ambitions and are the richest nations in their parts of the world: Japan and Germany. They do not have bases and soldiers stationed around the world and yet they are almost universally respected and trade with all races and all cultures. It is good to practice what one preaches. In this regard, America can learn what it has passed on to these two countries. Instead of going to war in Iraq and Afghanistan and wasting human life and billions of dollars, America could have turned those countries into close allies by spending a fraction of the war expenditure on working with the Afghans in a developmental capacity. For too long, the military and political institutions of (both internal and external powers) have neglected their one single task which is to make life better for their people. It is time to take care of this need too.

CHAPTER 5

AFGHANISTAN TODAY

Afghanistan's geographical position has been both a curse and a blessing. It has been a curse for lying on the main east- west division and since the Russian's interests in warm- water ports, north- south route connecting the Middle East and Europe with the Indian sub-continent, and the Central Asian mass with the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf. As a result, throughout history the area known as Afghanistan has been traversed and occupied by foreign forces. Its location is a blessing, because of its mountainous features and the resilient character of its people. Many ambitious rulers and their armies from Alexander the Great to Chengis Khan, and after that a spate of Muslim hegemonists, including Tamerlane, the Moghuls, the Safavids, then the British, the Soviets and now the Americans and their coalition have been dealt defeat by those within the country. All these powers in their own times discovered the impossibilities of ruling over Afghanistan.

Much has been written and said on the topic of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Since the focus of my study is on the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan, it would be essential to examine the growing body of work that explains such an action. There are two main schools of thought. The proponents/protagonists of the first school of thought have linked the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan with the historical Russian dream to get a foothold in the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. The second school of thought holds that the Soviets intervened in order to salvage their crumbling supported regime in Kabul. As the short term Soviet interests were at stake in Afghanistan, it was imperative for the Soviet policy makers to counter the spillover effects of Islamic Revivalist Movement in their own Muslim Central Asian Republics. Such a movement had received impetus with the revolution in Iran. The gaining strength of the Islamic fundamentalists movement in Afghanistan and the failure of the regime of Hafizullah Amin to liquidate the Muslim Afghan guerrillas left Moscow with no option than to militarily intervene in Afghanistan and protect its short term interests. Nevertheless, there is a third school of thought that rejects the warm – water theory or the protection of its short- term interests. The protagonists of this school maintain that the Soviet Union intervened for the first time in any non- aligned, Muslim and non- Warsaw Pact member country as a part if its long term objective to expand their influence beyond the Oxus river. Thus, Afghanistan was just a spring board which the Soviet policy makers used for accomplishing their long term interests in South Asia. With a political and military foothold in Afghanistan, the Soviets were undoubtedly in a better position to influence Pakistan and

India and also to counter the massive US naval military strength in the Gulf. After considering the logical and analytical aspects of the three schools of thought, it can be safely concluded that the third school of thought has more credibility and validity as compared to the other two.

In an attempt to debunk the warm – water theory, we need to look at the fact that given the modernization of the Soviet navy, the Soviet policy makers did not need an access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean. They had in their possession ice- breaker ships and naval fleets and therefore they did not have to opt for such a dangerous action like military intervention in a sovereign country just for warm – waters. Moreover, the Islamic Revivalist Movement, notwithstanding the Iranian Revolution or situation in Afghanistan, had not and would not have led to any religious uprising in Central Asian Soviet Republics. Around seventy years had already passed when these republics were brought under a different social and political system. Furthermore, much had changed since the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the Soviet Muslims, by then, had somehow or the other been assimilated in the Soviet life- style and socio- economic- political systems. Rejecting the second theory of the Soviets having intervened in Afghanistan for the protection of their short- term interests i.e., the survival of a pro- Russian regime in Kabul. Was it rational for Moscow to have taken such a risky step like a full- fledged military invasion merely for the protection of its supported regime in Kabul? The Soviets could have certainly thought of much better and reasonable ways to deal with the political crisis. Like reconciliation between the KHALQ and Parcham factions or a limited military intervention. Certainly, therefore, the 100,000 Soviet troops marching into Afghanistan in December 1979 would certainly have been in pursuit of accomplishment of some long- term objectives.

