

**INDIA'S POLICY RESPONSES TO AFGHANISTAN:
THE POST-1979 YEARS**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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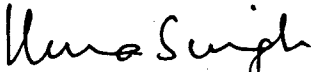


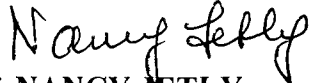
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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “INDIA'S POLICY RESPONSES TO AFGHANISTAN: THE POST-1979 YEARS”, submitted by NAMRATA PATHAK, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of the University, is to the best of my knowledge an original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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*For,
My Parents*

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PREFACE

The turmoils that Afghanistan has faced in the last few decades has had a significant impact not only on Central Asia, but also in South Asia and the world as a whole. Foreign interference in the country has led to almost two decades of civil war. Various factions had sought to claim power, without being able to provide stability in governance. In the period after 1979, when the Soviet forces militarily intervened in Afghanistan, the most dominant players in determining Afghan politics have been the erstwhile Soviet Union, USA and Pakistan.

To India, Afghanistan's location has always been important from a geo-strategic point of view. Not only has the country, been a traditional invasion route to India, creation of Pakistan has made this aspect all the more significant.

The present work examines India's foreign policy with regard to Afghanistan in the backdrop of its historical relations with the country, as well as Soviet military intervention and its aftermath. The study is divided into four chapters.

Chapter One covers the historical background of Indo-Afghan relations till the time when USSR sought to intervene in Afghanistan.

Chapter Two analyses the period between 1979-88 and deals with India's efforts at the regional and international level to deal with its non-condemnation of the Soviet intervention. Subsequently it also studies the risk India faced as a result of US arming of Pakistan (as a frontline state to

deal with Soviet expansionist tendencies in the region). The chapter ends with the Geneva Agreement which was signed in 1988 whereby USSR agreed to withdraw its troops and US and USSR became the guarantors to the Agreement.

Chapter Three deals with the years 1989 to 1996. Afghanistan at this time was ruled by three different types of governments -Najibullah backed by Soviet Union, the Mujahideen, backed by US- Pakistani cooperation and finally the Taliban, again backed by Pakistan. The chapter analyses India's efforts at engaging these regimes to her advantage and the various repercussions that the Indian government had to face as a result of the events in Afghanistan.

Fourth Chapter covers the post 1997 period, i.e. the Taliban's imposition of a strict Islamic code in Afghanistan, to the bombing of the World Trade Centre at New York on September 11, 2001 by Al Qaeda and the subsequent reconstruction and Afghanistan. This chapter studies India's foreign policy vis-a-vis these events and its successes and failures emerging from these efforts.

There has been at the same time certain limitations in the present study which need to be pointed out. Limited availability of materials on Indo-Afghan relations, specially after 1990 has been a major constraint. However an honest attempt has been made to draw conclusions from the sources available.

Namrata Pathak

CHAPTER ONE

Indo-Afghan Relations: A Historical Background

Afghanistan has always been the traditional invasion route to the Indian subcontinent. All overland invasions of the subcontinent have come via the key Afghan passes of Khyber and Bolan. This began before the birth of Christ and includes Alexander the Great's invasion (326 B.C) and subsequent invasions by the Huns, Sakas, Scythian, Mongols, Mughals and Safavids. The region now included in Afghanistan was a borderland between empires that ruled from India, Iran or Central Asia. It is an arid zone of endemic conflict.¹ It has played the role of a buffer during the imperial and cold war era. Whenever external powers, be it Soviet Union (1978-89) or Pakistan (1994-2001) have tried to intervene in this country, it has destabilized the regional balance of power and strategic stability. For India, the collapse of Soviet Union and subsequent events in Central Asia and Afghanistan have confronted India's foreign policy with tough challenges.²

An analysis of India's policy responses in the period following 1979, and factors involving Indian Foreign Policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan would be better understood after taking a look of Indo-Afghan relations in the period preceding 1979 and also understanding Afghanistan's position in response to world politics.

Before partition India had a common and long extending boundary with Afghanistan and there had always been intimate contacts between the two countries from ancient times. The earliest reference to Afghans in the form of Avagana is to be found in Bharat Samhita a treatise by Varah

¹ Col. G.D. Bakshi, Afghanistan: The First Fault line War, New Delhi, 1997, p. 36.

² P. Stobdan, "India and the Afghan Conflict", Delhi Papers, IDSA, 1998, p. 60.

Mihira, the famous Indian astronomer.³ The main sources of Afghan history are the Vedas and the Avesta.

It was from here that the Aryans migrated to India. In 305 BC Chandragupta Maurya inflicted a crushing defeat on the Greek armies and captured Afghanistan. Thus the Mauryans were the first empire-builders to recognize the strategic importance of Afghanistan. In the Mauryan period, Afghanistan was an outpost of the Indian empire and a prime center for Buddhist art and thought. The Gandhara school which resulted from a fusion of Indo-Greek styles was based in Afghanistan. Buddhism flourished in Afghanistan both under Ashoka and the Kushans. The 53 metre tall Buddha idol at Bamiyan, northwest of Kabul,⁴ bears ample testimony to the Buddhist influence. Afghanistan even finds mention in the ancient epic Mahabharata, once again as Gandhara; its ruling families being depicted as playing an active role in the sub-continental politics even in that ancient period. Olaf Caroe states in his book, 'The Pathans – 550 BC to 1957', that the Hindu Shahi dynasty ruled in Afghanistan from AD 400 to 900. It was thereafter conquered by the Arabs and Islam spread to Afghanistan.

As the Buddhist influence began to wane, Mehmud Ghazni, later in the tenth century AD, carried Islam across Afghanistan into India. A new 'Asia Empire' began to emerge under Babur who captured Kabul in 1504, and Delhi twenty-two years later. This control, though only nominal in the later, Mughal period, continued till Aurangazeb's time.

³ Encyclopedia of Islam, Vol. 1, London, 1960, PP. 216-25.

⁴ It was sought to be destroyed by the Taliban under their fundamentalist agenda, and thus received worldwide condemnation.

Ahmed Shah Abdali, the first Afghan King who had unified different autonomous tribes in 1747 to give the present Afghanistan a definite shape, extended his empire to the northern parts of India. But it was a short-lived empire.

Afghanistan entered the Europe-centred system of modern nation-states in the nineteenth century. This was an outgrowth of the rise of British imperial power in the Indian sub-continent and the Russian conquest of Central Asia. Afghanistan now became a neutral buffer state between the British and Russian Empires. Thus began the era of the Great Game.⁵

The British had gained a substantial foothold in the Indian sub-continent, through the East India Company. In search of still greater markets and in quest of security, Afghanistan could not escape their attention. They took initiative to ensure political and commercial contact with the country. In 1809 Mount Stuart Elphinstone led the first British mission to Afghanistan and signed a treaty of friendship between the two countries. Alarmed by the perceived Russian thrust towards the warm-water ports of Iran and the Makran coast, the British embarked upon a 'forward policy' to check the Russian advance well ahead of their Indian colonial possessions. This was a peak period of British geopolitical concern in Afghanistan.⁶

In 1826, Amir Dost Mohammed, the new Afghan ruler, apprehending danger from three sides – from the Sikhs, the Shah of Persia

⁵ Bakshi, n.1, p. 41.

⁶ Ibid, p. 41.

and the Czar of Russia – approached the British Government in India for assistance. The British though extended military help to the ex-ruler, Shah Shuja, with a view to install him on the throne of Kabul, so that, through him, they could bring Afghanistan within their sphere of influence. However, the adventure failed. Having come to realize their hitherto wrong approach, they now started a dialogue with the Amir on political matters through Alexander Burnes, who was on a commercial mission to Afghanistan for developing trade between the two countries. The Burnes mission failed and the first Afghan War (1838-42) followed. It was launched for the outright conquest of Afghanistan. But the British mission failed.

But with changes in the international arena, the relationship between Afghanistan and the British India began to improve. Through the good offices of Major Edwards on the British side and Ghulam Haider on the Afghan side, a ‘Treaty of friendship’ was concluded on 30 March 1855. The British promised not to interfere with, and respect, the territories under the Amir. Having thus concluded the treaties of friendship, alliances and military assistance with Britain, the Amir refrained from intervention at the Indian Mutiny of 1857 in spite of the Indian requests for assistance.

However, a change appeared in the British policy. The Amir insisted on the terms, which the British Government of India were not ready to concede, expressed a desire for improvement of the existing arrangement and emphasized the need for an alliance in return for a definite promise of aid from India. However, the British Government in pursuance of what is

popularly known as its policy of 'masterly inactivity' , instructed Lord Mayo "not to enter into any pact with him."

Under the threat received from Russia a British Military Mission was led to Afghanistan. The Amir did not welcome the move and so there ensued the Second Afghan war (1878-80) which lasted only for about six months. Afghanistan now at least for the time being, became a part of the British India.

This state of affairs at the political level was, however, short-lived. Afghans revolted on 3 September 1879. The Amir had abdicated and after prolonged negotiations, at a Durbar held on 22 July 1880, Abdur Rahman, who had come back to his motherland after a long exile, was installed as the new Amir.

A mission under Mortimore Durand, however, reached Kabul on 2 October 1893 and carried on the negotiations to demarcate the Indo-Afghan frontier. The outcome was the much controversial and widely disputed Durand Agreement signed on 12 November 1893.

However, the relations with the Amir, leaving aside minor skirmishes, continued to be normal. With the arrival of Lord Curzon as the new Viceroy of British India in 1899, there occurred change in the policies towards Afghanistan and the 'Forward Policy' was substituted by a new policy, generally described as one of the withdrawal and concentration. Lord Curzon was against the supply of arms to Afghanistan and stressed the necessity of fresh arrangements with Habibullah Khan, the new Amir, who had succeeded his father, Amir Abdur Rehman , in 1899. Normal flow

of trade was restored during the reign of Habibullah, who continued to receive eighteen lakhs rupees annual subsidy.

In the wider context of Anglo-Russian relations, Afghanistan had continued to be one of the most sensitive spots. Having secured the Amir's friendship, the British also signed a Convention with the Russians on 31 August 1907, whereby Russia accepted Afghanistan as being outside her sphere of influence.

Afghanistan also played an important role in the Indian national movement. At the time of outbreak of First World War, some Indian Nationalists tried to organize a rebellion and fled to Kabul, where a Provisional Government of India was set up in 1915 with Mahendra Pratap as its President and Barkatullah as Prime Minister. The aim of the Government, according to the then President, was to work with Afghanistan to throw the British Government out of India.⁷

Aman Ullah Khan, who succeeded the Amir was regarded to be the leader of a nascent anti-British Afghan movement. The nationalist leaders had joined the Muslims in the Khilafat movement and opposition to the Rowlatt Act was at its peak. The provisional Government of India at Kabul had already assured full support in the event of an attack on India. Aman Ullah Khan, expecting support from Russia also, summoned a special Durbar on 4 May 1919 to proclaim Jihad against the British for the complete independence of Afghanistan and to help 'our brethren in India. As a result, The Third Anglo-Afghan war was fought. The Third Anglo-

⁷ Mahendra Pratap, My Life Story of Fifty Five Years, Dehra Dun, 1947, p. 52.

Afghan war highlighted the high level of British security concern in Afghanistan .⁸.

Though the Afghans fought bravely, the British command of air and the bombardment of some important cities forced the Amir to seek armistice on 31 May, 1919.

Nadir Khan, who was born and brought up at Dehra Dun, crossed over to Kabul, captured the city and proclaimed himself the new ruler of Afghanistan. He was succeeded by his son Zahir Shah in 1933. Zahir Shah sought friendly relations with Russia as well as British India.

After the World War II, the British who had till then played a major role in the subcontinent was no longer in a position to do so. Besides, the world was now divided into two power blocs, USA and USSR. India after having achieved independence in 1947, was faced with the dilemma of evolving a foreign policy that would best serve its interests. Afghanistan was one of the first few countries with which India established friendly relations after independence.⁹ Thus when India achieved independence in 1947 she already had a long extending tradition and friendly relations with Afghanistan.

In keeping with the policy of keeping away from the cold war politics of the great powers, India under the Prime Ministership of Nehru, sought to pursue a policy of Non-alignment. From the very beginning he played a pivotal role in rallying a number of nations around the idea, and took an active part at the Belgrade and Cairo conferences of non-aligned

⁸ Bakshi, n.1, p. 42.

⁹ Hasan Ali Jafri, Indo-Afghan Relations : 1947-67, New Delhi, 1976, p.63.

nations. As leader of the Asian-African group of nations at the United Nations, India usually took an independent stand and condemned or supported either of the Super Powers.

Afghanistan too claimed non-alignment as her foreign policy objective under the name of 'impartial judgement'. This policy it is said, was derived from her geographical position as buffer between Russia and British India, and as a land locked and underdeveloped country which made her dependent upon her neighbours for trade routes and economic aid. Thus the policy of non-alignment has been one of the factors that has brought India and Afghanistan closer to each other after Independence.

There were other determinants of Indo-Afghan relations as well.

With regard to trade, major share of international trade of Afghanistan passed through India, Bombay and Karachi being the two chief ports for the import and export business of that country. After the creation of Pakistan the geographical separation had its natural effect on the trade between Indian and Afghanistan but the economic factors continued to play dominant a role.

The presence of the Indian business community in Afghanistan and of the Afghan traders in India necessitated the maintenance of friendly relations between the two countries. The Indian commercial population of Afghanistan which consisted of mainly two groups – Indian nationals and Afghan nationals of Indian origin, also continued to play an important role in further cementing this relationship. The Afghan Government treated the Indian merchants most favourably and they served as a useful link in the flow of mutual trade.

A significant determinant of India's Afghanistan policy has been the formation of Pakistan, and the fact that it chose to join the bloc led by US, after its independence. In the post independence period there was a strong convergence of interest between India and USSR on one hand, and Afghanistan and USSR on the other. When Pakistan sought to join the western by joining CENTO, India had to in her own national interest seek cooperation from USSR. The two countries also shared common security concerns vis-à-vis countries like China. IN 1954, when US declined to provide aid to Afghanistan, she too came closer to the USSR which agreed to do provide her with economic and military aid.¹⁰ By virtue of this fact also India was brought closer to Afghanistan. Soviet Union's relations with India and Afghanistan were to continue later on as well.

Another important and significant determinant and Indo-Afghan relations after independence has been the tensed nature of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations over the Pakhtoon issue as well as that of the Durand Line Till today this issue has been the bone of contention between the two.

With the coming into being of Pakistan there arose the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan on one hand and the Pakhtoon issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan, on the other. Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have remained tensed from day one of the former coming into existence because of Afghanistan's refusal to recognize the British drawn Durand Line (1893) as the border between the two. The Durand line divides Pashtun tribes living on both sides of Pakistan

¹⁰ Bakshi, n.1, p.48.

Afghanistan border. Constituting almost half of Afghan population, Pashtuns have ruled over much of Afghanistan's two centuries old history. A large number lives in North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan. Afghanistan claims Pashtun and Baluch areas as its own, supporting demands for Pashtun self-determination. The resentment and fear that the Pashtunistan issue raised in the Panjabi Military rules of Pakistan caused a sharp deterioration of relations between the two. Absence of any such problem with India made India a natural ally of Afghanistan.

Being a land-locked country, Afghanistan was dependent on Pakistan for outlet to the sea via the port of Karachi. When Pakistan sought to slow down commercial traffic from the seaport to Afghanistan in retaliation for Afghanistan raising the Pashtun issue, the latter looked for other alternatives, India being that logical alternative.

However, Government of India was not able to extend her support to the Afghan demand for Pakhtoonistan. It was felt that if India supported the Afghan demand for self determination in Pakhtoonistan, she herself may have to yield to application of the same principle in Kashmir. Similarly as the Afghan government was insisting on the application of the principle of self determination, to the Pakhtoon areas, she could not support the Indian stand on Kashmir.¹¹

Politically India started taking interest in the cause of Pakhtoonistan only in 1960s. The deterioration in the Sino-Indian relations leading to the ultimate outbreak of hostilities in 1962 made the government realize the need for friends. But the government still failed to pay any attention to

¹¹ Jafri, n.9, p. 27.

Pakhtoonistan. However after Pakistan's aggression of 1965, the government of India announced its support for the Pashtoon movement. In the Lok Sabha in reply to a question, the Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Dinesh Singh, announced full "support for the legitimate aspiration of the Pakhtoon people."¹² The belated Indian support at this time was governed more by requirements of the time as it suited India's national interest as than by her desire to support an Afghan sponsored cause.

However, the effort of Indians did not seem to pay off with regard to Sino-Indian, skirmishes in the late 1950s, and finally during the Chinese invasion in October 1962, Afghanistan was not among the first forty countries to respond to India's appeal. It maintained a neutral position during the dispute.

During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, King Zahir Shah could not muster support for India, because of fear of offending the religious sentiments that Afghans shared with Pakistan. Thus the Afghan government adopted a neutral stance in Pakistan's 1965 war with India.¹³ Even then, as a part of India's Foreign Policy of International Cooperation, India agreed to construct a large children's hospital in Kabul and the Vice-President of India went to Afghanistan to lay its foundation.¹⁴ By the early 1970s, especially Indo-Pakistan conflict in 1971 India received immense support from Soviet Union during this time and this included the signing of the Treaty of Friendship between the two countries in 1971. Indo-Soviet

¹² Government of India, Lok Sabha Debates, New Delhi, Vol 48, 1965.

¹³ Marvin Weinbaun, 'The Afghan Factor in Pakistan's India Policy', Himalayan and Central Asian Studies, vol.1, no.2, July-Sept, 1997, p.5.

