

# INDIA-AFGHANISTAN RELATIONS DURING SOVIET INTERVENTION IN AFGHANISTAN

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*No international incident spurted as much diplomatic enterprise in New Delhi as did the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Never before in the history of Indian diplomacy was there so much groping for ideas and directions. Never before was India's foreign policy an act of sterner choice.*

— Bhabani Sen Gupta<sup>1</sup>

The politics of India and its neighbouring countries witnessed unprecedented changes in the late 1970s. On March 24, 1977, India's elected government resigned prematurely due to the political crisis within the ruling Congress Party. Thereby, India suffered unstable coalition politics until Mrs. Indira Gandhi came back to power after an "unprecedented victory" in the January 1980 general election. At the same time, the politics of Pakistan was taken over by the military leader Gen Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq on July 5, 1977, and Martial Law was declared in the state. The changed political scenario in India and Pakistan coincided with the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. In the midst of all these developments, the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in December 1979, complicating the volatile political environment in the region.

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1. Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Afghan Syndrome: How to Live with the Soviet Union* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1982), p. 106.

**.....anyone who controls Afghanistan controls the land routes between the Indian subcontinent, Iran, and resource rich Central Asia. Almost every major power, therefore, wanted a slice of the pie.**

Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan marked a turning point in the politics of the region, as it not only brought the Cold War politics to the threshold of the Indian subcontinent but also led to a polarisation of the regional politics. With the Soviet Union taking over the politics of Afghanistan, the US embroiled itself in the regional politics to thwart Soviet infiltration into the oil rich Persian Gulf region. Thus, by the beginning of the 1980s, "the epicenter of world tensions" shifted from

"Europe to Asia."<sup>2</sup>

According to Shelton U. Kodikara, the impact of the Soviet action on US foreign policy was immense and threatened vital US interests. These interests revolved largely around the Middle East as "oil is the only economic interest which the US would have to fight for."<sup>3</sup> This fact was clearly highlighted by the then US Special Envoy Clark Clifford to reporters at New Delhi where he said that if the Soviet Union "moves towards the Persian Gulf," the US will not hesitate to prevent Soviet action through military means (war).<sup>4</sup> One of the main reasons why Afghanistan continues to play an important role in the politics of the world is that though geographically Afghanistan does not have any economic value,

.....anyone who controls Afghanistan, controls the land routes between the Indian subcontinent, Iran, and resource rich Central Asia. Almost every major power, therefore, wanted a slice of the pie. Today, flanked by Iran on the west, Pakistan on the east and the Central Asian Republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north (and a very small

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2. Annual Report 1981-82 (India: Ministry of External Affairs) p. iv.

3. Shelton U. Kodikara, "Role of Extra-Regional Powers and South Asian Security," in Sridhar K. Khatri, ed., *Regional Security in South Asia* (Kathmandu: Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1987), p. 49.

4. John G. Merriam, "Arms Shipments to the Afghan Resistance," in Grant M. Farr and John G. Merriam, eds., *Afghan Resistance: The Politics of Survival* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), p. 75.

stretch of border with China in the northeast), the country's geo-strategic importance has multiplied manifold.<sup>5</sup>

It was in this context that the US began to formulate its policy towards South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region in search of a steadfast ally for establishment of its military bases and facilities. Consequently, the US came in contact with Pakistan because it is strategically located to the north of the Arabian Sea—a strategic entry point to the oil-rich Persian Gulf, where about “80% of oil meant for South-East Asia and the Mediterranean, passes through Pakistan’s strategic port of Karachi.”<sup>6</sup> Besides, Pakistan is geographically linked to the Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

The above mentioned points vindicate that the fear of Soviet domination of the oil rich Persian Gulf region was the main reason for the US to embroil itself in the Afghan crisis. However, Arvind Gupta points out that the Soviets did not intervene in Afghanistan “owing to the historic drive towards warm water ports of the Indian Ocean” or the Persian Gulf, but to contain the instability in Afghanistan because, according to the Soviet Union, instability in its southern borders—Afghanistan—posed a considerable threat to its own security.<sup>7</sup>

Sharing similar views, Devendra Kaushik is of the opinion that the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was not the result of the Soviet “fear of the rise of an Islamic fundamentalist regime in the vicinity of the southern territory of the Soviet Union inhabited by 35 million Muslims (as propagated by some scholars and political analysts) nor the drive towards the warm waters of the Gulf and its rich oil wells.”<sup>8</sup> Agreeing with Selig Harrison, he

**Agreeing with Selig Harrison, Kaushik adds that it was the outcome of the “American intrigues against the USSR in South-West Asia following the overthrow of the Afghan monarchy by Daoud in 1973.”**

5. “Why Afghanistan is Important to India,” <http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/aug/30spec4.htm>

6. Lawrence Ziring, “Bhutto’s Foreign Policy 1972-73,” in J. Henry Korson, ed., *Contemporary Problems of Pakistan* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), p. 65.

7. Arvind Gupta, “Soviet Military Intervention in Afghanistan in Perspective,” in K. Warikoo and Dawa Norbu, eds., *Ethnicity and Politics in Central Asia* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1992), pp. 281-282.

8. Devendra Kaushik, “Soviet Union’s Pakistan Policy: A Study and Appraisal,” in Surendra Chopra, ed., *Perspectives on Pakistan’s Foreign Policy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University Press, 1983), p. 265.