I would like to extend a point- wise analysis as to why the third school of thought, which I support, holds more credibility and validity than the preceding two assumptions. Since long, the Soviet Union was interested in South Asia. Its objective was not merely to neutralize the pro- American regime in Islamabad or to counter American influence in South Asia, but to establish a defacto presence through friendly regimes in the region. Close friendship with India was futile until other South Asian countries, especially Pakistan and Bangladesh joined hands with Moscow. The Soviet policy makers were well aware of the level of international and regional condemnation against their intervention in Afghanistan. But they also considered the fact the durability of such an intervention, supplemented with the broadening of power base of Kabul regime, would have eventually forced the South Asian countries to accept the **SOVIETIZATION OF AFGHANISTAN** as fait accompli. In such a situation, it

would have been easier for Moscow to give a practical shape to its South Asian security approach. Such an approach was integrated in the broad Soviet Asian Collective system as envisioned by Brezhnev in the 1970s. By following this approach, the Soviet Union would be eclipsing the influence of extra- regional western powers over the South Asian subcontinent. Thus, Moscow followed a steady policy towards widening its influence in South Asia. If I may say, Afghanistan became a victim of the Soviet military onslaught simply because the country prior to the Soviet military intervention, was a buffer state between Soviet Union and South Asia. Now, such a buffer position which Afghanistan enjoyed since the days of British domination in South Asia, ended. The Soviets, therefore, did make advances over gaining an access in the South Asian Sub- continent.

The opening of 1980 witnessed some unprecedented geo- political changes in South Asia. These changes were mainly linked with the Afghan imbroglio. When the Soviet troops marched into Afghanistan in late December 1979, geo- strategic complexion of South Asia began to change. It re- introduced the American factor in South Asia and led to re- militarization of Pakistan. The American neo- isolationism that followed the Vietnam tragedy left countries like Afghanistan even more vulnerable to outside aggression than before. At the same time, the USSR perceived itself as achieving military parity and, before long, military superiority over the United States. That perception, in turn, had led to the emergence of new Soviet aggressiveness and willingness to take risks the likes of which had not been seen since the days of the Nazi- Soviet Pact. Given the importance of the Afghan factor in the Soviet- South Asian relations (particularly Afghanistan), the problem should be discussed in some detail. 1960's was the decade in which the Soviet Union was lagging behind the United States in strategic forces. Soviet military thought stressed the importance of preparing to fight and win the nuclear war. At this stage, superiority was of great importance. At the end of the decade and in the beginning of the 1970's when the Soviet Union achieved strategic parity, they came to accept the reality that this relationship, while far from ideal, was the best that could be attained in circumstances. The origins of the Soviet policy in the 1970's can be traced back to 1969- 71, when major changes in the international relations and within the Soviet Union itself created impetus for a new foreign policy line. This decade is particularly remarkable as this was the decade of détente. Détente (French word: implies a thaw, or warming of relations). Détente was extremely important at this crucial juncture of the Cold War. It all started well. In the early 1970's, Détente was marked by significant results in arms limitation, in East- West economic relations and the settlement of political disputes. It also gave rise, in the Soviet Union as well as in the West, to hopes of further agreement and co-