¹⁴ Niranjana M. Khilani, Realities of India's Foreign Policy, New Delhi, 1984, p. 54.

cooperation, and India's support to USSR was to go on even in the future, as one shall see in the chapters later on, specially with regard to Afghanistan. After the creation of Bangladesh, the world saw India emerge as a regional player of eminence. General Mohammad Daoud who deposed King Zahir Shah in 1973 and became the President of Afghanistan, looked to India for support. In keeping with its policy of recognizing de jure the ruler in Kabul, India swiftly consolidated its ties with Daoud. The then Vice-President of India G.S Pathak paid a visit to Kabul, that opened the way of a number of development projects.¹⁵

By this time the nature and extent of Moscow's involvement in Afghan economics and industrial development could be seen from the fact that the major infrastructural development projects in the field of agriculture, irrigation, development of mineral resources were being executed with Soviet Assistance. Afghanistan had initially sought assistance from USA. A month later the Afghan government accepted the Soviet offer of military and economic assistance but this request was rejected.

As mentioned before, the international realignment now saw India and Afghanistan as recipients of military equipment from the Soviet Union while Pakistan became a US military ally. Soviet military and economic assistance grew in volume. From 1954 till 1973, foreign assistance and sale of natural gas to the Soviet Union accounted for 80 per cent of Afghan investment in development expenditure. In 1975 the value of total Afghan trade with Soviet Union was \$572.92 million. During 1965-74 total soviet

¹⁵ Sreedhar and Mahendra Ved, Afghan Tormoil: Changing Equations, New Delhi, 1998, p.126.

Military aid amounted to \$325 million. Afghanistan thus became weak rentier state now of the USSR. Foreign aid led to a rise in the level of education and literacy. It produced a small but vocal and influential intellectual class of teachers, bureaucrats and military officers. Marxist ideology penetrated the intellectual elites and political classes. Such increasing dependency of Afghanistan on the Soviet Union for economic and military aid ultimately led to a situation congenial for deeper political penetration of the latter in the former's political sphere.

The two important Marxist groups to emerge in the political life of Afghanistan were the Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Flag) so called after the publications they brought out during the 1930s. The leader of the Khalq faction was Nur Mohammad Taraki, and the Parcham faction was led by Babrak Karmal. Both opposed the rule of Daud, the Khalq more trenchantly than the Parcham.¹⁶ The two factions united in July 1977 to form the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Before they could build their organisation as a strong rallying point of the anti-monarchy urban-educated class in Afghanistan, even before they could come to grips with the rush of political change, the coalition found itself catapulted to power as a result of the "revolution" or Leftist coup d'état of April 27 1978.¹⁷ In this coup Daoud and 30 members of his family were killed. The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) was proclaimed with Nur Mohammad Taraki as Chairman of the Afghanistan

¹⁶ Arundhati Roy, The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan : Causes, Consequences and India's Response, New Delhi, 1987, p. 34.

¹⁷ Luis Dupree, "Afghanistan under the Khalq", Problems of Communism, July-Aug 1979.

Revolutionary Council. Interestingly Soviet Union was first to accord it diplomatic recognition.¹⁸

However, the Khalq-Parcham coalition government did not survive even for a year following the revolution of April 1978, because of the deliberate policy of the Khalq leaders to ease the Parcham supporters out of office.¹⁹ The government was alienated from the masses. Efforts to push land reforms in a backward society alienated the rich and the poor alike.²⁰ The rich comprising the tribal chiefs and the mullahs were annoyed over the introduction of the land reforms and increased official control of commercial activities, because these measures adversely affected their vested interests.²¹ In view of the entrenched orthodoxy and traditionalism in Afghan Society, the contradictory implementation of the Marxist oriented reform programme backfired, and the people who were supposed to benefit from these reforms decided to oppose the communisation of their society.

In the spring of 1979 when the Marxist coalition began to crumble in Kabul, the Soviet government began to press for less radical socio-economic programmes which included abandoning of the land reforms. Hafizullah Amin, the 'strongman' of the Khalq faction opposed these measures and his victory over Taraki also strained relations between the PDPA regime and Moscow. As the London-based International Institute of

¹⁸ Bhabani Sen Gupta, The Afghan Syndrome: Living with Soviet Power, New Delhi, 1981, p. 35.

¹⁹ Roy, n.16, p.17.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nirmala Joshi, "Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan" Foreign Affairs Report, New Delhi, vol. XXIX, No.7, July 1980, p.130.

Strategic Studies opined “Faced with an apparent choice between withdrawing from Afghanistan, with an inevitable loss of prestige and supporting a man whose policies she believed to be unworkable, the USSR maintained her support but at the same time prepared to overthrow Amin and to install a more cooperative leadership in Kabul”.²²

Thus on December 27, 1979, 40,000 Soviet troops intervened in Afghanistan to protect a Marxist regime which they feared would collapse. This unilateral Soviet action in the words of Bhabani Sen Gupta, ‘triggered 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 50s, right upto the end of the Vietnam war, only one world power, the USA 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 US’.²³

Meanwhile, the fall of the Shah of Iran, who was patronised by the Americans, upset US policy calculations in the Middle East and Central Asian region. It caused Washington to shed its post Vietnam reluctance to engage in intervention in distant lands for the protection of American interests in the Third World, with certain Congressmen, “prepared in principle to endorse military intervention even in friendly countries, if western interests were threatened.”²⁴ This included even Afghanistan On the other hand, Soviet Union defended its intervention in Afghanistan as a

²² Strategic Survey, London, 1979, p.32-33.

²³ Sen Gupta n. 18, p.1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.4.

countermove to a US Military build-up in the Gulf region that commenced after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran.²⁵ Soviet Analyst Medvedko interpreted the establishment of US Military and naval bases far beyond the US borders in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean as “gun boat diplomacy”, towards the people of the region.²⁶ The Cold War had now reached the Indian subcontinent with India and Pakistan placed in two opposite camps, specially with regard to the Afghan issue. While India preferred non-condemnation of Soviet action, Pakistan was used by the US as a means to counter Soviet action.

²⁵ Roy, n. 16, p.36.

²⁶ L. Medvedko, “The Persian Gulf: A Revival and Gunboat Diplomacy”, International Affairs, Moscow, No.12, 1980, p..26.

CHAPTER TWO

Indian Diplomacy after the Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan, 1979-1988

On December 27, 1979, 40,00 Soviet troops moved in Afghanistan to protect a Marxist regime which seemed to be on the brink of collapse.¹ Soviet presence in Afghanistan was manifest till the beginning of 1988 when the Geneva Accord was finally signed calling for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Afghanistan. Indo-Afghan relations and India's policy responses during this period focussed primarily on the fact that it had to condemn, support or remain neutral regarding Russian troop mobilisation in Afghanistan. At the same time India needed to safeguard its own security in the backdrop of growing US military and economic aid to Pakistan.

In the aftermath of the Soviet intervention in Kabul, while the Cold War acquired new dimensions triggering above all an arms race among the two power blocs, India's official reaction focussed on two themes -- India opposed interference in internal affairs of a country and believed the growing arms race in the region would escalate tensions.

When the Soviet intervention took place in December 1979, Indian governments' response under Charan Singh as the P.M. was that India "opposed any outside interference in the internal affairs of a country by another".² India hoped that "no country or external power would take steps which might aggravate the situation and that normalcy will be restored very soon".³ P.M. Charan Singh also made it clear that sending troops on

¹ Bhabani Sen Gupta, The Afghan Syndrome: Living with Soviet Power, New Delhi, 1981, p.1.

² Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, India's Views on the Afghan Situation, 1980, p.51.

³ Ibid.

the part of USSR to Afghanistan would have “far reaching consequences for the entire region”.⁴ He also reminded the Soviet Ambassador that Soviet Union had made a Joint Statement with India in June 1979 during the former Prime Minister Morarji Desai’s visit to Moscow whereby it was stated that there must be no external intervention in Afghan affairs.⁵ The government was therefore eager about Moscow re-calling its troops as soon as possible by expressing that “India cherished its traditional close relationship with Afghanistan and would like its wide independence and non-alignment to be stronger”.⁶ India was at the same time skeptical about US decisions to supply arms to Pakistan about which it sought clarification from US Ambassador, Robert Goheen.⁷

In India, the press interpreted the intervention in various ways – ‘The Hindu’, called it “clear military aggression on the part of Soviet Union against the small nation of Afghanistan” and found it reprehensible on two counts - first for its blatant violations of national sovereignty supposed to be guaranteed in international law by the UN Charter, and secondly, as a manifestation of superpower bullying that threatens peace as well as regional security”.⁸ ‘The Hindustan Times’ saw the two super powers equally responsible for the Afghan crisis - “If Soviet intervention is to be condemned so must also be the American. What in more, any

⁴ The Hindu, Chennai, Jan 1, 1980.

⁵ The Indian Express, Mumbai, January 1, 1980, p.1.

⁶ Sen Gupta, n.1, p.16.

⁷ The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, Jan 1, 1980.

⁸ The Hindu, Jan 1, 1980.

strengthening of the Pakistani army as a part of the power game will only revive the tension in this subcontinent".⁹

However, domestic political changes in India took precedence over foreign policy decision-making at this time. Parliamentary elections resulted in change in government and Charan Singh was replaced by Indira Gandhi as the P.M. In Jan 1980, Mrs. Gandhi assumed powers. Even before she formally assumed office Mrs. Gandhi, in a statement issued on Dec 31 1979, emphasized that Soviet intervention in Afghanistan should not be considered in isolation since "people have been interfering in this region in some way or the other".¹⁰ Indira Gandhi, drew attention to the US move to arm Pakistan, and in the process making it an advance base of Washington's confrontation with Moscow. She also referred to the US China axis providing arms to Pakistan and thus posing a security threat to India.¹¹

Soviet Union on its part had already vetoed an American move in the UN Security Council to censure the intervention. The US and its allies therefore took the issue to the UN General Assembly where the 17 nation resolution which was moved among others by Pakistan and Bangladesh, asked for an immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan.

At the 'Uniting For Peace' Resolution at the sixth Emergency Session of the UN General Assembly, moved by 17 nations on January 11,

⁹ The Hindustan Times, Jan 1, 1980

¹⁰ The Indian Express, Jan 1, 1980.

¹¹ Government of India, n.2, p11.

1980, Brajesh Mishra India's Permanent Representative at the UN highlighted the following points.¹² First, Soviet Union had sent troops to Afghanistan at "the request of the Afghan Government first made by President Amin on Dec. 28, 1979".

Secondly, "there were attempts by some outside powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by training, arming and encouraging subversive elements to create disturbance inside the country". Third while "India was against the presence of foreign troops and bases in the country, India had no reason to disbelieve a 'friendly' state like the USSR, when the latter gave "assurances" that its troops would be withdrawn when requested to do so by the Afghan government. Finally, it was pointed out that some recent covert developments in the South Asian Region, which consisted of building bases, pumping arms to small and medium countries and terrorist groups were posing a threat to the security and integrity of India..

India's position in the General Assembly generated surprise among many countries. India was accused of trying to pacify Moscow for the help it had sought from the latter in the past-namely Indo-Pak war in 1971, and abandoning a smaller nation fighting a larger one. But India's stand centred around various considerations: India justified Soviet intervention on the ground that the then Afghan leader Tarik Amin requested for Soviet help on December 28, 1979. Secondly Indian Government seemed to recognise the need for Soviet presence at that time by emphasising interference by foreign powers in Afganistan's internal affairs. Finally, India was keen to

¹² Ibid., p.58-59.

point out the military build-up in the Indian ocean and pouring of arms to small countries which obviously included a reference to reasoning of Pakistan, which was being contemplated by the USA.¹³

New Delhi's stance vis-a-vis Afghanistan, went against almost all the non-Communist States and more than two-thirds of the Non-Aligned states at the United Nations. However India's stand internationally and politically did isolate it from its south Asian neighbours.¹⁴

Interestingly, India's support to Moscow was partial. It abstained from voting with 17 other countries on the resolution calling for "immediate unconditional and total withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan."¹⁵ This move was supported by 104 nations and opposed by 18 countries.

Following this debate in the UN General Assembly, India's response to the Afghan crisis consisted of 3 principles: Firstly, though India chose to avoid direct condemnation of the Soviet action in Afghanistan, it also made it clear that it did not support Soviet military presence either. Secondly India was concerned about arming of Pakistan by the USA following the indemnations and this signified a Cold-War resurgence. Third, in this Cold War resurgence, India's national and regional interest remained in defusing the crisis by keeping close to USSR without totally agreeing with all its actions. And, Indira Gandhi's remarks such as those at the Press Conferences on Jan 16, 1980 at New Delhi,

¹³ Arundhati Roy, The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: Causes Consequences and India's Response, New Delhi, 1987, p.60.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.60-61.

¹⁵ General Assembly Resolution ES-6/2 dated January 17, 1980, sponsored by Pakistan, United Nations Yearbook 1980, vol.34, p.301.

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where she stated “No country is justified in entering another country,”¹⁶ and on January 18, 1980 at a Press Conference in Trivandrum where she warned of “danger coming closer to our borders” because of US decisions to expedite arms aid to Pakistan¹⁷ highlighted the problems which India faced on various fronts.

Against this backdrop Indira Gandhi’s speech on January 30 in Lok Sabha reflected her apprehensions. It read,

“for the past 2 years, the Afghan Republic has faced numerous internal and external problems. There have been reports of armed attacks from bases located outside the country. We are told that the Government of Afghanistan invoked the provisions of the treaty it signed with the Soviet Union and asked for military help to meet the needs of the Republic. Whether the request for military assistance was right or not, whether the Soviet Union should have rushed military aid or not, is a matter on which there is division of opinion among the powers of the world. Each one is looking at the problem not at all from the point of view of the people of Afghanistan, but from geo-political and strategic considerations. This will further complicate problems without solving anything. I have stated our own view, which is that we do not approve of foreign presence or intervention anywhere in the world. However, we do not believe in one-sided condemnation. We have been watching with concern the build-up in the Indian ocean and some other countries, which is now being stepped up even further with Pakistan becoming one of the important bases for this.

¹⁶ Government of India, n. 2, p.43.

...It is necessary to reaffirm our commitment to non-alignment and to emphasise the independence of our judgement on each issue, which is not going to be affected by pressures from any quarter. Our geo-political situation, our commitment to certain fundamental principles, our historical experiences particularly, since the days of independence and above all our national interest will be the determining factors in our foreign policy”¹⁸

To this, she also added,

“there is a deliberate attempt to label us pro-this or pro-that. We are not pro any country except pro-India and this in what we indeed to remain. when we judge these issues, we judge them from the point of view of our national interest and from what we consider to be in the interest and world peace. All our efforts are directed at securing the speedy withdrawl of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Many big and small powers are involved. The training of armed bands, providing bases, entering of armed troops across the border and inhabiting another country and some other such activities do not create confidence among neighbour. They only prolong the misery of the people concerned and create conditions of hostility among the states. We cannot but fee disturbed by the reaction of some powers over these developments in Afghanistan. Billions dollars have been asked for and hundreds and millions have already been committed to Pakistan in military aid by USA. Other powers are being persuaded to make their own contribution to convert Pakistan into an arsenal. The People’s

¹⁷ Ibid., p.44.

Republic of China has also pledged to provide arms and other necessary assistance to Pakistan”.¹⁹

This statement sought to placate both sides by trying to see reason in the intervention and yet demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops. According to Abha Dixit, this might have been the closest to a factual understanding of the Afghan situation, a position borne out by subsequent revelations.²⁰ Indira Gandhi’s statement indirectly sought to hint at the efforts by the western world to create Afghanistan’s neighbour Pakistan into a ‘frontline state’ to counter Soviet Communism. Pakistan had become the conduit of international aid for the Afghan rebels or the Mujahideen (holy fighters) against the infidel communist government in Kabul (Bahshi Jyotsna).²¹ This country became the medium through which large-scale military aid to the Afghan rebels from the west, some of the West Asian countries and China was passed. Pakistan also provided sanctuary and training to Afghan Mujahideen against the Moscow backed Kabul regime.²²

Against this backdrop, US President Jimmy Carter’s special envoy Clark Clifford’s meeting with Indira Gandhi on Jan. 31, produced no result. The divergence of views between the USA and India was fed on the suspicion raised by the former US National Security Adviser and State

¹⁸ Government of India, Indira Gandhi: Speeches in Parliament, Lok Sabha Secretariat 1996, p.193.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.193-194.

²⁰ Abha Dixit, Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan: Does India have a role to play ACDIS Occasional Papers, 1997, p.2.

²¹ Jyotsna Bakshi, “Pakistani’s Geopolitical Game Plan in Afghanistan”, Himalayan and Central Asian Studies, New Delhi, July-Sept.1997, p.34.

²² Ibid., p.35.

Secretary, Henry Kissinger's observations on January 22, 1980.²³ To him the greatest danger was that India might seek, with Soviet support, to balkanize its neighbour by splitting Baluchistan and NWFP and to prevent such eventuality he suggested stationing of air-borne troops in Pakistan for an interim period.²⁴ Such suggestions from a high ranking U.S Government Official did not help to mend fences between India and US.

Subsequently, India's responses to the Afghan imbroglio varied at three different levels. It involved India's dialogue with regional countries Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Srilanka and other powers, especially Soviet Russia and U.S and finally India's stand at the different international forums.

The Indian diplomacy at the regional level began with the visit of Indian Foreign Secretary Ram Sathe to Islamabad on February 5, 1980. The two neighbouring countries' perceptions of the crisis remained divergent. Unlike India, to Zia-ul-Huq, the Pakistani President the Afghan issue was not a regional but a global one, with one of the super powers Soviet Union turning Afghanistan into a 'big red wedge' and the question was "whether the wedge would move the west to Iran or the east to Pakistan".²⁵ With Carter's National Security Advisor Brzezinski disagreeing with Zia in their February 2 talks about formalising the US-Pakistani Agreement of 1959,²⁶ it was clear to Zia that the US administration was reluctant to come to Pakistan's aid against a common front comprising the

²³ The Times of India, New Delhi, Jan 23, 1980.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The Statesman, Calcutta, Feb. 7, 1980.