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adds that it was the outcome of the "American intrigues against the USSR in South-West Asia following the overthrow of the Afghan monarchy by Daoud in 1973."<sup>9</sup> This fact was brought out by Leonid Brezhnev in his speech before the voters of the Baumannsky Constitution in Moscow on February 22, 1980:

Absolutely false are also the allegations that the Soviet Union has some expansionist plans with regard to Pakistan, Iran or other countries in that

area. The policy and mentality of colonialism are alien to us. We do not covet the lands or wealth of others.<sup>10</sup>

#### PAKISTAN'S TREACHEROUS PLOT

Taking advantage of the political developments in the region, "determined efforts" were made by "Pakistan to project the threat from the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan as not only a threat to its security, but also to the free world."<sup>11</sup> Shalini Chawla similarly urges that the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan "was a major strategic development which Pakistan's defence planners utilised fully to further highlight the threat perception." Quoting Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha, she says, "Pakistan propagated the conventional wisdom that the Soviet Union had intentions of reaching the 'warm water' through Pakistan, after establishing its control over Afghanistan."<sup>12</sup> Subsequently, Pakistan's leaders succeeded in influencing the US policy-makers, as it provided an easy access to the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and the Middle East. Thus, Pakistan ingeniously joined hands with the US and became a frontline state of the US for the containment of Soviet power in the region.

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9. Ibid.

10. K. Volkov, K. I. Gevorkyan, A. Mikhailenko, Polonsky and V. Svetozarov, *The Truth About Afghanistan: Documents, Facts, Eyewitness Reports* (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1980), p. 22.

11. Aabha Dixit, "India, Pakistan and the Great Powers," in Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, ed., *India and Pakistan: Crisis of Relationship* (New Delhi: Lancer Publishers, 1990), p. 31.

12. Cited in Shalini Chawla, *Pakistan's Military and Its Strategy* (New Delhi: K W Publishers, 2009), pp. 107-108.



Most intriguing is the fact that Pakistan's military rulers joined hands with the US not because of its animosity to Soviet policies but because of its increased isolation from the international community, thereby, willing to forswear some of its own larger interests in exchange for international legitimacy. Husain Haqqani, citing Pakistan's military leader Brigadier Yousaf wrote that Pakistan's military ruler Gen Zia ul-Haq's motive in agreeing to support the US against the Soviet Union "was not exclusively related to global security," but was more of a plan for its political survival and "Pakistan's traditional policy paradigm of seeking leadership in the Muslim world...and obtaining economic and military assistance." Haqqani further stated:

**Pakistan joined hands with the US because the "only possibility of acquiring American military and economic aid" was through converging Pakistan's views with those of the US.**

In 1979, Zia had just provoked worldwide consternation and condemnation by executing his former prime minister [Zulfikar Ali Bhutto]; his image both inside and outside Pakistan was badly tarnished, and he felt isolated. By supporting a *jihad*, albeit unofficially, against a communist superpower, he sought to regain sympathy in the West...<sup>13</sup>

Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha says that Pakistan joined hands with the US because the "only possibility of acquiring American military and economic aid" was through converging Pakistan's views with those of the US.<sup>14</sup> The US offered covert assistance worth about "\$ 3.2 billion" in economic and military aid, "which was accepted in 1981, effective for the next five years."<sup>15</sup> Other reports indicate that in the 1980s, the US supplied arms worth about \$ 630 million annually to the Mujahideen.<sup>16</sup>

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13. Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan Between Mosque and Military* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2005), p. 185.

14. Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha, *Pakistan's Arms Procurement and Military Buildup, 1979-99* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 14.

15. Kodikara, n. 3, p. 50.

16. Mahendra Lama, "The Afghan Refugees," *The Hindu*, February 5, 2002.

**This unprecedented militarisation in the region created a serious foreign policy problem for India.**

According to Kalim Bahadur, in connivance with the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was able to mobilise about "35,000 Muslim militants from forty Islamic countries for the war in Afghanistan between 1982-1992."<sup>17</sup> The covert action of America and Pakistan of mobilising Muslim militants to counter the Soviet presence in the region was made easier by the availability of huge numbers of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, said to be around "three million Afghans."<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Amir Rana stated that the CIA provided military training, financial help and armaments to a "huge contingent of Mujahideen" stationed in Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> Besides, the US also deployed the "aircraft carrier *Nimitz* and two nuclear cruisers to the Indian Ocean via the Cape to supplement its naval task forces already stationed in the Persian Gulf area."<sup>20</sup>

This unprecedented militarisation in the region created a serious foreign policy problem for India. The Indian government feared "the risk of converting the subcontinent into a theater of Great Power confrontation and conflicts as well as threaten the security of India," and thus, voiced its concern against "induction of arms into Pakistan" by the US and other countries.<sup>21</sup> J.N. Dixit, former Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan noted:

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's reservation about the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 was tempered by the valid perception that this intervention had taken place only because Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, backed by the US, were trying to subvert a critical exercise being undertaken by a segment of Afghan society to transform their country from its semi-medieval predicament into a modern society and stage.<sup>22</sup>

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17. Kalim Bahadur, "US and Islamic Militancy in Pakistan," in Riyaz Punjabi, ed., *USA and the Muslim World Cooperation and Confrontation* (Middlesex: Brunel Academic Publishers, 2004), p. 221.

18. Mohammad Amir Rana, *The Seeds of Terrorism* (London: New Millennium Publication, 2005), p. 18.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

20. Kodikara, n. 3, p. 49.

21. *Annual Report 1979-80* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), pp. iii-iv.