operation. And it was unlikely that Brezhnev would renounce the policy of détente with which he was so closely associated. In this light, détente can be seen as a ray of hope in salvaging the US- USSR relationship from damage in the wake of the Afghan crisis, it can also be interpreted as an attempt to breathe new life into foreign policy and to portray the Soviet Union as the champion of peace in the troubled world. As the Soviet Union achieved a strategic parity with the United States and came to emphasize it in its foreign policy discourses, this raised an important question for Soviet policy: Should the Soviet Union pursue significant strategic superiority, or should it try to stabilize strategic relationship at parity? Détente was the answer. Détente was seen by the Soviet leaders as following from an increase in Soviet power and a shift in the international 'correlation of forces' in favor of the socialist camp. Strategic parity would prevent the West from trying to deal with the Soviet Union from a position of strength, and encourage it to adopt more realistic policies. This in turn would lead to a relaxation of tension and to a reduction in the risk of war. It would also lead to greater access of Western credits and technology, and to greater opportunities for advancing Soviet influence in the world. Moreover, by pursuing a policy of détente towards the West, the Soviet Union had hoped to forestall too close a rapprochement between China and the United States. In Soviet eyes, therefore, détente not only resulted from growing Soviet power, but would provide a favorable context in which to pursue Soviet objectives, some of which entailed co- operation with the West, and some conflict. This broad framework allowed for differences of emphasis and priority; also about the use of the military power as an instrument of policy in the Third World.

In the interwar period, Soviet leaders viewed the international position of the Soviet Union primarily in terms of **'CAPITALIST ENCIRCLEMENT'**. That concept was dropped from the Soviet analyses after Stalin's death. But in the late 1970's, the Soviet Union faced the prospect of a new encirclement as its chief adversaries- United States, Western Europe, China and Japan- formed a quasi- alliance. The main impetus of this realignment came from the steady deterioration of Soviet- American relations in the latter half of the decade. The crisis over Afghanistan caused the deepest rift, but by then, it had already become clear that Soviet and American conceptions of détente were at odds. The main aim of Nixon- Kissinger détente policy had been to link different aspects of the Soviet- American relationship so that the United States could use leverage in one area (for example, trade) to influence Soviet policy in another (for example, in Third World). But the Soviet leaders, while anxious for co- operation in some fields, and willing to make some concessions, were determined to retain their freedom to pursue goals which conflicted with Western interests. Two events marked a

serious setback for the process of Soviet- American détente. First was the Soviet help provided to MPLA in Angola and support to the Cuban forces operating there. Soviet and Cuban help was decisive in securing the victory of MPLA over the forces backed by South Africa, China and the United States. Second event was the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan which worsened the situation further. To the American policy- makers, these events indicated that the Soviet Union would not change its repressive policies at home in return for better trade relations, and that détente was merely encouraging an expansionist policy in the Third World. To the Soviet leaders, this demonstrated that the United States was trying to interfere in Soviet domestic affairs, and the outcry over Angola and Afghanistan proved that an unhappy America was trying to restrict Soviet activities abroad. President Carter abandoned the hopeless effort to have the SALT II treaty ratified by the Senate and adopted various economic sanctions. As the new US President Reagan assumed charge in 1981, he made a commitment to reassess East- West relations, redress an alleged Soviet military superiority and to assess American power more vigorously. Therefore, it was clear that there was a marked divergence between the Soviet and American conceptions of détente. Whatever the truth, it is important to note that the United States and the Soviet Union had differing perceptions on détente. The United States viewed détente as a form of behavior modification, the key chain of which was to restrain Soviet expansion by offering the Soviet Union co-operation in areas of mutual interest. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, interpreted détente as a relationship of co- operation and conflict. They had rejected the American conception of linkage, arguing that co-operation in such areas as arms control and trade is mutually beneficial , and that therefore the Soviet Union should not be expected to pay an extra price by changing its political system or modifying its foreign policy to conform to American ideas about the norms of international behavior. At this point, I would like to say that there was an element of inflexibility in the attitude of the Soviet leadership. But this behavior was totally justified considering that fact that the decade of the 1970's was the decade in which the Soviet Union achieved strategic parity; it emerged as 'the other superpower' – a giant leap from the status of 'junior superpower' which so far had been bestowed on it. Therefore, while the Soviet Union was busy making carving a place for itself in international politics; the United States and the Western World did not share this assessment of the Soviet Union and was finding it increasingly difficult to adjust to the fact the other superpower had finally arrived! Of course, linkage was not merely a theoretical construct; co- operation between the United States and the Soviet Union was made more difficult by the conflict between them, no matter what conceptions they held. But the difference in conceptions of détente had important

political ramifications. Soviet actions in Africa and Asia deeply undermined American belief in the value of co-operation and as a result, agreement was harder to achieve as none of the two sides shared the same frame of thought or reference.