²⁶ The New York Times, New York, Feb 3, 1980, p.11.

Soviet Union and India. He therefore suggested that New Delhi persuade Soviet Union to pull its troops out of Afghanistan and that Indian troops participate along with Iran and Pakistan in a peace keeping force to facilitate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.²⁷ The meeting between Zia and Sathe however failed to produce any concrete results.

The second Indian mission to Pakistan was on April 10, 1980, led by Sardar Swaran Singh, a Former Foreign Minister. At this meeting with Swaran Singh, Zia-ul-Haq refused to meet the Afghan leader Babrak Karmal, because he thought it would amount to recognising the Marxist regime in Kabul.²⁸ Though the talks failed but before returning to New Delhi, Swaran Singh told reporters that differences on Afghanistan had narrowed down as a result of his visit.²⁹

With the beginning of 1981, Islamabad proposed that the UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, might name a representative to promote a dialogue between Iran, Pakistan and the ruling party in Kabul. Afghan president Babrak Karmal immediately seized the opportunity by sending a message to Indira Gandhi on Jan 5, 1981, indicating Kabul's willingness to participate in such talks.³⁰ It was India which had invited the countries concerned to negotiate at New Delhi on the eve of the Non-Aligned Conference which was to be held there in January.³¹ However after expressing eagerness for talks initially, the Pakistani Foreign Minister,

²⁷ Sen Gupta n.1, p.117.

²⁸ Ibid., p.131.

²⁹ The Hindustan Times, April 15, 1980.

³⁰ The Statesman, Jan. 6, 1980.

³¹ Ibid., 1981.

Agha Shahi ultimately rejected the possibility of such talks at New Delhi on the ground that there was no agreed basis for the procedure of such a dialogue and concentrated on the distinction between the ruling party and the government in Kabul. Pakistan and its army's Intelligence Directorate – the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), which had been providing arms aid to the rebels, had other aims in mind. The main objective of Pakistan behind this initial show of interest was probably to create a favourable climate of opinion for its foreign policy at the Non-Aligned Conference, and thus to take the wind out of India's sail that a political solution was the need of the day, as distinct from arms aid to Afghan rebels.³² Under these circumstances, India's attempt to get the various parties affected by the Afghan situation to talk with each other under the aegis of the Non-Aligned forum, or alternatively, with the UN acting as the mediator failed to register my success.

Since March 1981, tension with respect to the Afghan crisis, instead of being defused, began to escalate and the major element was the new US President, Ronald Reagan. He declared on open arms support to the insurgency operations.³³ This would only have a negative impact on Indian's renewed effort to find a political solution so the Afghan crisis. It was believed that the problem of Afghanistan could only he solved

³² Roy, n. 13, p.68.

³³ The Times of India, March 4, 1981.

politically by peaceful means and for that purpose all forms of foreign interference in Afghanistan would have to cease.³⁴

Interestingly, Reagan Administration's support to the Afghan rebels was also followed by the US decision to bolster Pakistan's military strength. Within days after Pakistan Foreign Minister Agha Shahi's assurance to India that the latter's fear of Pakistan being "armed to the teeth" posed a danger to India, as "unwarranted"³⁵, he made an arms deal with Washington during his visit to USA.³⁶ This caused grave concern in India. Mrs. Indira Gandhi stated that she was not worried about Pakistan getting arms but about the motivation involved in it and the "larger framework of an arms race.. posing the danger of a confrontation";³⁷ India's main concern was about Pakistan being drawn into the American gameplan for containing Soviet expansionism and protecting the US interests. This also had the overt threat of dragging the Cold war into the sub-continent.

Behind such a back drop, India's foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao visited Islamabad in the second week of June 1981. Taking up the Afghan issue, Rao pointed out that while the two countries had divergent views, these were not totally opposed to each other, and tended to come near to each other as time passed. He spelt out India's stand on Afghanistan, calling for a political solution. While expressing concern over the presence

³⁴ Government of India, Annual Report 1980-81, Ministry of External Affairs, p.1, Introduction p.iv.

³⁵ The Hindustan Times, April 16, 1981.

³⁶ The Hindu, April 23, 1981.

³⁷ The Hindustan Times, May 6, 1981.

of foreign troops, hoping that the Soviet Union would not violate the independence of Afghanistan. He also regretted the fact that the time taken for finding a solution to the problem, was leading to escalation of great power presence in the region on a permanent basis, leading to a vicious circle.³⁸

With regard to another regional actor, China, Indian Foreign Minister, Narasimha Rao during a visit by the Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua, to India in June 1981, made it known that China need not fear India's link with Soviet Union and that Beijing and New Delhi could have a relationship of their own.³⁹ Huang Hua, wanted the Asian countries to unite in an effort to oppose all forms of foreign aggression and intervention.⁴⁰ At the same time he reiterated his country's resolve to develop friendly relations with its neighbours in Asia as China perceived danger "from the rivalry between the Super powers" and their expansion and aggression in various places.⁴¹

Regarding negotiations with Afghan leaders, India was constantly in touch with the leaders themselves. However, a cooling effect in India's diplomatic endeavour for finding a political solution to the Afghan crisis became evident, when on September 1, 1981, Indira Gandhi conveyed to the visiting Afghan Foreign Minister, India's concern on the situation in his country. She felt that the process of finding an amicable solution was

³⁸ The Statesman, June 12, 1981.

³⁹ The Statesman, June 27, 1981.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

getting delayed because the countries in the region were not taking a long-term perspective of the problem of the people's of the region. She stressed that a political solution would be possible only on the basis of a historical perspective of the sequence of events in Afghanistan.⁴²

Following this, in the year 1982, Indo-Afghan Joint Commission was re-activated. Under various programmes of the Joint Commission, the number of Indian experts working in Afghanistan increased. Among the projects undertaken during this period was the expansion of the 250 bed children's hospital in Kabul, construction of a 300 bed hospital for gynaecology and obstetrics; establishing a small industries estate on the outskirts of Kabul, and collaborations in the fields of irrigation and hydroelectricity in the Selma Hydel power project near Herat and other micro-hydel projects in Bamiyan, Samangam and Faizabad. Indian experts in other areas like agricultural research, rural development, power and education were also present in Afghanistan during this period. Even though overall economic cooperation was small compared to Soviet efforts or even US economic cooperation programmes of the 1950s and 1960s, what allowed the perception of a Moscow-Kabul-New Delhi axis to foster was that while western countries maintained a minimal presence in Kabul and concentrated on using non-governmental agencies to provide assistance to the estimated 3 million refugees in Pakistan, India was taking bold steps that would reinforce the PDPA government.⁴³

⁴² The Hindustan Times, September 2, 1981.

⁴³ Ibid.

The results of this economic assistance programme for India were manifold. First, Pakistan gained favours from Washington with respect to Afghanistan, as a result of which Reagan administration supplied military equipment to Islamabad, despite India's protests with the objective of 'bleeding' the Soviets in Afghanistan. Secondly, pro-Soviet tilt ended any chances for India to maintain contacts with the Mujahideen groups fighting the Soviet supported regime and based in Iran and Pakistan. Although India followed a liberal policy towards Afghan refugees allowing them to stay in India and to be looked after in informal basis by The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) there was a common perception among the refugees and mujahideen groups that India was siding with the Babrak Karmal regime.⁴⁴ And lastly, the initial efforts launched by India to play the role of an honest broker under the auspices of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were also hampered because of objections from Pakistan and Iran.⁴⁵

Also, there were increased apprehensions in New Delhi that the Afghan crisis had become entangled with the Super Power rivalry in the region and in this process Pakistan was 'orchestrated' by the USA against Soviet Union. This was evident from the statement made by the Pakistani Government on September 16, 1981, announcing its acceptance of a supply of \$3.2 billion US arms and economic aid. The US-Pakistani deal convinced the Indian Government that with regard to the Afghan crisis,

⁴⁴ Karmal was supported by the Soviet Union and thus was opposed by the Mujahideen and the Afghan refugees in India.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Pakistan “had become a frontline state for the USA against the Soviet Union”.⁴⁶

With regard to India’s diplomatic initiative with the super powers such as USSR and US, India tried its level best to coerce the leadership in USSR to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan while seeking to stay away from directly condemning the USSR at the international fora. The visit to India by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko on February 12 1980, and by Indian Foreign Minister Narassimha Rao to USSR failed to produce any result as far as Afghanistan was concerned.

Disappointed over the slow pace of developments, Narasimha Rao after returning from Moscow mentioned in his speech in Lok Sabha on June 17, 1980, that,

“Reports coming from Afghanistan... seem to suggest that in view of the situation there, the hope that Soviet Assistance to Afghanistan could indeed remain limited in time, as originally intended, is not very strong. It is time for us to ask ourselves the question whether the Soviet troops meant for assistance have not become or are not likely to become, a pretext for those who wish to create further instability in the country”.⁴⁷

This disappointment was due to the fact that India had earlier expressed hope in the UN General Assembly on January 11, 1980 that

⁴⁶ Government of India, Annual Report 1981-82, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, p.27.

⁴⁷ Government of India, , n.2, pp.22-23.

interference, should stop in order to make possible a political solution".⁴⁹

However, although in direct negotiations India criticised Soviet Union, at an International forum, the Indian Government took care not to embarrass the latter. This was demonstrated in the Non-Aligned Foreign Minister's Conference held in Delhi in Feb 1981, where India made a pro-Soviet gesture as it avoided direct condemnation of the Soviet Union.

By the year 1982, India sought to widen her area of diplomatic initiatives and sought to contact countries like Saudi Arabia and USA which were till then Pakistan's allies. During her visit to Washington in July 1982, Indira Gandhi informed that if help to Afghan rebels could be stopped, that could be the starting point for improving the Afghan situation.⁵⁰ Infact, Indira Gandhi delivered a landmark speech at the White House dinner hosted in her honour by the American President on July 29, 1982. She reiterated India's stand against the involvement of foreign troops or any other interference in the internal affairs of other countries.⁵¹ India with its large area, was bound to strengthen the regional stability along with the its own. She therefore hinted that India and not Pakistan, ought to be bolstered by USA.

At the Foreign Policy Association and the Asia Society, New York on Aug 2 1982, She said,

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Breaking the Ice and Social visits", India Today, New Delhi, Aug 31, 1982, p.67.

⁵¹ Government of India, Foreign Affairs Record, Ministry of External Affairs, vol. XXVII, no.7, 5, July 1982, p.193.

“our position has been made clear publicly and privately through diplomatic channels and at the personal level, that foreign troops from Afghanistan should be withdrawn. At the same time we are aware of other interferences.”⁵²

The phrase ‘other interferences’ referred to the covert CIA-ISI assistance to Afghan Mujahideen to fight the Soviet backed regime on Afghanistan.

Mrs. Gandhi followed her US visit by a tour of Moscow in August 1982. As expected during the visit, Brezhnev’s speech on Sep. 20, 1982 and Indira Gandhi’s reply to it made no mention of Afghanistan and instead focused on Indo-Soviet relations.⁵³ The Indo-Soviet Joint Declaration issued on Sep 25, 1982, skipped the Afghan issue although it dwelt on other international issues.⁵⁴

Thus Indira Gandhi’s trip to Washington and Moscow in 1982 did not help to bring about any change in the stand taken by USA and USSR vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Also India’s dialogues with USSR did not offer any proof of India’s capacity to make Soviet Union pull out its troops from Afghanistan.

India followed a cautious policy with regard to its deliberation at the international fora and tried to balance its non-criticism of Soviet Union along with an initiative to somehow defuse the crisis. Thus on October 3,

⁵² Ibid., p.201.

⁵³ Government of India, Foreign Affairs Record, Ministry of External Affairs, vol.XXVIII, No.9, Sept. 1982 pp.227-231.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.235-239.

1980, Narasimha Rao made a statement at the 35th Session of the UN General Assembly stressing on in the need for a dialogue among the parties concerned, without preconditioning, if a solution to the problem was seriously contemplated. In the General Assembly debate on Afghanistan on November 19, Brajesh Misra said,

“A debate in the General Assembly on Afghanistan which would almost certainly lead to the adoption of another resolution unacceptable to some of the countries directly involved, might very well be counter-productive. If we are taking part in the debate, it is only to advise restraint and in the hope of contributing towards a possible amelioration of the situation in the future rather than in order to apportion blame for the past”.⁵⁵

At this time, the Non-Aligned Movement was facing large complexities. The Soviet presence in Afghanistan and the US naval presence in the Indian Ocean had got linked up as America would not agree to withdraw from the Indian Ocean if the Russians did not agree to pull out of Afghanistan. On the other hand, Moscow too would not relent in Afghanistan so long as the US military build-up continued in the Indian Ocean, specially around the Gulf region. Moreover, the continued Soviet presence in Afghanistan was bound to create anxiety in the Third World. India did not stake a division in the Non-Aligned Movement on the Afghan

⁵⁵ Government of India, n.2, p.62.

issue because the main direction in her lobbying was aimed at preserving the unity of the movement.

In the Seventh Non-Aligned Summit Conference which was held in New Delhi on March 9-12, 1983, India only reiterated its basic policy on Afghanistan. The 10-nation Working Group of the Political Committee of the Non-Aligned Summit in 1983 evolved a compromise arrangement on Afghanistan, which was to be included in the draft declaration in a way that should be acceptable to Pakistan and India. While Afghanistan objected to the original draft as "being conducted under the aegis of the United Nations", since it was felt that this conferred a kind of UN jurisdiction on Afghanistan. Pakistan was against references to direct negotiations between Kabul and her neighbours, because it was not prepared to accord recognition to the ruling regime in Kabul.⁵⁶ The final resolution which emerged in the summit as a compromise upheld the principles of non-intervention and peaceful settlement of disputes, while demanding comprehensive political solutions for Afghanistan and Kampuchea and withdrawal of all foreign troops. But it failed to suggest how a political solution could be attempted and did not even call upon the countries involved to make a contribution for the purpose. In this respect, it was a step down from the non-aligned resolution adopted in February 1981. It reflected the level of differences existing, specially between India and Pakistan. The Political Resolution of the Summit reportedly singled out the USA for no less than 22 strictures, whereas the USSR was mentioned only

⁵⁶ The Statesman, March 9, 1983.

once in the context of calling for the resumption of bilateral negotiations with the USA to reduce military activity in the Indian Ocean.⁵⁷

The above analysis reflects various aspects of India's stand on the Afghan question. First, India wanted the non-aligned status of Afghanistan to be preserved. Second, it desired the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan even though it refused to join the US -led campaign on that issue. Third, it advocated a peaceful political settlement of the crisis through direct negotiations between the concerned parties, viz., Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, on the initiative of the UN Secretary-General. Finally, it opposed the US arms aid to Pakistan and the arms build-up in the Indian Ocean by the USA in a countervailing measure against the Soviet presence in the region.

Thus between 1980 and 1984 though India was privately uncomfortable with the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan, it was forced to plug the line that "it did not believe in condemnation".⁵⁸

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi assumed the role of Prime Minister in 1984. Following his mother's policy he too initially tried to follow the policy of non-condemnation of the Soviet Union, while seeking to draw attention to the role of U.S. and Pakistan in Afghanistan. For example in reply to a debate in Lok Sabha 10 April 1985, he said,

⁵⁷ Sunanda Datta Ray, "Sermons on the Summit", The Statesman, March 15, 1983.

⁵⁸ Dixit, n. 20, , p.3.

“We are worried about their (Pakistan’s) feverish purchase of arms and weapons which we feel are well beyond their just requirement. Today we believe that the USA is spending the maximum amount it has ever spent since the Vietnam war drew to and end on armaments going to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan. And, as you know, these go through Pakistan. We can not be fully sure of how much goes where. The sums involved are very large”.⁵⁹

Also in an address to the Joint Meeting of the US Congress Washington on 13 June 1985 he said,

“Afghanistan and South-West Asia are on all our minds. Outside interference and intervention have put in jeopardy the stability, security and progress of the region. We are opposed to both foreign presence’s and pressures. The one is advanced as a justification for the other. We stand for a political settlement in Afghanistan that ensures sovereignty, integrity, independence and non-aligned status, and enables the refugees to return to their homes in safety and honour. Such a settlement can only come through dialogue and a realistic consensus among the parties directly concerned. The UN Secretary-General has taken an initiative in this direction. We fully support that initiative”.⁶⁰

This showed that India was not yet ready to confront Soviet Union with regard to the Afghan problem while at the same time it sought to remind the world community specially US about its apprehension with

⁵⁹ Government of India, Rajiv Gandhi Selected Speeches and Writings, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1986, p.293.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.334.

regards to Arm supply to Pakistan. In an address to the National Press Club Washington on 14 June 1985. He said,

“We have made our position clear on a number of occasions and we have not changed our position on Afghanistan at all, because there seems to be an impression that yesterday in my talk to the joint meeting of Congress, we put out a new banner on Afghanistan. The fact is that this is what we had in the 1981 non-aligned paper, that is what we had in the '83 non-aligned paper and that is what India has been saying since 1981”.⁶¹

“Any compromise that comes about must include both a stoppage of the intervention and the interference that is taking place at the moment and neither can be used as a precondition because then there can be no solution. There must be some talks to bring about a position from which a solution can come and we have been talking to your people. We think that they are keen on a solution. We believe that the Soviets are also keen to come to some sort of conclusion on this and if both the countries would get together and sort it out, it would do all of us in our region and in the world a very great favour”.⁶²

Also at a Press Conference at Press Club New Delhi, 11 Oct. 1985.