22. J.N. Dixit, *India's Foreign Policy 1947-2003* (New Delhi: Picus Books, 2003), p. 137.

India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reports indicate that India's stand on the Afghan issue was guided by the following principles:

- Opposition to all forms of external interference or intervention in the domestic affairs of the countries of the region;
- Opposition to the extension of the quarrels of other countries and the induction of Cold War tensions into the region;
- Respect for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-aligned status of the countries of the region; and
- Preference for a negotiated political solution of problems through dialogue among the parties concerned.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, Indian leaders acted cautiously and did not openly condemn the Soviet action. According to Bhabani Sen Gupta, the objectives of India's diplomacy with regard to the Afghan crisis were determined by three fundamental premises in Mrs. Gandhi's strategic thinking:<sup>24</sup>

- The Soviet intervention, though unfortunate and regrettable, was essentially a defensive move to secure the Afghan revolution and defeat US-sponsored efforts to destabilise the international situation;
- For India, far more dangerous than Soviet military presence in Afghanistan would be the rearming of Pakistan by the US and China and the conversion of Pakistan into a Cold War base; and
- In a new Cold War confrontation in which the United States, China and Pakistan joined forces to contain the USSR, India's national and regional interests dictated the pursuit of a single policy: to try to defuse confrontation in the South Asian region by keeping close to the USSR without completely identifying India with Soviet policies and actions.

Brajesh Mishra, India's representative to the United Nations, speaking at the United Nations General Assembly on January 11, 1980, justified Soviet action to the world community by saying:

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23. *Annual Report 1983-84* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. 3.

24. Sen Gupta, n. 1.

We are against the presence of foreign troops and bases in any country. However, the Soviet government has assured our government that its troops went to Afghanistan first at the request of the Afghan government on December 26, 1979, and repeated by his successor on December 28, 1979...We have no reason to doubt assurances, particularly from a friendly country like the Soviet Union with whom we have many close ties.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Afghans felt let down by India's low key response to the Soviet action. What disheartened the Afghans was that Indian policy-makers, instead of followings its independent foreign policy at the time of the Soviet military intervention, seemed to turn towards the Soviet policy. As a result, some Afghans reacted adversely. The Government of India's apprehension of a raid on the Indian Embassy at Kabul by local Afghans who had reacted adversely to India's stand (in the UN on a resolution calling for withdrawal of Soviet troops) led to additional precautions at the Indian Embassy in Kabul to avoid any untoward incident.<sup>26</sup> Maj Gen Samay Ram, Indian Military Attaché in Afghanistan at the height of the crisis, said that the Afghans were disappointed with the Indian government "for the lack of support when they most needed it and always expressed their feelings though in a guarded manner so as to show no disrespect to our country (India) or us."<sup>27</sup>

As the political crisis in the region deteriorated, the United Nations General Assembly, taking serious note of the political developments in Afghanistan and their implications for international peace and security, in its 7<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting on January 14, 1980, appealed

...to all states to respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity, political independence and non-aligned character of Afghanistan and to refrain

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25. Quoted in Dennis Kux, *Estranged Democracies: India and the United States 1941-1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 367.

26. "Additional Precautions at Indian Embassy," *The Hindu*, January 18, 1980.

27. Maj Gen Samay Ram, *The New Afghanistan: Pawn of America* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2004), p. 17.



from any interference in the internal affairs of [Afghanistan]. [It also calls] for the immediate, unconditional and total withdrawal of the foreign troops from Afghanistan in order to enable its people to determine their own form of government and choose their economic, political and social systems free from outside intervention, subversion, coercion or constraint of any kind whatsoever.<sup>28</sup>

**The Soviet action clearly indicated that though India had cordial relations with the Soviet Union, it did not take India into consideration when it intervened in Afghanistan.**

Similarly, the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC), taking a hard stand on the political developments in Afghanistan, in its First Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held at Islamabad in January 1980, passed a resolution strongly condemning the Soviet military aggression. It demanded "immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all Soviet troops stationed on Afghani territories," and suspended Afghanistan from the membership of the organisation. Further, the OIC asked member countries not to recognise the Soviet backed Babrak Karmal regime and to sever all diplomatic relations until a complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan.<sup>29</sup> In view of the gravity of the political developments in Afghanistan on the politics of the region, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Mr. Shridath S. Ramphal, said that the developments in Afghanistan were not singularly a Commonwealth problem but "in a real and true sense, a global problem."<sup>30</sup>

#### INDIA'S REACTION AND ACTIONS

"When Soviet troops directly intervened in Afghanistan...India was not altogether surprised, but the suddenness of the intervention was unexpected,"

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28. "The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security," General Assembly – Sixth Emergency Special Session Resolutions, ES-6/2, January 14, 1980, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/{65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9}/Afgh%20ARESES6%202.pdf>

29. This resolution was passed at the First Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held at Islamabad in January 1980. "First Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers," <http://www.oic-oci.org/english/conf/fm/All%20Download/frmex1.htm>

30. Ramphal, "Afghanistan not Regional Problem," *Patriot* (New Delhi), March 29, 1980.

**The disheartening fact was that the Pakistani leaders and scholars not only refused to entertain India for joint diplomatic efforts to facilitate the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, but also pointlessly perceived the Soviet action as an India-Soviet plot to balkanise Pakistan.**

said J.N.Dixit.<sup>31</sup> Dixit's statement was supported by the fact that "[t]he Soviets did not care to inform India of their intervention until 25,000 troops had already moved into Afghanistan."<sup>32</sup> The Soviet action clearly indicated that though India had cordial relations with the Soviet Union, it did not take India into consideration when it intervened in Afghanistan. But, Pakistani policy-makers and scholars, following their age-old antagonistic policy towards India, alleged that India "tacitly" supported the Soviet military incursion into Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup>

On the contrary, though India and Pakistan differed in their foreign policy objectives, sensing an adverse impact of the deteriorating political situation in Afghanistan on the peace and security of the region, Indian leaders sought Pakistan's help.