Having examined the reasons for the failure of the SALT talks, I would like to draw the attention of the readers to the considerations that prompted the Soviet leadership to invade. The Soviet decision to intervene remains an enigma for many. There has not been a whole-hearted consensus on one particular reason. Briefly, the Soviet decision to intervene is variously assessed as: a defensive reaction arising from growing concern that the instability might possibly spill over into the bordering Soviet Uzbek and Tadjik Union republics; an underestimation of the costs of suppressing Afghan tribal resistance and installing a more compliant Soviet satrap; a fear that China and the United States would exploit a Soviet setback in Afghanistan and acquire increased influence in the Muslim world; a response to a target of opportunity that was especially attractive given US preoccupation with the Iranian Hostage Crisis and exploitation of which would inevitably in time vastly improve the USSR's geo-political position vis-à-vis Iran, Pakistan and a possible drive into the Gulf; a shedding of restraint occasioned by the deterioration in relations with the United States and the belief that the SALT II treaty was dead; a manifestation of the traditional Russian imperialism, which has always sought to acquire additional territory along with its periphery; a necessary step towards eventual acquisition of warm-water ports on the Indian Ocean that also served to warn nations of the region to normalize relations with the Soviet Union; and to avoid too heavy a reliance on the United States; and finally a determination argued forcefully in the Communist ideologies not to abandon a progressive movement to reactionaries or to allow it to fall victim to its own ultra-leftist excesses. Throughout the decade, USSR maintained that their doctrine was defensive and that the aim of their policy was to deter attacks in the Soviet Union, and not to seek a superiority over the United States. The USSR firmly believed at that point that any attempts to try to outstrip each other in the arms race or to expect to win a nuclear war is nothing but a fatal insanity. However, it might seem paradoxical that Soviet leaders had denied that superiority was their goal just at a time when the growth of Soviet strategic power had given the most concern in the West. Two factors seem to explain this paradox: the first is that the Soviet leadership apparently accepted that with no effective defenses available against ballistic missiles, and with a large number of warheads the consequences of a nuclear war would have been devastating. The second is that the Soviet leaders appeared to have become more confident of the ability of Soviet military power to deter a nuclear attack. Whatever may have been the reason, it would be safe to conclude that

the explanations vary greatly, each analysis being shaped by implicit and explicit assumptions about the Soviet Foreign Policy in the Third World.