He said,

“We never took an initiative actually on Afghanistan. We were just helping the two powers understand their positions as we saw it, and we thought that helped in the talks that took place

⁶¹ Ibid., p.413.

⁶² Ibid.

immediately after I had returned from the US. We thought that progress was going rather well on that till the Pakistan delegation visited the US earlier this year. The Foreign Minister, I believe, went to the US and somehow, after that, things have got a bit cooled down. We have not been able to follow it up and find out what actually transpired or what the problems are”....

“We have made our position very clear and we have a non-aligned position on this; we do not have an aligned position and our position was appreciated even in the Joint Houses in Washington when I made our position clear. So the question of it being a pro-Soviet or anti-American position does not arise. It is a non-aligned position and we would like to see a non-aligned Afghanistan without any interference and without any intervention”.⁶³

With regard to the Geneva talks initiated in 1981, Afghanistan, still felt that India could play a substantial role in helping to bring about peace in Afghanistan. It was therefore proposed by Mahmood Baryalai, Politburo Member and Secretary of the Central Committee of the ruling PDP that India should also take part in the proximity talks of the seventh round of Geneva negotiations to be held in 1986.⁶⁴

In the international fora, India continued to play it safe-for example by abstaining from voting on a resolution accepted by the UN General Assembly calling for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan finding an amicable for a political solution to the problem.⁶⁵

⁶³ Ibid., p.447.

⁶⁴ The Patriot, New Delhi, 23 April, 1986.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 7 Nov., 1986.

With Mikhael Gorbachev assuming power in USSR in 1985, a paradigm shift in superpower relations, was brought about by his historic policies of *Glasnost* and *Prestroika*. He was keen to put an end to the costly arms race, extricate Soviet Union from experience expensive commitment abroad and above all, withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, which he described as a 'bleeding wound'. Babrak Karmal was replaced by Najibullah in Afghanistan, Najibullah adopted a new policy framework with emphasis on forming a broad based government of national reconciliation with elements of pluralism in both politics and economy in place of a Marxist regime. The initiative in Afghanistan therefore passed into the hands of Soviet Union and Afghanistan government the sides that had been on the defensive so far.

In an address to National Press Club, Canberra, Australia 15 Oct. 1986, Rajiv Gandhi stated,

"I do feel after having talked with General Secretary Gorbachev and President Reagan that a solution is available. Perhaps, it would not be very quick. The Soviets are willing to move out, and will move out provided they get some guarantees and these guarantees which they should work out mutually with the United States about who will then come into Afghanistan. We would like to see Afghanistan non-aligned with no intervention or interference in their internal affairs. We have had this stand right from the beginning. We have not changed it. After my June visit to the US, I had talked to President Reagan and I had more or less said this to him, perhaps in some more detail and he had agreed that, yes, a solution was possible on those lines and they would

start talking. Following that what they called the Proximity Talks, I think, they were called at that time, in Geneva went quite well. They were in July, but in August, the following month, the Pakistani Foreign Minister, I believe, visited the US, and from that point onwards there was a reversal and the US, at that point, decided that it could not give any guarantees to the Soviets on what would happen if the Soviet troops withdrew and that sort of brought things to a bit of a halt. But I believe, following for about a year now, there has been some movement on that and there is a possibility of getting a solution. But I feel that the Soviets are willing to move out and will be willing to move out.....

We do not see ourselves as a mediator at all. The guarantees we did not want to go into ourselves because we felt if we are not going to be involved in any mediation or in any direct involvement, we do not really want to know and they were to be worked out between the US and the Soviet Union. Last October, when I was at the UN, I had talked with President Reagan and they had a greed to go ahead and talk about guarantees directly with the Soviet Union. So we are looking at that point of view and we hope that something will come out.⁶⁶

In 1987, Najibullah was the first Afghan President to visit India in nine years after Mohammad Daoud visited India in 1978.⁶⁷ Now that Soviet withdrawal was imminent, India was in touch, with various Afghan elements, including Mujahideen guerrillas as to explore the chances of a

⁶⁶ Government of India, n.59, pp.363-368.

⁶⁷ News Time, Hyderabad, 24 Dec.1987.

consensus over the interim set up in Kabul, after the withdrawal of Soviet troops .⁶⁸

In its effort to play a more dominating role in Afghanistan, Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Natwar Singh met ex-king Zahir Shah who was in exile in Rome.⁶⁹ But Indian role was marginalised, with Zahir Shah not figuring in the U.N. peace plans.

On 15 April 1988 Geneva Agreement was signed under this, Soviet troops were to be withdrawn from Afghanistan by February 1989, Pakistan and Afghanistan pledged not to interfere in each other affairs and USA and USSR were the joint guarantors of the agreement.⁷⁰

By the beginning of 1988, it was obvious that Rajiv Gandhi had been desperately looking for an Afghan policy for some weeks. India tried to diplomatically take advantage of Pakistan's Afghan involvement by suggesting that the two countries would jointly defuse the situation. A highly publicised effort was made in 1988 when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi invited General Zia-ul-Haq to India to discuss the Afghan situation though the latter did not respond to India's initiative. Another attempt by India to involve itself in the Afghan situation came in June 1988 (at a time when the USSR was preparing to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan) when K. Natwar Singh, special envoy from New Delhi visited Moscow to impress upon the Soviet leadership that India had vital interests in

⁶⁸ The Hindustan Times, 24 Dec. 1987.

⁶⁹ The Hindu, 8 Feb., 1988.

⁷⁰ Bakshi, n. 21, p.41.

Afghanistan as well. An effort to play a bigger role in Afghanistan, though proved to be a failure.

Looking back at the period between 1984 to 1988, two considerations led to a slightly diluted stand by New Delhi on Afghanistan.

As in 1981, when the Reagan administration granted \$3.2b to Pakistan, during this period U.S. and Pakistan were negotiating another \$ 4.02 billion worth of military assistance revealing the vulnerable situation that India was in, vis-à-vis Pakistan.⁷¹ Further after the Geneva process was initiated in 1981, there was growing realisation in New Delhi that Soviet withdrawal was an inevitability. The failure of India to be at the Geneva talks, coupled with the failure of the NAM initiatives on Afghanistan, led to the marginalisation of India on the Afghan issue. When during the course of the Geneva process the Afghan government did suggest the inclusion of India in the list of guarantors, this produced a sharp reaction from the Pakistanis. This finally led to the whittling down of the list of guarantors to include USA and USSR.

Thus the period between 1979 to 1988 saw the cold war being enacted in the Indian subcontinent with both India and Pakistan being pitched in opposite camps. India's historical relations with USSR which included the support that it received during crisis such as the Indo-Pak war in 1971 and also the military aid received over a period of time made India accept the Soviet explanation for intervention at face value. But later various other factors also made India adopt an almost neutral stand with

⁷¹ Dixit, n. 20, p-4.

regard to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The most important reason was the US, decision to militarily arm Pakistan thus impinging on India's security. Also the Geneva Agreements prevented India from having any say in the post-USSR Afghanistan. Under such circumstances Indian policy makers were left with no alternative, other than the one they had adopted.

CHAPTER THREE

Politics of Engagement: Indo-Afghan Relations During 1989-96

Following the Geneva Agreements till the Taliban captured power in Afghanistan, the country was ruled by different groups. Between 1989 to 1992 Najibullah was in power. The Mujahideen factions shared power between 1992 to 1996 and finally 1996 saw the accession to power of the Taliban. While India maintained strong links with the Najibullah government, the Mujahideen government's relations with India though not very cordial yet seemed to make India relevant for them. Among various reasons, one was the fact that none of the Mujahideen leaders were strangers to India – having at some time or the other spent time in this country. But with the Taliban coming to power, Indian policymakers faced a tough challenge. The Taliban phenomena was totally new to India and none of the member of the Taliban had familiarity with India on a governmental level.

India's responses to the events in Afghanistan consisted mainly in trying to quell Pakistan's ambition with regard to Afghanistan, countering the menace of terrorism sponsored by Pakistan with the aid of Afghan *Mujahideen* in the state of Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir and lastely making an effort to bring to power a friendly regime in Kabul. The main obstacle that India faced now was that support to the Soviet actions during the last nine years (1979 to 1988) sought to provide an excuse to Pakistan and its friends in Afghanistan to prevent India from having any say in post USSR Afghanistan.

The Pakistan factor had always been an important element in India's Afghan policy. In fact the various events that one witnesses later on in this chapter shows that India's relation with any regime in Afghanistan is

shaped more by its efforts to quell Pakistani ambitions vis-à-vis Afghanistan. In the post-Geneva Agreement period Pakistani President General Zia Ul Haq followed an aggressive anti-India policy, seeking to deny India any hold in Afghanistan. In an interview to noted American scholar Selig Harrison, General Zia said:

“We have earned the right to have a friendly regime there. We took risks as a frontline state, and we won’t permit it to be like it was before with India and Soviet influence there and claims on our territory. It will be a real Islamic state, part of a pan-Islamic revival that will one day win over the Muslims in the Soviet Union. You will see”.¹

Pakistan therefore sought to establish a pro-Pakistan, anti-India Islamic government in Kabul that would serve its larger interests in the region. Denying India any say in Afghan affairs became an important theme in Pakistan’s Afghan strategy. As mentioned before, during the period of Soviet intervention when the Intelligence Directorate of Pakistani Army – the ISI developed close links with U.S. intelligence agency, the CIA, to counter the Soviet backed government in Afghanistan, the US aid to the Afghan *mujahideen* was funnelled through the ISI. The ISI preferred the more fundamentalist parties among the Afghan exile parties based in Peshawar. Thus Hezb-I-Islami led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the most hard-line fundamentalist of these parties, received the largest share of the

¹ Selig Harrison, "Afghanistan in the Mirror of the World Press", The Washington Post, compiled in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul 1989], p.90

aid.² Even after the Geneva Agreements, the fighting between the *mujahideen* and the Soviet backed government led by Dr Najibullah did not stop. India consistently supported Najibullah and this helped Pakistan to further favours gain among the *mujahideen*. To this extent, writes Aabha Dixit that, Rajiv Gandhi's meeting in New York with Dr. Najibullah in June 1988, at which the Indian leader expressed the hope that the Afghan government would be able to meet the "*Mujahideen* onslaught" allowed Islamabad to make further political capital.³

After supressing the initial *Mujahideen* attacks in Jalalabad, Gordez and Kandahar, the Najibullah regime in Kabul appeared stronger and better organized to face the *Mujahideen* who were poorly equipped to fight a battle with the Afghan army. To that extent Rajiv Gandhi's words of encouragement reflected the ground realities, but in terms of perception it further damaged India's position in the long run.⁴

In August 1988, after the death of Gen Zia, Ghulam Ishaq Khan, the Chairman of the Pakistani Senate succeeded him as Pakistan's new President. But the strategic Afghan policy shaped by Zia ul Haq was left untouched. Infact, President Ghulam Ishaq Khan proposed a confederation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, reflecting Pakistani attempts to dominate Afghanistan and deprive it of its independence. Perhaps Pakistan was eying the vast natural resources of Afghanistan, including untapped

² Anthony, Hyman, "The Afghan Politics of Exile", Third World Quarterly, Vol 9, No.1, January 1987, pp 73-74.

³ Aabha Dixit, "Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan : Does India Have a Role to Play?" ACDIS Occasional Paper, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, December 1997, p 4.

⁴ Ibid

reservoirs of nuclear minerals⁵. The proposal, however was rejected by the Kabul government under Najibullah and also received criticism in India and the Soviet Union.

Thus, Afghanistan, with the complete withdrawal of the Soviet troops on Feb 15, 1989, had entered a new phase. However the tussle for political, military power between Najibullah and the Mujahideen rebels continued. In fact, in his first press briefing after the Soviet withdrawal, Najibullah condemned Ghulam Ishaq Khan's statement and with regard to India he stated:

“The people and the government of Afghanistan appreciate and acknowledge the realistic appraisal and stand of India concerning the situation in and around Afghanistan. As the government of a peace loving country in the region, the Indian government has a totally realistic behaviour towards the events. I expect the Indian nation, whose friendship with Afghanistan has a special place in the history of our countries to play a crucial and specific role in maintaining peace and in implementing new constructive programmes for Afghanistan”.⁶

This showed the level of cooperation that Najibullah sought from India, inspite of the stiff opposition from the Pakistan sponsored and Peshawar based *Mujahideen* Parties. On the other hand, the super powers along with the regional actors like India, Pakistan and Iran sought to play a crucial role in Afghan affairs. Thus the Indian diplomatic response to the

⁵ Link, 26 Feb, 1989, pp –33-35; 5 march 1989, pp- 34-35

⁶ Sunday Observer, Bombay, 19 February, 1989

then Afghan situation was crucially linked to Pakistan. India was the only country in the world apart from the Soviet Union willing to help President Najibullah in countering the *Mujahideen*. However on 23 February 1989 the seven *mujahideen* parties based in Peshawar formed an interim Afghan Government. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, a moderate Afghan leader, was elected the President of the interim government and Sayyaf, the leader of Saudi backed faction of Hazb-I-Islami was appointed the Prime Minister.

Meanwhile Prof. Sibqatullah Mojadiddee President of the Afghan rebels' so called interim government, warned India against sending its aircraft pilots to help the Afghan forces in the 24 day-old stalemated battle for Jalalabad city.⁷

The nations supportive of the rebel government were all ready to formally recognize Mr. Mojadiddee as President once he had established control over Jalalabad. The United States was one of them and therefore the inability of the rebels to capture power caused great concern in the USA.⁸ Frustrated at his failure to attain victory over Najibullah's army, Mojadiddee charged Indian pilots and military advisors for indulging in "open interferences" in Afghanistan. India on the other hand always maintained that it was only sending relief supplies based on humanitarian needs. However, in a statement it was pointed out that India was directly affected by the developments in Kabul since it was totally within its interest to try and prevent the formation of a fundamentalist government in Kabul which was going to be inimical to Indian interests. Indian

⁷ The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 3 March, 1989

⁸ The Telegraph, Calcutta, 2 April, 1989

government believed that, "there are links between Kashmir's secessionists and the rebels" as Kashmir is close to Afghanistan.⁹

However, in December 1989, Mr. Ali Khan, the chief representative of the Afghan *Mujahideen* in India praised the new government in India headed by Mr. V.P. Singh.¹⁰ This showed the eagerness of the Afghan *Mujahideen* to seek diplomatic recognition from India. Contradicting the recent statement of Mr Abdul Wakil, (Foreign Minister of the Afghan government) hoping India would continue its old foreign policy, Mr Khan questioned the authority of the Kabul regime to speak on behalf of the Afghan people. Also Mr Ali Khan said that the only solution to the Afghan tangle was that Dr Najibullah vacate his position as President of Afghanistan immediately and pave the way for holding elections so that the "real representatives" of the people should come to power. Besides, he thanked different political parties, except the Congress and the Leftists, for their 'moral support to their struggle' and hoped it would continue in future too. Also, the government in Kabul was concerned about the fate of nearly, 10,000 Afghan refugees who had taken shelter in India.¹¹ The underlying implication of this plea revealed that even though the *Mujahideen* showed abhorrence for Indian support to Najibullah, yet they still sought legitimacy from the Indian government thus making India very much relevant even in the post Soviet Afghanistan. In response in June 1990, New Delhi's decision to invite Dr Najibullah to India for talks¹² showed that India still

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ The Statesman, Calcutta, 24 December, 1989

¹¹ Ibid

¹² The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 8 June 1990

supported Najibullah against the *Mujahideens*. The issues to be discussed ranged from Pakistan's interference in the internal affairs of the two countries to regional and bilateral issues. Dr. Najibullah assumed significance in the context of Pakistan's persistent efforts to destabilize the democratic process by training and arming subversives and sending them across to Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab to commit disruptive activities.¹³ Again, intelligence inputs regarding the involvement of Afghan *Mujahideen* factions, led by Hekmatyar, in the training of Kashmiri subversives in the use of weapons and giving them actual combat training on the Afghan front, was provided by the Afghan government headed by Najibullah.¹⁴ By this time several hundred Kashmiri subversives had been trained in Afghanistan and also in the camps set up for this purpose in Pakistan and Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). Reports were also received of plans to involve some Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan, in actual subversion in Jammu and Kashmir.

In June 1990, the Najibullah government "proposed that India should be a participant in a regional or international conference" aimed at "defining the neutrality and demilitarization of Afghanistan".¹⁵ The Afghan foreign minister, Mr Abdul Wakil who visited India during this time said that 'India would always be given greater role in the final settlement of the Afghan problem'. This was because "our Indian friends have got contacts with all concerned, including Afghan opposition. Inside and outside the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ The Times of India, New Delhi, 14 June 1990.

country they (Indians) know them".¹⁶ At the ninth session of Indo-Afghan Joint Commission, a protocol was signed between India's External Affairs Minister Mr. I.K. Gujral and the Afghan Foreign Minister Mr. Abdul Wakil. Areas of cooperation included water and power, cartography, telecommunication, tourism and meteorology. Besides, cultural exchange programmes were also to be enhanced. Emphasis was also placed on the creation of adequate trained manpower resources in Afghanistan through deputation of experts and training of Afghan cadres in India in disciplines relevant to Afghanistan's developmental priority.