India, true to its friendship with Afghanistan and adherence to the Panchsheel principles of non-interference and peaceful coexistence, sent Sardar Swaran Singh to Islamabad seeking President Zia ul-Haq's cooperation to bring about an early amicable solution to the Afghan crisis.<sup>34</sup> Reports indicate that on January 10, 1981, the then Indian Ambassador to Pakistan, Natwar Singh, had delivered a letter from Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to President Zia "strongly" urging Zia to normalise the relations between India and Pakistan and to build "an atmosphere of peace and stability, especially in the context of the disturbed situation in Afghanistan and the developmental aspirations of the people of the subcontinent."<sup>35</sup> Regrettably, the Pakistani leader, instead of

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31. Dixit, n. 22, p. 134.

32. Sen Gupta, n. 1, p. 110.

33. Basharat Hussain, "Indo-Afghan Relations: Pre-and Post-Taliban Developments," *Regional Studies*, vol. XXII, no.3, Summer 2004, p. 34.

34. Mahavir Singh, "India's Relations with the USSR and its Successor State, the Russian Federation: More of Continuity Than Change," in Nalini Kant Jha, ed., *India's Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2000), p. 92.

35. J. N. Dixit, *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance: Indo-Pak Relations 1970-1994* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 1985), p. 66.

joining hands with India to bring about an amicable solution to the ongoing political crisis in Afghanistan, refused to cooperate with India. Touquir Hussain a Pakistani writer observed:

Pakistan was deeply conscious of the power disparity in the [Indian] subcontinent and was actively looking for ways to redress it. The heightened security concerns and [the] need for economic development compelled Pakistan to reach out to the United States, which was trying to promote a strategic alliance of Asian states to check the expanding lines of Soviet influences.<sup>36</sup>

The disheartening fact was that the Pakistani leaders and scholars not only refused to entertain India for joint diplomatic efforts to facilitate the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, but also pointlessly perceived the Soviet action as an India-Soviet plot to balkanise Pakistan, although, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan unilaterally, without India's knowledge and India had no role to play.

Since the political environment in the region began to deteriorate further, the leaders of the world began to look towards India seriously as a major regional power. One witnessed many visits of high officials from different countries to India in the post-Soviet intervention period to review the prevailing political crisis in Afghanistan. Clark Clifford, the Special Envoy of the US President, visited India in January 1980. According to Dennis Kux, Clifford specially came to India to allay New Delhi's "concerns about renewed US arms aid to Pakistan and to urge Mrs. Gandhi to use her influence in Moscow to press for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan." Kux added that, on the contrary, Mrs. Gandhi expressed her displeasure with the US for arming Pakistan and blamed other external powers for escalating the political crisis in Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing also visited India in January 1980 and issued a joint declaration stating:

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36. Touquir Hussain, "US-Pakistan Engagement: The War on Terrorism and Beyond," *Regional Studies*, vol. XXXIV, no. 1, Winter 2005-06, p. 5

37. Kux, n. 25, pp. 369-370.

.....inadmissibility of the use of force in international relations, intervention or interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states and the need to prevent further escalation in areas of tensions through states refraining from actions which could intensify Great Power rivalries and revive the Cold war through dangerous arms build-ups which are liable to threaten peace and stability in sensitive regions. It reiterated the need to restore conditions in which independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states could be preserved and the right of their people to freely determine their own destiny without outside interference assured. Finally, it appealed to all states, particularly the most powerful ones, to recognise the gravity of the danger and to exert efforts to avert it.<sup>38</sup>

Later, when the Soviet Union faced stiff resistance from the world community for its defiant action, almost all Russian high officials came to India to seek its support. On February 11, 1980, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited India and held talks with various Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on the prevailing political situation in the region. A joint statement was subsequently issued at the end of Gromyko's visit. However, while the joint statement did not make any specific mention of the prevailing political condition in Afghanistan, it rhetorically stated that the talks "were held in an atmosphere of mutual trust and cordially reviewed the international situation, including the developments in the region and around it."<sup>39</sup> In return, Indian Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao visited Moscow in June 1980. It was reported that "[o]ne of the [main] objectives of [Rao's] trip was to persuade the Soviet Union to withdraw from Afghanistan as soon as possible."<sup>40</sup>

In mid-December 1980, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev along with a "300-strong delegation" visited India and met various Indian leaders. The then President of India Sanjeeva Reddy once again reiterated India's views and reminded the Soviet President of India's opposition "to any form of intervention, covert or overt, by outside forces in the internal affairs

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38. *Annual Report 1979-80* (India: Ministry of External Affairs) pp. ii-iii.

39. "Joint Statement," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVI, no. 11, March 11-17, 1980, p. 15356.

40. Dixit, n. 22, p. 139.



of the region." Reddy was also said to have pleaded for the restoration of durable peace through negotiated political solutions ensuring "independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-aligned status of the countries of the region."<sup>41</sup>

Yet, the Soviet President ingeniously sidetracked the Afghanistan issue in his talks with the Indian leaders and instead voiced the Soviet concern on the emerging danger in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. The five-point doctrine of peace and security for the Persian Gulf laid down by President Brezhnev in his

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address to the Indian members of Parliament on December 10, 1980, clearly manifests this point.<sup>42</sup> Astonishingly, the Indo-Soviet joint declaration issued on December 11, 1980, at the end of President Brezhnev's visit, like the previous February 1980 India-Soviet joint statement, only expressed serious concern about "all forms of outside interference in the internal affairs of the countries of South-West Asia," and "made no reference to Afghanistan and glossed over the main point of difference" between Soviet and Indian leaders over the presence of Soviet troops in Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

Though the joint declaration consciously did not mention the Soviet intervention, to send a strong message of disapproval of the Soviet action, the Indian government refused to take part in the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Indo-Soviet Treaty organised by the Friends of the Soviet Union in 1981 at Moscow.<sup>44</sup> The then Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressed the Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers' Conference held in New Delhi in February 1981, urging the external powers not to interfere in the politics of the region and to withdraw "their young (military) men back"

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41. "President L. Brezhnev's Visit," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no. 2, January 8-14, 1981, p. 15827.