CONCLUSION

From whatever we have gathered in the preceding four chapters of my research work, it can be said that the reasons for Afghanistan turning into a misadventure are many. The Soviets, in ways more than one, were repeating the mistakes of the local communists. They thought that they could rectify a political situation by administrative reorganizations. They thought that if they could replace Amin by Taraki or the Khalq faction by Parcham, this would solve the problem and that Afghanistan would become similar to a docile East-European satellite state. Their diagnosis of the problems of the Afghan communists was that they did not know how to implement progressive socialist ideas or to build a communist society. The massive number of advisors who they had placed from the office of President down to the smallest department were expected to rectify the cultural traits of the Afghans; namely mistrust in central authority, jealousy and resentment amongst the ethnic groups and local and cultural divisions on linguistic, ethnic and religious bases. They never appreciated that the Afghan state, though it might seem to the Russians as corrupt and inefficient, nonetheless somehow worked for a developing country like Afghanistan. The old monarchical system that had been around for some 230 years did not challenge the country's dominant tribal regions. Even the bureaucracy that had evolved had an element of tribal patronage built into it. The tribal representatives served as advisors to the rulers in the eighteenth century or as permanent members of the Loya Jirga throughout and had a great deal of influence over bureaucracy. The system, therefore, was not totally unfamiliar even to those who lived in rural areas. This system did not need thousands of advisors or armies of soldiers to make it function. A deeply Islamic and traditional society like Afghanistan needed time and resources to bring about changes in stages. Instead of following that route and turning Afghanistan into a friendly and possible client state, the local communists and the Russians were in a great hurry to transform Afghan society almost overnight into a socialist state. They seemed to have taken no note of the saying that 'Afghanistan least ruled, best governed'. Had the Russians spent a fraction of the Ten Year War expense on economic infrastructure, education and literacy and had continued to work through Afghans rather than to take over the state machinery and attempt to run it, as if they were operating within the Soviet centralized bureaucracy, the Afghan public if not converted to Communism would not have become their enemies either and the Soviet empire might still have existed. In fact, the advisory system like the direct intervention of sending thousands of troops did exactly the opposite. The Afghans became more and more suspicious and hostile and their hatred intensified both against the Soviets and their Afghan allies. These changes had been happening since the 1920s and the Russians were a part of the

process of change through their development projects and political acts such as the 1921 and the 1933 Treaties of Friendship with Afghanistan and their development since the 1950's. While aid in the finance, material and technology was certainly welcome, dictating terms as to how to govern the state was certainly not. Afghanistan is ungovernable without the consent of its people, who will simply not tolerate a government whose composition owes more to foreign states and backroom power sharing deals than to a homegrown, authentic Afghan governance.

The Soviets underestimated Afghan resolve against the foreign invaders, and essentially they relied too much on assurances by the Communists. The West also in the first three years could not believe that a poor, small country could reverse the brutal Soviet war machine. They made statements to the effect that the Russians could have Afghanistan provided they did not go further nor endanger Middle East oil reserves. Afghanistan has always been an attractive place for invaders, but all previous intruders learnt at their cost that Afghanistan is one thing, and keeping it is quite another. It took the Soviets ten years to realize this. While the United States can take some credit for making the USSR pay more heavily than it anticipated, the major credit must go to the Afghan themselves. Their implacable hatred for foreign domination and their willingness to sacrifice property and lives to fight against it were new phenomenon for the Soviet army. The smaller countries of Eastern Europe – fought over, conquered and occupied by Great Powers – had been more or less accustomed to the experience of being dominated. Whatever their true feelings, considerations of sheer survival have dictated some measure of caution in dealing with large conquerors. These countries are also relatively rich, with multiple overlapping organizations; good communications and built-in levers of control. None of this is true of Afghanistan; where resistance fighters and his forebearers have never in tribal living memory been occupied by foreigners except for the briefest of interludes, where there is little of economic value to lose by fighting, where organizations apart from family/tribe are non-existent, and where the basic units of opposition are single, indomitable individuals, not malleable groups. Perhaps the single most significant result of all these factors was the failure of the USSR to conquer the country swiftly and present the world with a *fait accompli*. Had it succeeded in doing so, the various reprisal measures taken by the United States and others would likely have eased as anticipated; and Afghanistan would have become just another fading memory, like Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Instead Afghanistan continued to defy conquest, whatever the odds, and there was no end in sight for the occupation force's troubles. The USSR was not alone in overestimating its own capabilities and underestimating those of the resistance.

Clearly, to the Soviet leaders the price of retreat appeared to be potentially even greater than the ongoing drain of men, material and prestige that Afghanistan was exacting. The potential penalties of retreat included the possible spread of the Islamic nationalist contagion into Soviet Central Asia and the weakening of the Soviet hold on Eastern Europe, as well as the surrender of a strategically valuable stepping stone towards domination of the Middle East oil resources. It can be predicted that the overall costs to the USSR of continued occupation would have to rise considerably before the Soviets would risk exacerbating such problems.