Thus even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops following the Geneva Agreements, India managed to hold relevance vis-à-vis Afghanistan. In a positive development it even developed friendly ties with the Najibullah government. In exchange the Afghan Government too accorded primacy to Indian role in resolving the on-going crisis in that country. In addition to all this, in the changed geopolitical scenario the Najibullah government emerged as an area of strategic understanding between Moscow and New Delhi.¹⁷

With USA and Pakistan seeking to support the *mujahideen* it was obvious that India and USSR would become allies in their support to Najibullah government. Besides, the national reconciliation process initiated by Najibullah¹⁸ by which he broad based his government, (23 out

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Jyotsna Bakshi, "Pakistan's geopolitical game plan in Afghanistan", Himalayan and Central Asian Studies, New Delhi, July-September 1997, p-44.

¹⁸ K.K. Katyal, "Kabul and New Delhi thinking on the same wavelength". The Hindu, September 5, 1990.

of 39 members in the government and making truce with local commanders), received considerable support from India, which too is a pluralistic country.

India found it easier to justify its attitude towards Afghanistan, since it was no longer isolated in the international community as had been demonstrated in NAM conferences and the UN discussions. In 1988 when Saudi Arabia tried to boost the Peshawar based 'Afghan Interim Government (AIG)' by getting Bahrain and Malaysia to accord recognition to it, and according Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Afghan representative status at the OIC Foreign Minister's¹⁹ meeting, in the present scenario the recognition process had come to a stop and the 'AIG' failed to find a replacement for Mr. Hekmatyar as "Foreign Minister" after his resignation from the post. Solidarity on the basis of a common religion – Islam also did not pay dividends. Pakistan sought to make Kashmir the cause of the *Umma*. Acting together, Kabul and New Delhi sought to meet challenges posed by this Wahabi-Pakistani combination. India was greatly helped at this time when neither the Non-Aligned group nor SAARC responded to the call of Afghan opposition based in Pakistan. Neither Bahrain nor Malaysia added their voice to that of Sahebzada Yakub Khan when he called for giving the Afghan seat in NAM to an 'AIG' representative.

Induction of Afghanistan into SAARC was on India's agenda, which is revealed in a press statement:

¹⁹ D. R. Goyal, Indo-Afghan Relations : A New Beginning" The Telegraph, 6th July 1990.

“Indian leaders have expressed the hope that Afghanistan would assume its rightful place as a SAARC member country and contribute towards regional peace and development”.²⁰ Indian efforts to do so in the past had been thwarted by Pakistan. The reason behind such efforts by Indian policy makers was mainly that it was hoped that this would pull the Afghan problem out of the big power politics. Also it would subject Afghanistan to be more pluralistic and therefore less prone to be affected by military rule and fundamentalism being witnessed in its immediate neighbourhood. It was no surprise therefore that India had been showing a deep interest in helping Afghanistan rebuild its war-torn economy.

Thus with the departure of the Soviet troops from Afghan territory, the major dilemma in India of establishing friendly ties with Afghanistan was removed. India had warmed up towards Najibullah government. In the changed geopolitical scenario, Najibullah government also emerged as an area of ‘strategic understanding’ between Moscow and New Delhi²¹ and India expanded political and diplomatic ties with it. While, the Najibullah government was following the policy of national reconciliation and permitting pluralistic elements both in the polity and economy of Afghanistan, and hence such a policy received support from India.

Just when India sought to establish cordial ties with the Najibullah regime, various events in Afghanistan and also in the international arena caused concern among Indian policy makers. In Pakistan Benazir Bhutto of

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Col. G.D. Bakshi, Afghanistan: The First Fault Line War, New Delhi, 1997, p-44

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) came to power in the elections that followed after the death of Gen Zia. It was widely believed that the powerful Pakistani army had agreed to relinquish power to a civilian government only on the condition that the army would be given a free hand in the country's Afghan policy.²² The Pakistani army along with the ISI sought to pursue the policy framed by Zia and this included cropping up the Peshawar based *Mujahideen* against the Najibullah regime. Pakistan continued to back Hekmatyar (one of the leaders of the seven Peshawar based parties) both morally and materially. The Hekmatyar faction was therefore essentially a part of the Pakistan's security establishment. The various factions of Mujahideens were demanding Dr. Najibullah's government should step down before any dialogue could begin revealed that Najibullah now faced stiff opposition from home.

Within Russia too, there was large-scale opposition to Soviet military and economic aid to Afghanistan and primarily to the Najibullah regime. Russia at this time was more concerned with the release of its POWs from the hands of various Mujahideen factions rather than the survival of the Najibullah government.²³ In September 1991 the Soviet Union and the USA agreed to stop supplying arms to the warring factions in Afghanistan. It was a bigger blow to Najibullah as the *Mujahideen* could still get arms from Pakistan and continue its militant activities and moreover the drug money was also at the disposal of the Mujahideen.²⁴ In September 1991, Russian President Boris Yelstin had said that he did not

²² Express Magazine, 2 April 1989

²³ Bakshi, n.17, p-45

²⁴ Asian Recorder, 22-28 January 1992, p-2211

want to see Russian food being sent to Afghanistan or Cuba.²⁵ Without food and fuel the Najibullah government found it difficult to survive the Mujahideen onslaught. Under such circumstances, Dr. Abdul Rehman Hatif, the Vice-President of Afghanistan's visit to India became significant. This was mostly because Afghanistan had only India to look up to tide the crisis when the trusted Russian aid was cut off.

In mid November 1991 when the Soviet Union was breathing its last, a delegation of Afghanistan led by Burhanuddin Rabbani was received in Moscow. The Soviet Union agreed to cut all military supply and fuel for military transport to Kabul government by January 1, 1992. However, a similar commitment could not be negotiated with the Pakistan government to withdraw support to the *Mujahideen*. Soviet Union, thus, gave so much in return for a rather vague *Mujahideen* promise to return the POWs²⁶. It was favourable for Pakistan but India felt deeply let down. Support for Najibullah in Afghanistan acted as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism inside Afghanistan because of his mistrust of the ISI which ran the Afghan war efforts.

Another facet of the Afghan tangle that greatly worried Indian policymakers was the nationalistic upsurge among the Asiatic Republics of Soviet Union which had the potential of developing into areas of religious fundamentalism and extremism. Moreover, the contacts of the people of the Asiatic Republics of Soviet Union with ethnic minorities of Afghanistan

²⁵ The Patriot, 9 September 1991

²⁶ Frontline, Chennai, 20 Dec 1991, p 43-49

had been a cause of concern.²⁷ This tendency coupled with plans of Pakistan to destabilize Jammu and Kashmir through *Mujahideen* trained terrorists was posing a new threat to the internal security of India. Democratisation and secularisation of the polity of Afghanistan had a direct bearing on the regional stability and it was in India's national interest that these tendencies in Afghanistan should be supported.

On April 15, 1992, Najibullah stepped down from his position as President of Afghanistan. On April 16 he was deposed and took refuge at the UN office in Kabul. According to Mahendra Ved, Najibullah would have succeeded in staying on longer, but for the "combined hostility of the UN and the US" who wanted direct role for the *mujahideen* as a logical corollary to the Soviet withdrawal.²⁸ Dr Najibullah had already sent his family members to India in advance. His own departure from Kabul however was prevented. According to the then Indian Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit, India did not make any efforts to rescue Najibullah in 1992 because any such effort would have failed as the six kilometre route to the U.N. headquarter in Kabul and the airport had atleast three military establishments.²⁹

On April 25, 1992, the ruling Watan party Government, stepped down and a *mujahideen* government was formed in Kabul. The *mujahideen* factions based in Peshawar reached a compromise brokered by the

²⁷ V.D. Chopra, "Regional Stability in Afghanistan", The Patriot, New Delhi, 9 September, 1991.

²⁸ Mahendra Ved, "Indo-Afghan relations", in Sreedhar and Mahendra Ved (ed) Afghan Turmoil: Changing Equations (Himalayan Books, New Delhi, 1998), p-181.

²⁹ Ibid.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharief, whereby a 51-member *mujahideen* council was to be formed to run affairs in Afghanistan. Sibghatullah Mojaddedi was to become the first President of the country for two months. Hekmatyar was to become the Prime Minister and Ahmed Shah Masoud was to take charge of the Defence Ministry. After two months Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani the leader of *Jamiat- i-islami* was to become the country's President for four months.

Thus, a shift in India's policy was witnessed after the subsequent fall of the Najibullah government in 1992. Not only did India seek to create links with the factions that captured power in Kabul, but also sought to use the good offices of high ranking officials of the former regime who had switched sides and were part of virtually all *Mujahideen* groups. Earlier, contacts made with smaller ethnic groups, most notably those belonging to the Uzbeks and Ismailis in northern Afghanistan and Hizb-e-Wahdat in central Afghanistan near Bamiyan, provided a small foothold. But this clearly was not enough to provide New Delhi with a countervailing influence vis-à-vis Pakistan.

However, in the period after Najibullah's fall the first interim President of Afghanistan, Sibghatullah Mojadeddi, started to develop warm ties with India. India too acknowledged the Mujahideen Council in Afghanistan as the interim government of that country and looked forward to a continuous dialogue with the new regime. The Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr Eduardo Faleiro said, that "India always stood for a sovereign, independent, non-aligned and united" Afghanistan and had always supported a political settlement in that country "based on the

aspirations of the Afghans and worked out by the Afghans themselves”.³⁰ Ahmad Shah Masood, the Afghan Defence Minister, however said that Afghanistan would have to reconsider its ties with India, given the fact that India had failed to support the Mojahideens during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan³¹. Mujaddedi, however said that Afghanistan would give top priority to the region and “in that context the traditional ties with India will bear significance and importance”³². This was mainly because of the mistake made by the Pakistan government in seeking to move rapidly towards making the transitional government to agree to recognize the Durand Line as the official border between the two countries.³³ This forced Mojaddedi like his predecessors to look towards India to counter balance Pakistan. And though the Mojaddedi government lasted a short term, as per the mandate of the Peshawar Accord, nevertheless Mojaddedi’s cultural and religious roots in India made him pay a visit to the country.³⁴

However, later on even prominent Mujahideen leaders like Ahmad Shah Masood and Abdul Haq who earlier had been severely critical of India’s role during Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, begin to soften their stance, since, their cordial ties with Pakistan had begun to erode. Reports from Kabul and Kandahar talked of the fear of “Bangladesh Syndrome” and of how the Afghans were deeply resentful of Pakistani interference in their internal affairs. “Nationalist elites’ like Mojaddedi were resentful of

³⁰ The Statesman, 1 May 1992

³¹ The Patriot, 1 May 1992

³² Ibid

³³ Dixit, n.3, p 5

³⁴ Mojaddedi is an Islamic scholar and head of the Naqshbandi Sufi Order in Afghanistan which has links with the Sufi order in India.

the manner in which “Pakistani hosts cum patrons consistently undermined them to the advantage of fundamentalists like Hekmetyar”³⁵. When the new Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani assumed power, he too sought help from India during his brief stopovers to other destinations³⁶. India had long been the main source of Afghanistan’s wide ranging humanitarian requirements and had also given the country much assistance in the development of small industries, irrigation and agriculture. Besides Burhanuddin Rabbani used the strategic decision to use India to keep Pakistan countered in Afghanistan after Pakistan’s hard liners exerted enormous pressure on the government to accept the Durand Line³⁷. To that extent a major implication obtained from this situation was that as long as the traditional hostility between Pakistan and Afghanistan exists, with regard to the Durand Line and Pashtunistan issue, any government in Afghanistan would be looking to India to counterbalance Pakistan’s over bearing attitude.

Besides, though the composition of the *Mujahideen – led* state should have assured Pakistan that India would have a low standing in Afghanistan, the leadership in Pakistan, specially under Benazir Bhutto and Nawaaz Sharif failed to appreciate the fact that the infighting among the various Mujahideen factions would make one part or the other look to India for assistance. This was more so, when Pakistan sought to promote certain fundamentalist elements like Hekmatyar.

³⁵ Menon Kesav, The Hindu, 19 June 1992, Indo Afghan Ties Need a Push

³⁶ Indian express, 15 September 1992

³⁷ Ibid

A major failure on part of the India policy makers with regard to the formation of the government in Kabul by the Mujahideens was their inability to take care of the interests of the Sikh and Hindu citizens of Afghanistan who had to flee this country as a result of the takeover of Kabul by the Mujahideens.³⁸

During Rabbani's regime, Kabul sought India's help for training the pilots of Afghan National Airlines, Ariana, which served as the lifeline for the new government. As the situation evolved, the contact between the two countries at the official level increased. Interactions since then were maintained at the Presidential, Foreign Minister and Deputy Foreign Minister levels. Indian Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao's meeting with Rabbani during the Non-Aligned summit in 1992 was a major turning point. Rabbani's stopover in New Delhi, on his way back home, significantly enhanced understanding between the two countries. The new Afghan Foreign Minister, Hedayat Amin Arsula, visited New Delhi twice in 1993, apart from his several meetings with Indian foreign minister Dinesh Singh in New York.³⁹

As ties between India and Afghanistan began to improve, Pakistan actively sought to spread misinformation about Indian motives in Afghanistan. Two Newspapers in Pakistan, the *Daily Jang* (in Urdu) and the *Frontier Post* (in English) published articles about India arming the forces loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani and the existence of

³⁸ M L Sodhi, "India must Apologise to the Mujahideens", *The Pioneer*, 2 October 1992.

³⁹ P Stobdan, "The Afghan Conflict and India", *Delhi Papers*, IDSA 2000, p 66

a larger Delhi Moscow axis backing the Kabul government.⁴⁰ Hekmatyar and Pakistan claimed that twenty five Indian personnels, including seven engineers, 4 pilots and 14 technicians, had helped the forces belonging to Rabbani and Masood⁴¹. Hekmatyar also accused the Rabbani government of taking the help of an Indian pilot in an attempt to kill him by ariel bombing, alleging that 7 Indian aircrafts were operating from Bagram air base against his positions⁴². Some Pakistani analysts claimed that India had gifted Ahmed Shah Masood two MIG 21 aircrafts⁴³. These allegation were false and later on even Hekmatyar after joining Rabbani's government refuted any Indian involvement.

The post-Soviet Afghan imbroglio also saw India being a victim of widespread small arms proliferation, drug trafficking and trans-national terrorism. Besides Afghanistan has since then increasingly figured in the Kashmir conflict. To some observers there is little evidence of actual transfer of Afghan Mujahideens to the Kashmir front but there is enough reason to believe that the Pakistan government policies ignoring the activities of the country's Jamaat-e-Islami and ISI officers have condoned if not officially supported the transfer of weapons and training of Kashmir fighters.⁴⁴ Besides, the Afghan Minister of Education, Abdul Quayyum, was reported to have favoured the recruitment of Afghan Mujahideen to Kashmir and Punjab. It was pointed out that after 14 years of Pakistani

⁴⁰ The News, Islamabad, 21 July 1994, p 11.

⁴¹ Ibid p-67

⁴² Muslim, 5 May 1995

⁴³ Dixit, n.3, p 5

⁴⁴ Marvin Weinbaum, "The Afghan Factor in Pakistan's India Policies", Himalyam and Central Asian Studies, New Delhi, p-12, 1997.

protection in Peshawar this was how the new government would repay its debt to that country.⁴⁵ The Palestinians and Saudis continued to provide funds for Afghan war veterans ostensibly to recruit and train Muslim volunteers from other Islamic countries in various terrorist training camps functional in several towns of the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontiers. These came to be known as the “Afghanis” (estimated at approximately 30,000 according to US sources) and were implicated in various terrorist attacks in India and the western world. Since the summer of 1992, at the peak of militancy in the Kashmir valley⁴⁶, the infiltration of Afghanis into Kashmir increased, numbering about 2000, belonging to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan and Tunisia. Newspapers in India carried reports of various instances when a large number of Afghan Mujahideens had sneaked into Kashmir, to fight the local militants. On May 22, 1992, The Statesman carried a report saying “the state government has begun investigation following the reports that several hundred Afghan Mujahideens have sneaked in to fight alongside Kashmiri insurgents for separation of Jammu and Kashmir (sic) from the Indian Union.”⁴⁷

Similarly, another report by Times of India, talked about a claim made by the Jamat-e-Islami, both in Pakistan held Kashmir and in Srinagar, that Afghan Mujahideen leaders had “assured their full support to Kashmiri militants”⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ The Tribune, Chandigarh, 20 May, 1992.

⁴⁶ P Stobdan, “Kashmir : The key Issues”, Strategic Analysis, April 1996, p 111-139.

⁴⁷ The Statesman, 22 May 1992

⁴⁸ Ibid

Again there were reports in 1993 that 400 foreign mercenaries comprising of 200 battle hardened Afghan rebels had sneaked into Jammu and Kashmir to fight along side local militants⁴⁹.

The reason for this influx of Afghan mercenaries into Jammu and Kashmir was that the ouster of the Najibullah regime after the withdrawal of Soviet troops did not lead to a massive return of Afghan refugees from Pakistan. The unsettled situation within Afghanistan and the continuation of the violent factional conflict had discouraged a lot of them from returning to Afghanistan while encouraging others to come out to a safe haven in Pakistan. An appreciable number of Afghans with access to arms supplies had funneled out inside Pakistan and were a spruce of law and order problem⁵⁰. Thus something had to be done with this mercenary population. At this point Pakistan's Afghan and India policies came together and Pakistani policy makers sought to infiltrate this population into Jammu and Kashmir.

Finally, the year 1994 saw the beginning of the rise of the Taliban or the student militia in Afghanistan. For India, the eruption of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan in mid 1994 was a depressing phenomenon, although India had advance information about its creation in the autumn of 1993⁵¹. The Taliban's emergence came in the light of the growing Indian and Iranian cooperation in Central Asia following the tripartite agreement signed between India, Iran and Turkmenistan in 1995.