42. The five-point doctrine of peace and security for the Persian Gulf can be seen in "President L. Brezhnev's Visit," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no. 2, January 8-14, 1981, p. 15827.

43. Text of the "Joint Declaration," can be seen in *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no. 2, January 8-14, 1981, pp. 15828.

44. Singh, n. 32, p. 92.

to their country.<sup>45</sup> This indicated an impending *volte face* in India's attitude towards the Soviet Union's policy in the region. This change in Mrs. Gandhi's attitude towards the Soviet Union was surprising because it was alleged by some Indian leaders that Mrs. Gandhi's tilt towards the Soviet Union was so strong that even her "Cabinet personnel have to be approved by Soviet Prime Minister Kosygin."<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, in her keynote address at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Commonwealth Nations Summit held in Melbourne on September 30, 1981, she once again expressed that India was "gravely concerned over the use of Afghanistan as a pretext for massive external-funded militarisation of its neighbourhood."<sup>47</sup> Further, on August 2, 1982, Mrs. Gandhi in her address at the luncheon hosted by the Foreign Policy Association and the Asia Society, in cooperation with the Far East American Council of Commerce and Industry and the Indian Chamber of Commerce of America at New York, said, "There is no alternative [on the Afghan issue rather than] to a political settlement which will take into account the concerns of all the parties involved." She also vividly brought out India's views on the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan saying:

We are against foreign interference, military or otherwise, in any country. It is unfortunate but true that there has been, and is, interference in many developing countries, to which American and other publications have drawn attention. On this or other international matters, we do not lean to one side or another, neither to the so-called East nor West. We judge issues from the Indian point of view and in terms of humankind's right to a peaceful and fuller life.<sup>48</sup>

In the midst of these developments, the United Nation Secretary General (UNSG) Perez de Cuellar visited New Delhi in February 1983

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45. "Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers' Conference," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no.11, March 12-18, 1981, pp. 15924-15925.

46. Kuldip Nayar, *India The Critical Years* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), p. 3.

47. "Commonwealth Summit in Melbourne," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no. 45, November 5-11, 1981, p. 16308.

48. Recorded in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy 1982-83* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1985), p. 223.

and held talks with Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Cuellar, was reported to have told Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that he was "keeping a close watch on the [political] situation in Afghanistan".<sup>49</sup>

A month later, in March 1983, the Seventh Conference of Heads of the Non-Aligned States was held in New Delhi by mere chance as the conference had been scheduled to be held at Baghdad, "But because of the continuance of the Iran-Iraq War, and more importantly, Iran's opposition to its being held in Baghdad," the venue was shifted to New Delhi from March 7-12, 1983.<sup>50</sup> In New Delhi, besides taking up other important issues, the Heads of the Non-Aligned States reviewed the outcome of the New Delhi Ministerial Conference held in February 1981 and called "for a political settlement on the basis of the territorial integrity and non-aligned status of Afghanistan and strict observance of the principle of non-intervention and non-interference by external powers. They also reaffirmed the right of the Afghan refugees to return to their homes in safety and honour and called for a speedy solution to the vast humanitarian problem."<sup>51</sup>

Numerous regional and international meetings were held and agreements were passed, yet, "[t]he conflict of attrition continued, with increased financial, and military assistance to opposition groups" in Afghanistan. As a result, a mid-term review meeting of the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission was held in Kabul in October 1983.<sup>52</sup> The Heads of State of the Commonwealth Countries "expressed grave concern at the situation in and around Afghanistan and its implications both for the region's peace and stability and for international security."<sup>53</sup> The Communiqué of the Commonwealth Summit held at New Delhi in November 1983 stated:

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49. "UN Keeping Close Watch on Kabul," *The Times of India* (New Delhi), February 28, 1983.

50. M.S. Rajan, "The Seventh Non-Aligned Summit," in Kumar ed., n. 48, p. 53.

51. *Supplement to the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs 1982-83* (India: Ministry of External Affairs) p. 5

52. *Annual Report 1979-80* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. 3.

53. "Commonwealth Summit Communiqué," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXVII, no. 48, November 26-December 2, 1981, p. 16340.

Heads of Government continued to be gravely concerned at the situation in and around Afghanistan and its implications both for the region's peace and stability and for international security. [The Commonwealth countries also] called for an urgent search for a negotiated political settlement on the basis of withdrawal of foreign troops and full respect for the independence sovereignty and non-aligned status of Afghanistan and strict observance of the principles of non-intervention and non-interference, which would leave the Afghan people free to determine their own future.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the deterioration of the political situation in the region, Afghanistan-India relations, especially on trade, continued uninterruptedly. The signing of an agreement on February 20, 1984, at Kabul, between the two countries, that envisaged several "measures for expanding and diversifying bilateral trade and for establishing direct operations contacts between the banks of the two countries" with a view to facilitating smoother bilateral trade and technical cooperation operations, being one such example.<sup>55</sup>

One of the reasons binding India and Afghanistan together despite all the problems and crises in the region was the strong sense of affinity between the leaders of the two countries. The Afghan President, Babrak Karmal, was deeply moved by the untimely demise of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and said that he had "lost an elder sister who had been such a source of strength" to him. The then Chief of the Afghan Intelligence Services (the "KHAD") Dr. Najibullah, expressed anguish over the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi and termed it "a crime." Dr. Najibullah not only called for "justice" on the crime, but went a step further and demanded "decisive and salutatory retribution against those who are determined to destabilise and break up India."<sup>56</sup>

In a significant development, notwithstanding India's strong support to President Babrak Karmal, many Afghans defected and sought political

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54. "Final Communiqué," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXIX, no. 52, December 24-31, 1983, p. 17528.