From an analytical point of view, we can safely conclude that the Soviet doctrine might have been DEFENSIVE by intention, but Soviet military strategy stressed the importance of taking the OFFENSIVE in the event of war, and Soviet forces were deployed with this in mind; hence the policy implications of the shift in doctrine are not clear. Moreover, it is not always evident what the statements of doctrine meant in practical terms. At best, what we can conclude is that **NATIONAL INTEREST IS CLOAKED IN THE GARB OF DIPLOMACY**. Like all major world powers, Soviet Union too was cautious about portraying a harmless and benevolent picture of itself to the outside world, the sole objective of which would be to safeguard world peace, but in realpolitik, it would continue to pursue the goal of maintaining a military and strategic equilibrium with **the USA. PARITY**, to which the Soviet leaders then declared themselves as committed, was hard to define precisely, because no agreed way of measuring strategic power exists. As the circumstances, parity could no longer be maintained only at the level of intellect and thinking. The actual involvement in the Third World countries of Asia and Africa demonstrated to the whole world the level of Soviet Union's military and strategic preparedness. So, without sparing a thought about the nation or the people, the USA and the USSR chose Afghanistan as the theatre of a proxy war and as a prime battlefield of Cold War historiography.

Meanwhile, the Soviet writers had interpreted changes in American strategic doctrine in the 1970's as an effort to escape the consequences of parity, and they portrayed the new American strategic weapons programmes as a drive for superiority. Active Soviet interest in the Third World was not new, for the Soviet Union supported anti-colonial struggle from its earliest days. May be it did not have the resources to assert its power and position then. At times there have been wide variations in the degree of risk and commitment the Soviet Union was willing to undertake. But in the 1970's, a growing naval presence and airlift capability provided the Soviet Union with new instruments of policy and a new confidence to challenge the supremacy of the USA. It would be a totally myopic analysis to view the Soviet actions merely as a result of policy decisions taken in the 1970's. Soviet policy had been guided not

only by the desire to assert Soviet status as a global power, but also by more contingent factors: the security of its own frontiers, the containment of China, the restriction of Western power and influence. Soviet policy has to be interpreted not merely in terms of Soviet ambitions, but also in the context of the region where it intervened. The Soviet Union was indeed an important actor in international politics, but it was not alone in devising the plot, writing the script, setting the scene or directing the play. There were other players as well. What was taking place was not merely a competition in arms, but also a competition in strategies and ideologies, with each side trying to make the strategy/ideology of the other unworkable.

In a nutshell, the whole issue highlights the role of ideology in the Cold War. If the new Cold War historiography has a consensus it is that ideology mattered. The Soviet Union was a self-proclaimed ideological state with an explicit ambition to transform the world in its own image. And this ideology was inherent in the Soviet Union's lived relationship with the world, not simply a convenient mask to disguise its pursuit of power. The Soviet commitment to long-term peaceful co-existence with western capitalism was genuine but the political dimension of Moscow's policy and practice constantly undermined its strivings for stability and security. The Soviets' ideological view meant they thought they could transform world politics through peaceful co-existence, but as Gorbachev discovered, only by giving up their ideology could they end the Cold War. In reality, Gorbachev's revolution was the result of an ongoing process of change and transformation in Soviet ideology. Gorbachev's moves to end the Cold War were the culmination of a campaign that the Soviets had launched 40 years before. The unexpected consequence was the collapse of Soviet communism and of the USSR itself. But, just as the outbreak of the Cold War, this was a contingent, not an inevitable process. Had the Cold War not begun, or had it ended much earlier as a result of negotiations or a prolonged *détente*, we still might be living in a world of mixed socialist and capitalist systems. Whether that would be a good thing or bad is a matter of political judgement and historical perspective. The Cold War was a war of choice, not necessity. Both the sides of the Cold War saw the other as a dire threat. Neither view was accurate. The Cold War was the result of neither communist expansion nor western imperialist aggression, but of the failure of political and ideological imagination- aided and abetted by historians on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

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