⁴⁹ Business and Political Observer, 25 August 1993

⁵⁰ A K Ray, "Afghan, Mujahideens and terrorism in Kashmir; Afghanistan factor in Central and South Asian Politics", Himalayan and central Asian Studies, New Delhi, 1994 p 43

⁵¹ J N Dixit, My South Block Years, New Delhi 1996, p 105

Since Hekmatyar had failed in his efforts to unite Afghanistan under a pro Pakistan government and opened trade routes to Central Asia, he was replaced by the Taliban created by apparent Pakistani involvement and covert US backing and Saudi aid.⁵² The Taliban first appeared in 1994 in the Kandhahar area. Most of them were recruits of Islamic theology schools – madrassahs run by Jamaat-e-Ulema-e-Islam of Pakistan headed by Maulan Fazlur Rehman. Interior minister of Pakistan under Benazir Bhutto, Nasirullah Babar also played a significant role in the creation of Taliban militia.⁵³ In September 1995, the Taliban received a major victory when they got control of the western city of Herat. The fall of Herat aggravated Iranian-Pakistani rivalry in the region and consequently, Iran moved closer to India. This was the obvious reason why both India and Iran had supported the Rabbani government in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding the Taliban's substantial gains, increasing its hold over provinces from 4th January to 14th December 1995, India continued to support the Rabbani government which controlled significant parts of the Afghan territory.⁵⁴ While the Taliban succeeded in dislodging Hekmatyar, the latter joined hands with his arch rivals, Rabbani and Masood. Finally, on 26 January 1996, Hekmatyar took office as the Prime Minister of a new coalition government.

Meanwhile, India's Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda had sent a congratulatory message to Hekmatyar.⁵⁵ Hekmatyar, who had harboured

⁵² Bakshi, n.17, p 52.

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Stobdan, n. 39, p. 69.

⁵⁵ The Hindu, 11 July 1996.

reservations about India in the past, suddenly made statements expressing thanks for the message of greetings he had received from India on his assumption of office as Prime Minister. Though he expressed that “we his Hizb-e-Islami party consider ourselves right on this issue of complaints against the rigid policy during the years of Jihad”, nonetheless, he said he would now “hope” that India would reciprocate the sentiments of the present government in Afghanistan by respecting the wishes of the people of Afghanistan.⁵⁶ Hekmatyar also accepted the Indian Charge-d-Affaires’ invitation to participate in India’s Independence Day reception at the Indian embassy in Kabul on August 15, 1996.

However, in a strategic move, the Taliban finally managed to take control over Kabul on 27 September 1996. According to P. Stobdan, Taliban’s failure to translate their military victory into meaningful diplomatic and international legitimacy, their display of bigotry and intolerance for human rights and the events in Kabul dictated and sustained by the Pakistani armed establishment made it difficult for India to establish any possible contact with the militia.⁵⁷

There were many reasons which made the Taliban unacceptable to India. And foremost amongst them was the suppression and contempt of democratic norms and the rule of law. Along with this was the Taliban’s utter disregard to humanitarian values, coupled with located atrocities. For example, the ban over women from working and the subsequent shut down of schools attracted considerable criticism from India. The Taliban had

⁵⁶ The Hindu 4 August 1996.

⁵⁷ Stobdan, n. 39, p-69

been seen in India as a force backed by the same elements and with the same interests that had tried to destabilize Kashmir through terrorism.⁵⁸ Although the new Afghan outfit had oriented its ideology on the concept of the Islamic code of conduct called the *Sharia*, very few in India agreed that it was a Islamic rendition since there was nothing new that the Taliban added to the Islamic thought, nor was there any revolution in the country where the idea of Taliban was conceived. The movement was not revolutionary in spirit as it did not enjoy the support of even the majority community, the Pashtuns, leave aside the support from other Afghan nationalities. Both the nature of the Taliban polity were seen as totally opposed to India's interest to be recognized as a legitimate political force in Afghanistan. Promotion of religious fundamentalism as done by the Taliban was against India's secular tradition and Taliban's advocacy of a government based singularly on one ethnic group was opposed to India's multicultural, multi-religious socio-political set up. Recognition of Taliban by India would also have given an excuse to fundamentalist groups to carryout anti-national, subversive activities. Finally Taliban was created to foster a particular expansionist agenda by the Pakistani establishment which was seen in many ways to undercut Indian influence in the Central Asian region.⁵⁹

India on its part, did not react in haste to the capture of Kabul by the Taliban Militia on 27 September 1996, although it closed its embassy and all of its 11 staff members returned home on 26 October. And the Indian

⁵⁸ Ibid p 70.

⁵⁹ Stobdan, n.39, p 70.

Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral expressed regrets over the execution of Najibullah at the hands of the Taliban and asked for restoration of a democratically elected government. Surprisingly, it was two weeks after Najibullah's public execution that India expressed "shock" and strongly condemned the action of the Taliban. It was also stated that India had not derecognised the Rabbani government.

However the Taliban's abrupt rise caused security concerns for India. Report of Sikhs in Afghanistan joining the Taliban forces, signalled the militia's links with India's Sikh extremists.⁶⁰ In response India's Parliamentary Consultative Committee on External Affairs with members from key political parties which met on 15 October 1996 came out with a national consensus on the need to support the Rabbani government⁶¹.

But despite the fact that Taliban along with Pakistan sought to blame India for trying to forge an anti-Pakistan and anti-Taliban alliance with Rabbani, the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Taliban government Shir Mohammad Abbas Stanakzai in a statement said, "We know that they (Indians) maintained good relations with (the ousted regime of) Rabbani. They were also on very good terms with Najibullah. We, too, want good relations with India".⁶² Thus India's recognition of the Taliban as the legitimate government of Afghanistan was eagerly sought by the Militia, despite the fact that their external overtures were otherwise. Such a mixed strategy, ostensibly was resourced by the Taliban government perhaps to

⁶⁰ Prakash Nanda, "Taliban victory will accentuate problems in India" Time of India, 15 October 1996.

⁶¹ "India to intensify Talks on Afghan crisis", The Times of India, 17 October 1996

⁶² The Indian Express, New Delhi, 14 Oct 1996.

gain greater foothold in the region and most importantly in lieu of political recognition among the family of nations.

India actively participated in initiatives to bring the various warring factions among the groups opposed to the Taliban, to an agreement. Russia, Iran and some Central Asian States were as concerned about the developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan's support to the Taliban, as India. India sought to provide aid to the groups opposed to the Taliban and the supply of military equipment by Russia and India continued throughout 1996.⁶³ Commonality of interests between India and Iran with regard to the Afghan problem made the two countries cooperate with each other at various levels.⁶⁴ India responded to the 'Friends of Afghanistan' Conference held in Iran on Oct 29, 1996, which called for a UN effort to convene an international conference on Afghanistan by sending a high level delegation led by senior Cabinet Minister, Chaturanan Mishra to Iran. Pakistan chose to stay away from the conference, owing to its opposition to the fact that India too was participating in it. The Iranian Majlis speaker Nateq Nauri's visit to India in November 1996 was another significant step with regard to joint cooperation on Afghanistan by India and Iran.⁶⁵

Apart from the high level cooperation that India sought from Iran, efforts were also made to built contacts with Rabbani. Indian Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda met Rabbani in Rome, whereby he expressed

⁶³ Thomas, Washington, The Other Allies: Russia, India and Afghanistan's United Front", Current History, Jan 2002, Vol 101, pg-42.

⁶⁴ Tehran had a significant Afghan refugee population of approximately 1 million people, and also suffered from narcotics trafficking across the eastern Iranian-Afghan border.

⁶⁵ Government of India, Annual Report 1996-97, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 1997, p-42.

his support to the Rabbani government. The latter in return expressed his gratitude for Indian support and India's interest in evolving a solution to the situation in Afghanistan.⁶⁶

With regard to the United Nations, apart from raising the Afghan issue at the Security Council, India participated in various conferences held in Afghanistan. Among them was the one day conference on Afghanistan in New York, convened in November 1996 and attended by 19 countries with high stakes in Afghanistan. Under the U.N. sponsored mine clearance programme (MCP) of a proposal for such an effort was to be put forth at the "International Forum on Assistance to Afghanistan" in Peshawar.⁶⁷ With Pakistan, withdrawing its offer to host the meet in Peshawar mainly due to the fact that India was invited for the same, the venue was shifted to Ashkhabad and attended by India. India joined the opinion of the majority of states, in condemning the Taliban's human rights record, by supporting the UN Security Council Resolution 1076.⁶⁸

In what came to be known as the Gujral doctrine propounded by the Indian Foreign Minister, I.K. Gujral, India's new strategy was that she would not be baited by Pakistan on any issue especially that of Afghanistan. Gujral's statement in Parliament on 27 November 1996, outlined India's approach to the then Afghan situation; this included : (a) support to Afghanistan's territorial integrity, unity and independence; (b) A call for cessation of foreign interference in Afghanistan; (c) stressing that

⁶⁶ The Hindu, November 18, 1996.

⁶⁷ India's offer for MCP was based on its experience in clearing land mines in Kashmir and in UN peace keeping operation outside India.

⁶⁸ Aabha, Dixit Indian Activism in Afghanistan is Welcome, The Pioneer, February 8, 1997.

there is no military solution to the crisis; (d) support to the UN Secretary General's effort in solving the Afghan tangle; and (e) demilitarization of Kabul and cessation of arms supply to Afghanistan.⁶⁹ Gujral also expressed serious concern over the pursuit of "obscurantist doctrine" by the Taliban leadership and consequent denial of human rights in Afghanistan.⁷⁰ It was also asserted that India had a "vital interest in who ruled Afghanistan and that India was determined to bring back to power the forces opposed to the Taliban, even if it meant having to make them share power". This was the most comprehensive and assertive position that India had taken, as far as Afghanistan was concerned.

The upheavals in Afghanistan in the period between 1989 to 1996, had various implications for India. The most serious was the rise of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab and the role of the Afghan war veterans in it. Secondly, there was spread of the Kalashnikov culture and drug addiction (which had already plagued Pakistan) into India : sophisticated weapons were available at much cheaper rates – according to Press reports the cost of the dreaded AK-47 rifles was Rs 300,000 and arrest of smugglers had led to the discovery of weapons such as light machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, plastic bombs, rocket launchers, anti-tank grenades and pistols.⁷¹ Thirdly, India's cultural diplomacy had been most successful in Afghanistan as compared to any other country. Even the strict observance of the Islamic code by the Taliban, had not prevented the common Afghan citizens from appreciating India – be it

⁶⁹ Dixit n. 3.

⁷⁰ "Taliban is a Threat to India, says Gujral," Times of India, November 28, 1996.

⁷¹ R.K., Mishra "Is India becoming an arms bazaar?", The Pioneer on Sunday, March 3, 1996.

Indian currency, Indian films and music and also the fact that India provided a functioning hospital in Kabul during and after the Soviet intervention. Finally, as the various events had shown, India's Afghan Policy was predominated by efforts to negate the Pakistani influence in the region. Pakistani designs of gaining 'strategic depth' vis-à-vis India, and denying India access to Central Asia via Afghanistan accelerated Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

By 1996 India realized the permanent significance of the *mujahideen* and their importance in any political set-up in Afghanistan. In the post Najibullah era, India sought to create better relations with the *mujahideen* factions, now under the Taliban regime, called the 'Northern Alliance'. The Taliban's rise to power was totally opposed to India's interests in the region, specially in relation to Pakistan, which promoted the Taliban to power for its own strategic designs. In the years ahead, India's main policy option was to prevent the Taliban from gaining a permanent foothold in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER FOUR

Rise of the Taliban Militia and Indo-Afghan Ties post-1997

The post 1997 period has been quite eventful not only with regard to regional politics of South Asia but also for world politics as a whole. From the rise of the Taliban, the extreme violations of human rights on their part, their sheltering of terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda and its head Osama Bin Laden to the role played by Bin Laden in bombing the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11 2001 and the subsequent attacks carried out by US forces in Afghanistan in search of Bin Laden, all had serious implications for India. While initially India had not been able to succeed in coming out with an Afghan policy owing to the presence of the Taliban, (with whom Indian policy makers had no interaction), the demise of the Taliban after September 11, 2001 and formation of a new interim government in Afghanistan, enabled India to finally make its presence felt in Afghanistan.

With the Taliban assuming power in Afghanistan, India was at a loss, since unlike the Mujahideens, the Taliban did not contain elements that had any prior contact with India. Nevertheless, India maintained its diplomatic pressure on the Taliban. India invited the Rabbani government's representative for NAM meeting in New Delhi in April 1997. Taliban Information Minister, Amir Khan Mutaqi, however was displeased and responded by saying “..

We are sure India supports Rabbani. It gives good political advice in political activities and it helped Rabbani when he was in power with technicians to repair his planes.... our demand for India is that anyone who

is a rebel should be considered a rebel and government be considered a government".¹

But India's Afghan policy drew criticism from the Indian public and political parties such as the BJP as well as the media which criticized the government for being too indecisive in a proactive Afghan policy² India's conspicuous absence in the areas controlled by the Northern Alliance despite its high political stakes in Afghanistan was something that was deeply regretted. Also India's support to the Northern Alliance had been lukewarm and the developments following the ouster of the Rabbani regime had seriously derailed India's Afghan policy.³ It was commented that the much proclaimed Gujral doctrine of focusing on the immediate neighbourhood had pushed Afghanistan to the back burner in New Delhi.

New Delhi's support for the Rabbani government had not only put India decidedly in one camp, but also sent a signal that it was opposed to the majority Pashtuns – the traditional rulers of Afghanistan. It was argued that it was in India's interest to resume diplomatic and economic contacts with the new winners in Afghanistan considering the danger that they could pose to the situation in Kashmir. It was also pointed out that the Taliban had not shown particular antagonistic overtures towards India, and would sooner or later turn to India to counter-balance Pakistani influence. It was a well known fact that a section of the Taliban ranks held a pro-India attitude, and in fact, amidst the reports of Pakistan raising yet another

¹ Times of India, New Delhi, 8 April 1997.

² The Hindu, Chennai, 18 June 1997.

³ M K Dhar, "India is still without an Afghan Policy", The Hindustan Times, New Delhi, 6 March 1997.

Afghan force, the Taliban leadership had warned Islamabad that such action would force them to turn to India for help.⁴ The Taliban's brief victory over Mazar-I-Sharif in May 1997 had put India in an unenviable position. With the sudden change in the Afghan battle, New Delhi declared it was Afghanistan's internal affair, and also reaffirmed that it was for Afghans to decide on their future without outside influence or interference. The reaction by the Foreign Office spokesman who said that "New Delhi is watching the situation closely and a concrete decision will be taken as it crystallizes", indicated that India might deal with whosoever was in effective control of the country. The Taliban's successive gains in the spring of 1997 made many Indian analysts change their earlier assessment and call for a change in New Delhi's approach towards the Afghan civil war.⁵

The fall of Mazar, demolished some of the earlier assumptions in India about the militia. The immediate implication was seen for the possible reversal of the nearly eight year old Kashmir militancy.⁶ It was feared that the possibility of the Taliban's reach upto Badakhshan, not far from India's border could have increased the influx of better armed and battle hardened militants. The Indian military officials admitted that the Afghans had preferred to infiltrate into Kashmir from the north along the Gilgit Skardu axis. They claimed that the foreign militants entered through the Kishan Ganga valley. These militants used the passes in Gurez-

⁴ P. Stobdan, "The Afghan Conflict and India", Delhi Papers, IDSA, 1998.

⁵ Dixit Abha, "How the scales tilted in Taliban's Favour?", The Hindustan Times, 7 March 1997.

⁶ Aneja Atul, "Taliban Rise Revive Jammu & Kashmir Militancy", The Hindu, 21 February 1997.

Bandipur area, and the routes from the NWFP to come to the western Poonch-Uri alignment.⁷

Besides security concerns, India was also worried about the policy review of the Russians who in the recent past had sought a serious engagement with the Taliban and political accommodation with Pakistan.⁸ The visit by the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Victor Osralyute, to Islamabad in June 1997 and Pakistan Foreign Minister Gohur Ayub Khan's visit to Moscow, a month later were matters of serious concern to New Delhi. India's diplomatic role in the Afghan affairs also suffered a decline when Russia brokered a Tajik peace settlement on June 27, 1997, in consultation with Pakistani and Taliban officials, while excluding India. Similarly, India was also not invited to participate in the meeting of Foreign Ministers of Central Asian states and Russia held on June 26-28, 1997, which discussed the developments in Afghanistan. But though these events heightened Indian concerns, there was no major change in India's position on Afghanistan.

Later Russia (which had begun to suffer from Islamic fundamentalism in Chechnya) was keen to enlist India's active support in strengthening the hands of Afghanistan's legal government, better known as the Northern Alliance. The Kremlin saw the Taliban's advance as a direct threat to its own security, fearing that its "near abroad" states bordering Afghanistan in Central Asia would be destabilized by an upsurge of extremist fundamentalism. However, India's lack of interest in coming

⁷ Atul Aneja, "Army Ready to counter Taliban", The Hindu, April 29, 1997.

⁸ S.K. Singh, "Uneasy Development", The Pioneer, New Delhi, July 15, 1997.

out with a concrete game plan with regard to the Afghan issue disappointed these players. India's belated statement on Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover of Mazar-e-Sharif, "that developments in Afghanistan impact on India's interests and national security"⁹ revealed its half-hearted stand. Elaborating upon the statement, MEA's spokesman said, "India has always worked for the welfare of all Afghan people and has promised Afghanistan with technical and economic assistance as well as humanitarian aid".¹⁰ However, India's contribution with regard to such aid had not been as much as it should have been.