55. Satish Kumar, "India and the World-Trends and Events," in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy 1983-84* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 25; "Trade Agreement with India," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXX, no. 12, March 18-24, 1984, p. 17653.

56. Quoted in Dixit, n. 35, p. 83.



asylum in India. The United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) granted "political protection" to three members of the Afghan soccer team, Noor Mohammed Mukhtar, Mohammad Bahadur Alikhail and Farid Ahmed who had defected and sought refuge in India in September 1984.<sup>57</sup> Eight months later, on April 26, 1985, a judge of the Afghan Supreme Court, Mr. Mohammad Yusuf Azmi, too announced his defection on reaching New Delhi.<sup>58</sup>

**Indian policy-makers viewed peace and stability in Afghanistan as an important foreign policy objective.**

Indian policy-makers viewed peace and stability in Afghanistan as an important foreign policy objective. That was the reason why former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi "asserted that India could not remain indifferent to the developments which had brought the confrontation of major powers to its doorstep."<sup>59</sup> Criticising the external powers for jeopardising peace and development in the region, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in his address at a joint session of the Congress Party in June 1985, said:

Outside interference and intervention have put in jeopardy the stability, security and progress of the region. 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.<sup>60</sup>

Signifying close relations between the two countries, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Shah Mohammad Dost, and other senior Afghan officials visited India in August 1985 and attended the seventh session of the Indo-Afghan joint committee on economic trade and technical cooperation, held in New Delhi from August 6-8 in 1985.<sup>61</sup> During Shah Mohammad Dost's visit, a cultural exchange programme for 1985-87 between the two

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57. "UNHRC Grants 'Political Protection' to Afghans," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXX, no. 52, December 23-31, 1984, p. 18098.

58. "Judge Defects," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXI, no. 22, May 28-June 3, 1985, p. 18335.

59. Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy 1989* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 31.

60. Quoted Kodikara, n. 3, p. 50.

61. *Annual Report 1985-86* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. v.

**India did not want to “indulge in one-sided criticism of the Soviet Union”; rather, it wanted “non-intervention in Afghanistan by all external forces and the creation of a democratic non-aligned government in Afghanistan.”**

countries was signed in New Delhi on August 7, 1985. According to the agreement, India agreed to “provide ten scholarships to Afghan nationals for doctoral studies and other fellowships for visiting scholars for training in public cooperation and child development.” India also agreed to impart “training to Afghan nationals in repair and preservation of historical monuments and rare manuscripts and also in the field of sports.” Further, for the development of education, both the countries agreed to “undertake joint research and teaching programmes” and India agreed to “strengthen the programme of Afghan studies,

hold film weeks and supply textbooks.”<sup>62</sup>

Technically, India agreed to “assist Afghanistan in the expansion of its health institutions and provide equipment worth Rs.20,00,000,” and “setting up a 300-bed maternity hospital and expanding the India aided institute of child health in Kabul,” which included “construction of a new surgical ward and a new outpatient department. India will supply every year medicines worth Rs. 2,00,000. India will add 10 more sheds to an industrial estate in Kabul and provide equipment worth Rs. 20,00,000 for a facility.”<sup>63</sup>

The top secret documents of the Soviet Union, “Soviet Briefing on the Need to Counter-Balance Yugoslav Endeavors Concerning the Afghan Question in the Non-Aligned Countries,” declassified by the American think-tank Woodrow Wilson International Center, reveals that prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bandung Conference, Yugoslavia campaigned with the non-aligned countries to summon a Conference of Foreign Ministers or a session of the Coordination Bureau to discuss the Afghan question at the conference commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bandung Conference.<sup>64</sup> It was reported that the Yugoslav proposal was rejected by

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62. “Cultural Exchanges with Afghanistan,” *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXI, no. 44, October 29-November 4, 1985, p. 18580.

63. *Ibid.*

64. “Cold War International History Project (CWIHP),” [www.CWIHP.org](http://www.CWIHP.org),

India and many other non-aligned members. India refused to entertain the Yugoslav proposal because it was one-sided and as such it did not take into account the role that other countries like the US, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia had played in escalating the crisis in the region. Therefore, India did not want to “indulge in one-sided criticism of the Soviet Union”; rather, it wanted “non-intervention in Afghanistan by all external forces and the creation of a democratic non-aligned government in Afghanistan.”<sup>65</sup>

In the light of this background, as the then Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, during his statement in September 1986, did not mention the Afghan issue, while referring to almost all other international problems, including South Africa and Namibia, nuclearisation, Iran and Iraq, Israel and Palestine and South-South cooperation. Rajiv Gandhi strongly condemned the autocratic action of the Pretoria regime in South Africa and called for economic sanctions to weaken it. According to him, “Outside economic sustenance only reinforces Pretoria’s intransigence.” Therefore, he was of the view that “[s]anctions will compel Pretoria to relent.”<sup>66</sup> Further he added:

The Frontline States [Namibia and South Africa] have been subjected to subversion, economic aggression and armed attack. Their security is jeopardized by a regime which suborns their stability, arms and finances mercenaries, abets puppet rebels, bombs neighbours with impunity, and even invades them with its troops...The actions of the Pretoria regime constitute a clear and present threat to international peace and security, within the meaning of Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.<sup>67</sup>

Three years earlier, on October 26, 1983, speaking at the 2488<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Security Council, the President of the African National Congress similarly called “for the immediate imposition of comprehensive and

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65. Dixit, n. 22, p. 136.

66. K. Ramamurthy & Dr. Govind Narain Srivastava, eds., *Eight Non-Aligned Summit Harare-1986: Selected Documents* (New Delhi: Indian Institute For Non-Aligned Studies, 1986), p. 10.

67. Ibid.

mandatory sanctions against the Pretoria regime”<sup>68</sup>

As the political reconciliation began to take place, Afghan Foreign Minister, Abdul Wakil, visited New Delhi at his own initiative on February 7, 1987, and briefed Indian leaders, including Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, “on the national reconciliation moves initiated in Afghanistan” and discussed with them the upcoming peace talks on Afghanistan.<sup>69</sup> It was reported that the Indian government “welcomed the initiatives of the Afghanistan government to bring about a national reconciliation” in Afghanistan. Three months later, in May 1987, the Eighth Session of the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission was held in Kabul where “the two countries decided to establish direct banking arrangements, closer cooperation between their trading organizations, and to intensify their industrial cooperation.” Besides, India agreed to “set up a cultural centre in the Indian Embassy [in Kabul] to project Indian culture.”<sup>70</sup>

India’s External Affairs Minister N.D. Tiwari met Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil on May 3, 1987, and clearly stated “there could be no military solution to the Afghan problem.” He reiterated “India’s opposition to all kinds of interference and intervention in Afghanistan.”<sup>71</sup> Afghan President Najibullah along with Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil visited New Delhi on December 24, 1987. During the course of the Afghan leaders’ visit, the leaders of the two countries analysed the political developments in Afghanistan.<sup>72</sup>

Amidst all these developments, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) debated the Afghanistan question at its 41<sup>st</sup> session and adopted a Resolution by 122 votes to 19 with 11 abstentions. Once again, India abstained on the UNGA resolution but called for an immediate withdrawal of the Soviet military personnel from Afghanistan. India’s delegate Shri Vyalar Ravi urged that “the resolution was less than fully constructive and supportive

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68. United Nations Document S/PV. 2488

69. *Annual Report 1986-87* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. 9.

70. Satish Kumar, “India and the World: Survey of Events,” in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India’s Foreign Policy 1987/1988* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988), p. 45.

71. “Kabul Reconciliation Plan Yields Result,” *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), May 4, 1987.

72. Kumar, n. 70.



of the efforts being made by the SG and his special representative."<sup>73</sup> Since, the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, India continuously abstained from the UNGA resolutions condemning the Soviets, because the resolutions did not take into account the flow of arms to the Afghan Mujahideen from the US, Pakistan and other Muslim countries. That is why Mrs. Gandhi said that she "would prefer to see the estimated 100,000 Soviet troops leave [Afghanistan, but, at the same time she] also stressed that as long as outside support to the insurgents continued, conditions would not be conducive for a Soviet withdrawal."<sup>74</sup>

Mr. V.R. Krishna Iyer, former Supreme Court judge, said the Government of Afghanistan is "sincerely pursuing a policy of national reconciliation" and is making several gestures to the Afghan refugees in Pakistan to make them return home. But he was pessimistic about the willingness of Pakistan to allow this to happen and said, "Islamabad had a vested interest in keeping the refugees in Pakistan and is physically obstructing their return because it is getting over \$4 billion from the United States on the basis that it is supporting these refugees." Pakistan feared that the flow of funds from the US would stop if the refugees left that country. The US for its part was "unwilling to have the issue disappear."<sup>75</sup>

Soviet Prime Minister N.I. Ryzhkov visited New Delhi in December 1987 and met various Indian leaders, including Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and held discussions on various important topics confronting the region. Six agreements were signed dealing with trade, tourism, higher education and training. On Afghanistan, Mr. Ryzhkov said that the Soviet Union "was for the withdrawal of a limited contingent of Soviet troops from Afghanistan provided outside interference was stopped."<sup>76</sup>

The year 1987 marked an important event in the history of the region. On July 29, 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed at Colombo to establish

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73. *Annual Report 1986-87* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. 51.

74. William Claiborne, "Fear Over Afghanistan seen as Factor Pushing Pakistan Toward India," *International Herald Tribune*, November 19, 1982.

75. "Afghan Government is Earnest about Reconciliation, says Krishna Iyer," *The Hindu* (Madras), April 3, 1987.

76. "Soviet Prime Minister's Visit," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXIV, no. 2, January 8-14, 1988, pp. 19820-19822.

**On February 8, 1988, the Soviet Communist Party General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev declared that Soviet troops in Afghanistan would begin withdrawing from May 15, 1988, if the UN sponsored talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan could bring about any amicable solution by March 15, 1988.**

peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka.<sup>77</sup> The agreement was significant because the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka posed a “formidable challenge” directly or indirectly to India’s security as India had a substantial Tamil population in its southern state. But the accord manifested a serious drawback as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with whom Sri Lanka had been at war, was not taken into confidence. Therefore, the peace accord was just an eyewash as it did not bring about any significant changes in the life of the Sri Lankans.<sup>78</sup>

While India was euphoric about the new development in the region, another “major development of considerable concern to India” in May 1987, was the coup in Fiji. Indian concern arose out of the fact that 50 per cent of the population of Fiji is of Indian origin. The Fijian Indians naturally looked towards India for support.<sup>79</sup> What concerned Indian leaders was that while they actively advocated for peace and cooperation in the region, the politics of its neighbouring countries (Fiji, Maldives and Sri Lanka) went through political turbulence, creating serious political and security problems for India.

#### **THE GENEVA AGREEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON REGIONAL POLITICS**

On January 6, 1988, the UN mediator Diego Cordovez reported about the Soviet Union’s willingness to find an early political solution on the ongoing Afghan crisis. He stated, “The Soviet Union wanted the [proposed upcoming] Geneva round to be the last, and that a withdrawal time-table,

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77. Text of the Indo-Sri-Lanka Peace Agreement to establish peace and normalcy in Sri Lanka can be seen in *Foreign Affairs Record*, July 1987; Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India’s Foreign Policy 1987/1988* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1988), pp. 233-235.