India suffered immensely as a result of its inability to counter the threat perceptions posed by the Taliban in the Kashmir valley. Intensified action in Kashmir, instigated by Pakistan took place because firstly operation of Indian security forces had led to a let-up in the morale of the extremists in the Valley. The local elements once associated with the foreign masters were losing heart due to their own isolation from the population. This was reflected in the clear change in the pattern of terrorism and the concentration of the outside mercenaries to new areas. Secondly, Pakistan was under compulsion to avoid more direct clashes between the Taliban, (blessed by Osama bin Laden), and the USA. The US missile strikes on Laden's camps, the shifting of Taliban forces to the Iran border following the concentration of troops to the other side and the US-induced arms twisting by the hitherto benefactor Saudi Arabia had caused

⁹ ibid.

¹⁰ ibid.

considerable embarrassment to Pakistan which wanted to ensure the support of both sides.¹¹

Added to the fact that India was lacking a concrete Afghan policy there was widespread concern about implications of security in the Indian subcontinent following the nuclear tests carried out by India and Pakistan in May 1998. Pakistan made a renewed bid to create insurgency and terrorism realizing that it no more stood to win a direct war with India. The best thing for Pakistan to do under such circumstances was to heighten the tension in Kashmir. Low intensity proxy war was a less expensive but more effective way of countering Indian superiority in the region. Evidence revealed that apart from Pakistani soldiers and ex-servicemen, there were Afghan Mujahideens, Algerian, Sudanese and Arab terrorists of different denominations.¹² Terrorists rounded up had revealed details of their training in camps in Pakistan and those set up by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Pakistan appeared to have a grand design which went beyond Kashmir and sought to establish a position in trans-Asian region which included Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Middle East and China. Pakistan's army's funding of Taliban to control southern Afghanistan and the trade route to central Asia seemed to be a part of this design.

Under criticism from various quarters for not making enough efforts to draw global attention to the deteriorating situations in Afghanistan, India finally sought to establish contacts with the Taliban government in

¹¹ D.Raman, "Delhi concern over Taliban Threat", The Tribune, 13 October, 1998.

¹² Ibid.

Afghanistan in 1999.¹³ By this year various countries like Uzbekistan, Tajakistan, Kyrgyztan and Kazakhstan had met Taliban representatives mostly in Pakistan. The Iranians, who were strong backers of anti-Taliban alliance, of which Afghan Shias were a part had also met representatives of the Taliban in Dubai. Under such circumstances it was only prudent that India establish contacts (although secret one) with the Taliban. Although the secret contacts sanctioned by the BJP government fell short of any diplomatic recognition of the Taliban, it assumed significance in the light of U.N. brokered peace talks that had been carried out in Afghanistan. India had earlier sent a plane-load of medicines to the rebel controlled areas in Afghanistan some time before this. The supply of medicines was in response to a request from the Taliban to New Delhi for humanitarian relief in Afghanistan. Also, there were reports that Ariana, the Afghan national airline, under the control of the Taliban, had been secretly allowed to fly to Amritsar regularly.¹⁴

The hijacking of the Indian Airlines plane IC 814 by Islamic militants and the help sought by India from the Taliban to defuse the crisis also revealed the need felt for Indian diplomacy to view the world politics in a new way.

Therefore the need was felt urgently to bring about a consensus among the powers to cooperate in order to defuse the Afghan crisis. Indian government hence sought to draw international attention to the forces of destabilization radiating from Afghanistan and Pakistan. With the Taliban

¹³ The Telegraph, 17 March, 1999.

¹⁴ Ibid.

imposing a religious code, the minorities specially the Sikhs, had started fleeing from Afghanistan to India.¹⁵ An urgent need was felt to replace the Taliban rule.

Convergence of interests of the major powers such as US and Russia with that of India, greatly helped India to constrain the Taliban and force its leadership to adopt moderate policies. Enraged by the Taliban's recognition of Chechnya and military aid to Chechen rebels, Russia reiterated its rejection of the Islamists' bid to control the whole of Afghanistan and reaffirmed support for the government and Burhanuddin Rabbani.¹⁶ The US which had already faced attacks on its embassies in East Africa in 1998, carried out under the leadership of Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden, now declared that "Afghanistan and Pakistan have become the new epicenter of international terrorism".¹⁷ Hence Pakistan, which had so far been an ally was now being condemned by the US for its support to the Taliban regime.

Various other factors also favoured India at this time. The fragile Central Asian republics were extremely concerned at the support the Taliban extended to various dissidents and terrorist groups which sought to undermine the ruling regimes. Again the leading Islamic nations, Iran and Saudi Arabia, were anxious about the conundrum in Afghanistan while Shia Iran saw its ideological, economic and political interest being threatened by Sunni extremists being nurtured in Afghanistan and Pakistan,

¹⁵ Afghanistan News and Information Bulletin, Embassy of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in India, February-March, 2000. No-38, p-23.

¹⁶ *ibid* p-16.

¹⁷ C. Raja Mohan, Focus on Afghanistan, The Hindu, 22 June, 2000.

the Saudis, who were considered the guardians of Sunni faith, were essentially conservative and were troubled by the expansive radicalism of the Taliban and its support to Osama Bin Laden, who had committed himself to overthrow the Saudi ruling family.

The concerns of the major powers and also important regional actors, had begun to put pressure on Pakistan to modify its Afghan policy and rein in the Taliban. While Pakistan had gained immensely during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, by becoming a front line state for US, China and the Islamic states to counter Soviet troops, this time its support to the Taliban and religious extremism led to its isolation. By virtue of this fact India was in a favourable position vis-à-vis Pakistan.

Towards the end of the year 2000 India had begun to realize the necessity of engaging world powers to form a united front against the Taliban, and this signified a new phase in its Afghan policy. The joint working group between India and Russia in November 2000 and between India and US in September 2000 assumed significance in this regard.¹⁸ Though the Indian government had been trying to draw the attention of US with regard to foreign mercenaries operating in Jammu & Kashmir, it was only after US companies failed to find a break through with regard to laying an oil and gas pipeline across Central Asia, (that would eventually run through Afghanistan in mid 90s), the bombing of US embassies in Africa in 1998 by Bin Laden's men and also bombing of US ship USS Cole in Yemen in 2000 that US authorities took notice of the fact that the Taliban could create problems for them too in future and hence started

¹⁸ The Indian Express, 25 November 2000.

maneuvers initiating the joint to working group with India to tackle the situation in Afghanistan.

As the international opinion grew against the Taliban, India's efforts in this regard included such instances as the medical treatment of northern alliance soldiers who were fighting the Taliban. On February 13, 2001, an Indian newspaper reported that Indian army doctors were working in a "secret" hospital on the Afghanistan Tajikistan border to treat Afghan soldiers loyal to Ahmed Shah Masood, the rebel leader fighting the Taliban.¹⁹ About two dozen Indian doctors and male nurses were working in civilian clothes.

While, on the one hand, India tried to help the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, on the other hand, the Taliban regime sought to establish diplomatic ties with India. The Taliban's regime ambassador in Islamabad, Mr. Adbus Salem Zaef, reportedly expressed his desire to reestablish normal ties with India.²⁰ This showed that the Taliban regime was willing to re-open diplomatic and trade to India which had been blocked after the overthrow of the Burhanuddin Rabbani regime. International pressure which mainly included the US and the UN, forced the Taliban to observe various alternatives such as ways to deal with Osama Bin Laden, who was sheltered in Afghanistan and was sought after by the US. Under pressure exerted by the various sanctions imposed against Afghanistan, Islamabad had to ask the UN to set up more tents for the homeless Afghans within their country as Pakistan was unable to bear

¹⁹ The Statesman, 13 February 2001.

²⁰ The Tribune, 23 February 2001.

the burden of the refugees. Afghan refugees therefore no longer seemed to be welcome in the country of their first choice, i.e., Pakistan. The Afghan authorities' secret contact with India therefore seemed to be aimed at gaining a better bargaining position vis-à-vis Pakistan.

India however, was reeling under the threat of terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir, that was mainly an outcome of activities of terrorist group in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hence responding favourably to the Taliban's gesture fo friendship was not possible.

Fanatical terrorist organizations like Markaz-e-Dava, Mektab-e-Kadamat and Al Queda located in Afghanistan and Pakistan provided facilities for military training and financial support for 'jihad' in Kashmir; most of these 'jehadi' groups were previously onvolved in Afghanistan war.²¹ Osama bin Laden became a cult figure among religious fanatics for 'jihad' against Indian rule in Kashmir. Posters carrying emotional messages for the young members of the Muslim community were published in the name of Osama bin Laden. These posters were interspersed with others exhorting Muslims to wage jihad in Kashmir to free it from 'Hindu India'.²² Thousands of young Kashmiri Muslims were coerced to cross the LOC (Line of Control) to undergo training in arms and sabotage in various training camps set-up in, among other places, Afghanistan. Select groups of such recruits were taken for advanced

²¹ Maj. Gen. Afsir Karim (Retd), *Terrorism and National Security Concerns*, in V.D. Chopra, (ed) *Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in Eurasia*, New Delhi, 2001, p-100.

²² Allah's Armies: The Herald, Karachi, 1998.

training to camps on the Pak-Afghan border and inside Afghanistan.²³ According to 173rd Report on 'Prevention of Terrorism Bill 2000' submitted to the government by the Indian Law Commission, the Interservice Intelligence (ISI) sponsored terrorism, that involved Afghan *Mujahideen* and help sought from such terrorist organization like the ones based in Afghanistan, has resulted in the deaths of 29,151 civilians and 15,101 security personnel and 2730 explosions. Security related costs in countering ISI activities was around Rs. 64,000 crores.²⁴

Sponsoring terrorism is an expensive affair. Around 5 to 10 crores in a month are spent on the salary of the militants. Each new recruit gets a salary of Rs. 10,000 to 15,000 a month. The top militant leaders are paid Rs. 15 to 20 lakh a month as a salary for their militant operations in Kashmir.²⁵ According to a study conducted by the Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis, New Delhi, more than 50 percent funding for the militancy in Jammu & Kashmir comes from poppy cultivation in NWFP and Afghanistan.

With this regards another aspect of terrorism faced by India as a result of the Afghan imbroglio was the spread of narco-terrorism in India. Poppy is known as the golden plant and the countries that grow these plants are known as Golden Triangle and Golden Crescent. South West Asia popularly known as Golden Crescent comprising of Afghanistan,

²³ K. Warikoo, *Islamist Extremism and Terrorism in Kashmir*, V.D. Chopra (Ed) Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in Eurasia, New Delhi, 2001, p-128.

²⁴ The Hindu, 28 April, 2000.

²⁵ Kshitij Prabha, 'Narco-terrorism, "The Case of Pak-sponsored Terrorism in India", paper presented in the National Seminar on 'Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in the Region', organized by International Institute for Asia-Pacific Studies, New Delhi on 30 April 2000.

Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka is the largest producer of illicit opium in the world.²⁶ India is the only licit producer of opium in this region. Nepal, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka do not grow opium but are used for trans-shipment of heroin from Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ports of Maldives and Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are frequently used for trafficking of narcotic drugs. According to UN Information Service, Afghanistan and NWFP of Pakistan is the biggest producer of of opium in the world. Afghanistan alone produces 4,600 of 6000 metric tons of the world's total illicit production.²⁷

In 1998, the Taliban controlled 80 percent of the country's territory and over 95 percent of the area where opium poppy was cultivated. Chemicals which are used for producing heroin and morphine in the laboratories in Afghanistan are imported from Europe, China and India. The Taliban believed that poppy cultivation was not against Islam but its consumption was. Therefore, they refused to control poppy cultivation unless the international community offered development assistance and also political recognition. The drugs produced in the Pak-Afghan border and also inside Afghanistan found way to Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Indo-Pak border, which has always been vulnerable to transaction of narcotic drugs and weapons. Common boundary and common people inspired the Pakistani government and the ISI to use India as the main transit route for narcotic drugs. These drugs along with the

²⁶ Narco terrorism: The case of Golden Crescent by Kshitij Prabha V.D. Chopra (ed) Rise of Terrorism and Secessionism in Eurasia, Gyan Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p-318.

²⁷ The UN Information Service, Press Release of AFG/107/SOC/ NAR/811: Opium Production in Afghanistan in 1999, Vienna.

consignment of weapons are sent across the border from Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu & Kashmir and then to Mumbai and other port cities for trans-shipment to the west. The main center for business transaction in Mumbai where underworld criminals operating from Dubai also controlled the drug trade. The Pak-Afghan-*Mujahideen* drug traffickers and smugglers in this region operated in concert.²⁸

However, though India tried to draw the world's attention to the threat that the Taliban posed in terms of sponsoring terrorism world-wide it was only when Al-Qaeda under Osama bin Laden, carried out attacks on the New York Trade Centre in the USA on September 11, 2001 that the major powers, including USA sought to take any concrete action.

With this incident a major turn around occurred in global and regional politics. The Taliban was sought to be removed from power and the US forces in an attempt to search Osama and his aides carried out attacks in Afghanistan. Terrorism achieved a new meaning, as now even a super power was not considered safe enough. All this augured well for India.

With the world ranging against the Taliban, even the UAE and Saudi Arabia, two of the 3 countries that accorded diplomatic status to the Taliban, withdrew their support.²⁹ Pakistan remained the only country to retain its contact with the Taliban, more so because of the fear that Afghanistan would pass into the hands of the Northern Alliance which

²⁸ N. Mittal, *World Famous Drug Mafia*, New Delhi, 1990, p-23.

²⁹ *The Hindustan Times*, 27 September 2001.

India supported, and which Pakistan wanted to keep away from. The terrorist attack on October 1, 2001 on the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly Building again highlighted India's vulnerability to terrorist organization operation from Pak-Afghan region. As a result of this attack, India ordered a nationwide crack down on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) on the charge that it had links with the Al Qaeda and with the Fundamentalist Taliban rulers of Afghanistan.³⁰

In the new scenario however, India was again left without a concrete Afghan policy. This was mainly because the USA sought to keep India out of the rebuilding of Afghanistan in the post-Taliban scenario. This was evident when inspite of New Delhi's offer of military bases and other facilities to the USA, the latter did not seek any help.³¹ A commentator also pointed out that a 'Hindu India cannot be a partner in an alliance fighting against an Islamic fundamentalist regime, particularly, at a time when this country is putting a Muslim separatist Movement in the Kashmir Valley.'³²

But with the victory of the Northern Alliance India found itself in a favourable position unlike US and Pakistan who were wary of the gains of the Northern Alliance on the suspicion that this group would not be amenable to their interests. This was because India had supported the Northern Alliance, even when it had appeared an insignificant force.

³⁰ Ranjit Devraj, "India Demands US Action on Kashmir 'Jihadists' Group" Inter Press Service October 3, 2001.

³¹ The Tribune, Chandigarh, 22 October, 2001.

³² Ibid.

New Delhi provided help not excluding the supply of arms – to the extent possible in the face of constraints.³³ India recognised the government in-exile and Burhanuddin Rabbani (of which the Northern Alliance was, loosely speaking, the military arm). Hence despite the fact that India was not a major player during the last five to six years, and also was not a part of the six-plus-two arrangement (comprising six neighbour of Afghanistan, plus the US and Russia) devised by the US, to determine the future of Afghanistan future government its role was nevertheless being gradually recognised notably by Russia and Iran for the commonality of interests with regard to Afghanistan. The three countries shared the same wavelength with regard to the future government in Kabul – these included support for the Northern Alliance, importance of the Alliance securing the backing of Pushtuns, recognising the fact that no neighbour of Afghanistan should be allowed to have undue interest in its affairs, (this referred to PaKistani interference in Afghanistan) need for maximum agreement among its neighbours and major powers on the transition to a new regime, acceptance of the UN's role in the formation of a transitional government and in providing a force for their peaceful transition, and finally opposition to the organisation of Islamic conference (OIC) or the European nations providing personnel for such a force.³⁴

Under the UN secretary General's special representative Lakhdar Brahimi a 5 point peace plan was presented that: Under this plan the UN would convene a meeting between the Northern Alliance and other groups

³³ K.K. Katyal, "An opportunity for India", *The Hindu*, 19 Nov. 2001).

³⁴ Ibid.

to discuss the political future of the country. The meeting was to help in the formation of a provisional council:

- The council would discuss the transition to a new administration within two years.
- A traditional, Afghan Council, the 'Loya Jirga' comprising of ethnic and tribal chiefs would be convened.
- During a transitional phase, the Loya Jirga would hold a second meeting to set of a government.³⁵

According to the Brahimi Plan, it was decided that the first meeting of the Afghan groups be commenced in Bonn in the last week of November 2001. The four major Afghan Groups (The Northern Alliance, the Rome Group, the Cyprus group and the Peshawar Group) gathered in Bonn (Germany) on November 26, 2001; The meeting went on for 9 days. The 4 groups concluded on agreement on an interim set up, on 5 December 2001.³⁶

Commenting on the reversal in fortunes of India and Pakistan in Kabul, V. Sudershan wrote in outlook: "Nothing illustrates the fact that New Delhi has been able to inveigle itself successfully into the diplomatic matrix that surrounds Afghanistan politics, better than a post-midnight meeting, the day before the declaration on Afghanistan was signed in Bonn on December 5, after 12 days of protracted wrangling. Those who attended

³⁵ "UN Plan for new Afghan Government", The Dawn, November 13, 2001.

³⁶ 'Accord on Afghan future set-up signed in Bonn, Financial Times, December 5, 2001.

that meeting had to make a last-minute decision whether there was going to be a declaration on not. The list of countries that participated in that last-minute meeting indicates the new strategic confluence on Afghanistan: US, Russia, Germany, Iran and India: not Pakistan”.³⁷

India was also among the first few countries to set up a mission in Kabul after the ousting the Taliban. Shekhar Gupta wrote in India Today, that this indicated India was helping the Northern Alliance form a multi-ethnic government in Kabul. After the exit of the Taliban from Kabul, India also provided humanitarian assistance, apart from reopening the Indira Gandhi Children’s Hospital in Kabul and sending medicines and personell to help run it. An artificial Limb (the Jaipur Foot) center has ben set up to help Afghans who have lost their limbs to landmines.³⁸ India also announced a grant a \$ 10 million for immediate utilisation by the Afghan Govt.

Another factor, that has helped India establish a suport with the new Government in Afghanisatn is the fact that several members of the interim administration, (including the Head of the Interim Government, Hamid Karzai), Studied at Indian universities. The families of many Northern Alliance leaders, such as those of Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, stayed in New Delhi during the time when Taliban was in power.

Under the new interim government, the visit to India by the various office holders in the Afghan government included those of Afghan Deputy

³⁷ Sudha Ramchandra, "In Afghanistan, Pakistan’s loss in India’s gain", Asia Times, Feb 1, 2002.

³⁸ The Statesman, 2 Jan, 2002.

Defence Minister General Abdul Rashid Daostum in January 2002,³⁹ whereby India agreed to help train an Afghan army. Mohammad Arif Noorzai, Minister of small industries in Afghanistan visited India in Jan 2002 with regard to seeking and Indian help in rebuilding Afghan industry.⁴⁰ Similarly the visit of the chairman of the Afghan Interim Government, Hamid Karzai on 26-27 Feb, 2002, whereby the Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee announced a grant of US \$ 10 million for immediate utilisation by the Afghan government, India and Afghanistan agreed of various levels of bilateral cooperation. In a 'statement on the areas of cooperation between India and Afghanistan on Reconstruction and Rehabilitation in post conflict Afghanistan', the two countries assessed the status of the existing cooperation and agreed to:

- a. Continue with the existing cooperation,
- b. Enhance cooperation at the following new areas.

Education:

- Rebuilding and Educational infrastructure including six schools, polytechnics and supply of teaching aids to Afghanistan.
- Rehabilitation of some of the existing educational institutions in Afghanistan.

³⁹ The Hindustan Times, Feb 1, 2002.

⁴⁰ The Hindu, 13 Jan, 2002.

Health:

- Rebuilding of Health Infrastructure, including construction of six medical care centers, and mobile medical facilities in Afghanistan.
- Rehabilitation of some of the existing medical facilities in Afghanistan.

Info Tech:

- Setting up of computer training and maintenance facilities in Kabul.
- Computer hardware and software support to various Afghan Government Ministries.

Public Transport:

- Provide, 50 buses and other vehicles and material support as identified by the Afghan interim Administration for rebuilding appropriate public transport facilities as Kabul and other areas.

Industry:

- Rehabilitation of existing Industrial park in Kabul and construction of new Industrial Park as per Afghan priorities.

Energy:

- A composite Indian team to visit Afghanistan to undertake feasibility studies of various projects related to water and power sectors.

- To examine various areas of specific cooperation in the field of non-renewable energy resources.
- To examine projects for cooperation specifically with regard to development of rural areas in Afghanistan.

Training:

- To impart training to government officials from various Afghan Ministries at various Institutions in India related to capacity building and human resource development in different sectors.⁴¹

Hamid Karzai paid a second visit to India in March 2003, whereby India and Afghanistan signed the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) to boost trade between the two countries. Apart from Karzai's statement that 'India has helped as a lot in a variety of areas ranging from education to technology. Our relations have been a traditional and historical one', signifying India's relevance for Afghanistan, the fact that Indian experts were to assist in the formation of a new Afghan constitution, has shown the constructive role that India has been playing in the post-Taliban Afghanistan.⁴²

The post 1997 has held significant importance for India with regard to Afghanistan in many respects. Firstly the role of the terrorist organisations operating from and based in Afghanistan, seeking to create

⁴¹ Statement on Areas of cooperation between India and Afghanistan on Reconstruction and Rehabilitations in post conflict Afghanistan, Embassy of India, South Asia Region, New Delhi Feb. 27, 2002.

⁴² "India, Afghanistan sign preferential Trade Agreement", Xinhua News Agency, Global Sources, March 6, 2003.

tensions in areas like Jammu and Kashmir, got international attention after September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York. The role of terrorist organisations and their contribution in arms proliferation and spread of narco-terrorism in India has been highlighted earlier in this chapter. Secondly Central Asia too has assumed immense significance for India – more so after the events of September 11, 2001. This is because it lies at the junction between the two powers of Russia and China and shares borders with Afghanistan which had been a major source of spread of Islamic religious extremism under the Taliban. This has generated the probability of spread of such extremism to the region. India has had a vital interest in the security and political stability of this region Kashmir being a hot bed for terrorist activities, any advance by the Islamic extremist groups from Afghanistan to CARs could invigorate similar elements active in Kashmir. Peace in Central Asia and therefore Afghanistan is important for India, also for economic reasons. This region with more than 55 million consumer market holds immense significance for India. Also CARs with immense potential for energy reserves could serve India's growing energy requirements. After September 11, 2001 with efforts being made to restore normalcy in Afghanistan, India has started making efforts to gain better access to CARs. India's Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha, announced that India, Iran and Afghanistan have agreed to develop a new 'Silk Route' to enhance trade with Central Asia.⁴³ This route would utilise Chah Bahar part of Iran to send goods through Afghanistan and to Central Asian countries. India's cooperation with Iran has been an important outcome of the upheavals in Afghanistan. Since India and Iran had suffered equally with

⁴³ India Express, 31 Jan, 2003.

the rise of the Taliban and Pakistan's ISI's activities it was but rational for the two countries to explore possibilities to come together to forge an alliance.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan had made the minority Hindus staying in Afghanistan to flee the country. The Taliban edict issued in 2001 requiring the few Hindus remaining in Kabul to wear yellow identity badges had greatly incensed Indian government. Therefore, the change in Guard in Kabul was highly favourable for India. Finally, under the new circumstances that ensued after events in September 11 took place, India got an opportunity to make its presence felt in Afghanistan, albeit in a non-political way, i.e. at the economic and humanitarian level.

It was clear that development in Afghanistan, had led to a complete turn around in Indian foreign policy objective – from an indecisive to a more active role, India's vulnerability to events in Afghanistan with regard to militancy in Kashmir was also appreciated better in the world at large. Moreover India found new friends in the form of Iran and better access to regions in its North-West, such as the Central Asian states. Besides a broad based government in Kabul has made Indian policy makers more receptive to making efforts towards establishing relations with Afghanistan.

Conclusion

For India, Afghanistan is significant not only for its historical relations with the country but also for its strategic location – It is the gateway to Central Asia, a region that holds immense economic potential for India in terms of its vast untapped market and also the possibility of energy reserves that India requires so desperately. Besides, any upheaval in Afghanistan, has impact upon India due to its strategic location. This is true atleast for the events that have occurred since the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

The entry of Soviet forces in Afghanistan and its withdrawal thereafter posed Indian policy makers with a tough challenge. The most important question with regard to the India's policy response to Afghanistan are the factors that have influenced Indian policy decision-making and whether they have varied with the change of governments and change of circumstances. The answer lies in the fact that the factors that have influenced Indian policy with regard to Afghanistan have remained almost constant.

Interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by the super powers namely the US and USSR during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, and later after the collapse of USSR, by US alone has had a detrimental effect on Indian policy towards Afghanistan. The Afghan civil war that took place following the Soviet military intervention was the most important manifestation of the Cold War. This brought the US, with its efforts to counter Soviet expansions in the Third World, to Afghanistan. India which had become dependent on Soviet military supplies right since the 1960s, and had received considerable help from USSR during Indo-Pak

War of 1971, had to accept the Soviet explanation (its intervention in Afghanistan) at face value. Thus the statement made by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the Indian Parliament on January 30, 1980 tried to see a reason behind the intervention and yet demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops. However, India's failure to condemn the Soviet invasion drew immense criticism from the West particularly the US. Another reason why India sought to play down any criticism of USSR was the decision by United States to arm Pakistan militarily. In the Cold War that erupted after the Soviet invasion, US sought to utilize Pakistan as a 'frontline state' due to the latter's geographical and religious proximity to Afghanistan, in order to counter the Soviet Union. Thus \$3.2 billion was granted as aid to Pakistan initially and later this amount increased to \$4.6 billion. This was used to purchase arms to be provided to the rebel Mujahideen fighting the Soviet backed regime in Afghanistan. But this in turn also caused concern in India with regard to its own security, since any effort at arms proliferation in Pakistan-Afghanistan was bound to affect India too.

However, since India was firmly put in Soviet camp (even though, due to circumstances that were not of its own making) the US failed to appreciate India's concerns in the subcontinent. The result was the massive influx of militants in the Kashmir valley in the early 90s, local, as well as some foreign, with arms that were provided to them by Pakistan.

The interference of super powers like the US, in Afghanistan, did not stop even with the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989. Both the USSR and US continued to supply weapons to their respective clients – Najibullah and the Mujahideen respectively.

India's support to the USSR during the Soviet invasion had to be paid for heavily. Pakistan had gathered support from the Mujahideens using this fact, both during and after the Soviet invasion. Thus even though the Mujahideen factions like the ones led by Ahmed Shah Masood, and Mojaddedi later came to appreciate India's support, they were initially critical and distrustful of India due to the support that it had provided to the Soviets.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the emergence of the new independent states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan with vast reserves of oil and gas, US companies rushed in to invest in these countries. Since Iran could not be used by US for establishing oil pipelines, (due to the strained relation between the two) the next best route was through Pakistan and Afghanistan. For this reason, as Ahmed Rashid says, "between 1994 to 1996 the US supported the Taliban politically through Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian, anti-Shia and pro-Western... Between 1995-1997, US support was driven by the UNOCAL oil/gas pipe line project.¹

This was an adverse development for India. The Taliban being pro-Pakistan, were bound to be anti-India. Though they received Pakistan's patronage, the fact remains that they received US support too (at least initially).

Finally, after the events on September 11, 2001, when World Trade centers were bombed in New York, by terrorists who had taken training

¹ Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: militant Islam Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia, London, 2000.

from Al Qaeda under the leadership of Bin Laden, who was sheltered in Afghanistan, US involvement in Afghanistan became manifest again. In an effort to search Bin Laden and his men, US sought to carry out attacks in Afghanistan, remove the Taliban from power and helped set up an interim government in Afghanistan. These developments again had an impact on India too. The demise of the Taliban with whom Indian policy makers could not establish formal diplomatic ties due to their fundamentalist learnings and above all due to the fact that they had sought to collaborate in the highjacking of the Indian Airlines Plane by Islamic Militants in 1999, was a positive development for India. But then under the New Interim government in Afghanistan, the US tried to prevent India from having any say in the future political set-up of Afghanistan, reducing India's role in the post-Taliban Afghanistan to a humanitarian and economic one. Thus the involvement of the great powers such as US and USSR has influenced India's Afghanistan policy to a great extent.

Pakistan has been another important factor in India's Afghan policy, not only from 1979 but since the partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Pakistan's view of Afghanistan has always been an adjunct to its policy towards India. Both the political and military leadership in Pakistan has considered Afghanistan and Central Asia as a tool to realize their ambition of gaining 'strategic depth' vis-à-vis Pakistan's military rivalry with India.

Thus with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan tried to coerce US to provide it with military aid to counter the USSR. President Zia-ul-Haq used the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as an excuse to build

up Pakistan's military in order to gain an upper hand over India. Thus while India was pitched on the side of USSR, Pakistan as an ally of US developed close relations with US Intelligence agency, the CIA to act as a conduit for supply of arms to the Afghan rebels fighting the Soviet backed regime in Afghanistan. Pakistan also saw to it that the Soviet forces remained bogged down in Afghanistan for a longer period, the ultimate objective being to draw the spectra of the Cold War closer to the South Asian situation, which in turn would internationalise, if not help solve the Kashmir issue.²

With the withdrawal of Soviet troops, Pakistan sought to divert its arms supply and other forms of support to Kashmir. There has therefore been a correlation between the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and the heightening of the Pakistani proxy war in the Kashmir valley. A major portion of the western supplied weapons for the Afghan Mujahideen was transformed to the Kashmiri separatist forces in India, leading to a low-intensity conflict since 1988.

Islam has also been used by Pakistan to garner support from Afghanistan and thus propagate an anti-India campaign. This has been a major hindrance to India establishing a cordial relationship with Afghanistan. India's secular polity with emphasis on pluralism has often sought to make the Afghans seek greater proximity with Pakistan, both being Islamic in their religious beliefs.

The Afghan resistance has also been used by Pakistan to install a friendly government in Kabul and thus prevent it from developing any ties

² P, Stobdan, 'The Afghan Conflict and India', Delhi Papers, IDSA, 1998.

with India. The selective encouragement of Hekmatyar and his party, the Hizb-e-Islam and after his failure to unite Afghanistan under a pro-Pakistan government, of the Taliban was a manifestation of this policy.

But again, it is the Pakistan factor that has provided India with an opportunity to gain relevance for the various governments in Afghanistan. For example the issue of the Durand line as has been mentioned in Chapters earlier, has always been a bone of contention between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's decision to make the Mojaddedi government agree to Pakistan's terms on the issue Durand line made Mojaddedi pay unit to India to revive contacts, and most importantly to counter balance Pakistan's hegemonistic attitude. Similarly Burhanuddin Rabbani too, while adopting an uncompromising attitude on the issue of Durand Line sought to look to India for support. Besides, the infighting among the Afghan Mujahideen factions based in Peshawar, with Pakistan promoting particular groups that of Hizb-e-Islami of Hekmatyar, made them also seek Indian recognition. Pakistan, therefore has played an important role in shaping India's Afghan policy.

Another important factor that has shaped India's Afghan policy is the cultural and historical relations that the two countries have shared with each other. Also leaders of various Afghan governments except the Taliban have had wide ranging contacts with India, besides the political relations. Thus the leaders of the various Mujahideen factions, including Burhanuddin Rabbani, Sibghatullah Mujadeddi, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Abdul Sayaf Ahmad Shah Masood and General Dostun, were familiar with India, having visited it at one point of time or the other. Even after

the formation of the various leaders of the new Interim government such as Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, have had their education in India and have even taken shelter in India while in exile. This helped India greatly at times when there was need to counter Pakistan's efforts at alienating India from any leadership in Afghanistan. The factors mentioned above have almost always been a constant whenever India has sought to study its policy decisions with regard to Afghanistan.

The success and failures of Indian-policy responses to Afghanistan have also been determined by these factors. Firstly being looked upon as pro-Soviet during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, meant that India could not prevent the USA from arming Pakistan for the purpose of countering the Soviets. The constant failure to condemn Soviet invasion resulted in the animosity that India received from the Mujahideen and also from Afghan refugees stationed in India. India's stand also made Pakistan, under Zia-ul-Haq to prevent India from having any say in the reconstruction of the post-USSR Afghanistan, specially after the Geneva agreements took place in 1988.

A major failure of Indian foreign policy makers was their indecisiveness as far as the Taliban were concerned. India failed to establish any contact with the Taliban, and tried to do so only after security concerns reached its peak following the hijacking of Indian Airlines plane in December 1999 in which the Taliban was said to have provided aid to the militants hijacking the plane.

India also remained lukewarm towards the Northern Alliance at a time when they were seeking to counter the Taliban's gains.

Besides, India also failed to protect the Indians, including the Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan from being prosecuted at the hands of the Taliban.

Developments in Afghanistan have had a direct impact on militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and other areas in India. India has often been at loss in countering terrorism in its various facets, including narco-terrorism. Various militants, having bases and training in Afghanistan have often raised security concerns in India.

India's policy towards Central Asia has also been seriously challenged by the Afghan issue since Afghanistan is the gateway to Central Asia, India's interests are better served if the region of Central Asia remains free of international conflict. But tensions in Afghanistan are bound to affect the Central Asian states since they border Afghanistan.

However, India's policy responses to Afghanistan, has had its share of successes as well. For example the various humanitarian activities undertaken by Indian government in Afghanistan right from 1982 under the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission to the 'statement on the areas of cooperation' between India and Afghanistan in 2002 whereby India agreed to help Afghanistan in areas of education, info-tech, health, industry and energy have created a substantial amount of goodwill among the people of Afghanistan for India. Even during the civil war, Indian doctors in hospitals established in Kabul by the Indian government have provided their services. Such efforts have received appreciation and thus have had positive effect as far as India's effort to make its presence felt in Afghanistan is concerned. As a fall out of the Afghan imbroglio India has sought to establish ties with other countries which have similar concerns in

Afghanistan, like India. For example cooperation with Iran on the issues related to Afghanistan have been fruitful and Iran and India have often supported the Northern Alliance in its fight against the Taliban. In the new scenario, India, Iran and Afghanistan has sought to develop a new 'silk route' to enhance trade links with Central Asia.

Finally Indian government has always managed to make itself relevant to the various governments in Afghanistan, despite Pakistan's efforts to keep India away from having any say in matters relating to Afghanistan.

Analysing the various events in Afghanistan from the Soviet invasion to that of the formation of the new interim government under Hamid Karzai, would indicate that Indian security interests are substantially linked to peace in Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, India has not been satisfactorily able to influence events in Afghanistan to its advantage. India's ability to deal with Afghanistan has been often influenced by the type of patronage that the rulers of Afghanistan have received from external sources. The role played by Pakistan has often resulted in India supporting any form of government be it communists or democrats, that has not been dictated to, by Pakistan. Finally events after September 11, 2001, have been favourable for India as it has helped India to make its presence felt in Afghanistan, unlike the situation that it faced under the rule of the Taliban.

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