78. A brief analysis of the development of the signing of the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord can be seen in *Ibid.*, pp. 28-40.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

a time-frame of less than twelve months, would be offered" at Geneva. He also brought out the fear of the Soviet Union that the United States and Pakistan "may bring up the date before agreeing to their half of the bargain—a cut-off of the flow of arms to the Afghan Mujahideen."<sup>80</sup>

A month later, after the reports of the UN mediator Diego Cordovez of Soviet willingness to withdraw from Afghanistan, on February 8, 1988, the Soviet Communist Party General Secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev declared that Soviet troops in Afghanistan would begin withdrawing from May 15, 1988, if the UN sponsored talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan could bring about any amicable solution by March 15, 1988. He acknowledged that the years long "military conflict" in Afghanistan had become "one of the most bitter and painful regional conflicts." Claiming that the Soviet troops would begin withdrawing from Afghanistan, he said:

Seeking to facilitate a speedy and successful conclusion of the Geneva talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Governments of the USSR and Afghanistan have agreed to set a specific date for beginning the withdrawal of Soviet troops—May 15, 1988—and to complete their withdrawal within 10 months. The date is set based on the assumption that agreements on the settlement would be signed not later than March 15, 1988, and that, accordingly, they would all enter into force simultaneously two months after that. If the agreements are signed before March 15, the withdrawal of troops will, accordingly, begin earlier.<sup>81</sup>

Regrettably, though the Afghan government expressed "its willingness to participate in the trilateral talks with Pakistan and Iran" as early as 1981, and despite "seven rounds of talks that took place between the Foreign Ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan in Geneva" between 1982 and 1987, peace seem to be a distant dream. What impinged in the successful conclusion of the peace talks was that though the Afghan government was willing to participate in the peace process, "Pakistan refused to recognise the Soviet-backed regime, and

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80. "Soviet Pull-out Plan," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXIV, no. 7, February 12-18, 1988, p. 19871.

81. "Troop Pull-out Deadline," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXIV, no. 11, March 11-17, 1988, p. 19915.

Iran insisted that the Mujahideen should be included in the talks."<sup>82</sup>

However, after six years of failed negotiations, a peace accord known as the "Geneva Accord" was signed on April 14, 1988, with the hope to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. The Geneva Accord, in fact, contains four accords:

- Between the Soviet Union, the United States, Pakistan and Afghanistan on the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.
- Between the United States and the Soviet Union, to guarantee the above.
- Between Pakistan and Afghanistan on non-interference and non-intervention.
- Between Pakistan and Afghanistan on the return of the refugees.

Besides, a separate Memorandum of Understanding on arrangements for monitoring the Soviet withdrawal under UN auspices was also signed.<sup>83</sup> It is an unpleasant reality that the peace process which was initiated by the UN, took such a long time to come to an agreeable conclusion. India's national newspaper, *Patriot*, commenting on why the UN failed to bring about an amicable solution to the ongoing Afghan crisis, wrote, "UN mediators can negotiate when peace is on the agenda but not when war is actively stoked. Because of Pakistan's and the United States' insistence on their right to provide military supplies to Afghan rebels, the authority of the UN has been badly undermined."<sup>84</sup> What was disheartening about the Geneva Accord was that owing to differing foreign policy objectives of the two superpowers, "there was no agreement on the setting up of any coalition government in Kabul."<sup>85</sup> At the same time, like the 1987 India-Sri Lanka peace accord where the LTTE did not take part, the Afghan Mujahideen refused to take part in the signing of the accord. Iran also backed out of "the Geneva deliberations and continued to demand" the

82. S.K. Shukla, "Prospects in Afghanistan," in Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy, 1989* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 107.

83. Research Institute for Peace and Security, Tokyo, *Asian Security 1988-89* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1988), pp. 50-51.

84. "What on Durand Line," *Patriot* (New Delhi) March 31, 1989.

85. n. 83, p. 51.



installation of "a purely Islamic regime at Kabul" manifesting a serious political drawback.<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, even before the peace accord could be put into practice on July 25, 1988, Afghanistan expressed its displeasure to the UN of the violation of its terms for the withdrawal of Soviet troops by Pakistan and the US. Afghan Foreign Minister Abdul Wakil in a letter to the UN Secretary General cited "the new wave of ferocious and adventurist actions by extremists linked with the Peshawar-based alliance of seven (rebels groups) who have created appalling tragedies with missile barrages on Kabul."<sup>87</sup> It may be recalled that the seven Mujahideen groups formed an alliance on May 17, 1987, with an agreement "to establish an elected 230-member council *Shura*."<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, despite charges and counter-charges between the Soviet, Pakistan and the US, accusing each other of violating the accord, the Soviets began to withdraw from Afghanistan on May 15, 1988. Finally, on February 15, 1989, Lt. Gen. Boris Gromov of the (Soviet) Red Army contingent, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan, crossed over to the Soviet side, across the bridge on the Amu Darya River, completely withdrawing from Afghanistan, marking a new turning point in the history of Afghan politics.<sup>89</sup>

India welcomed the adoption of the draft resolution at the 43<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly without vote and without debate. The Prime Minister of India, committing to the principle of peace and stability in the region, sent India's Foreign Secretary K.P.S. Menon to Islamabad as a special emissary for a discussion on the Afghanistan situation with President Zia and other Pakistani leaders on May 3, 1988. Further, as part of the revival of India's cooperation programme, in 1988, various economic and cultural programmes were initiated by India in Afghanistan, like preparing a feasibility report on a 300-bed maternity hospital in Kabul by the Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation and the construction of 10 additional industrial sheds at the India aided industrial estate project in Kabul by the Central Public Works

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86. Shukla, n. 82, p. 107.

87. "Afghanistan Protest Pakistan, US Pact Violations," *Patriot* (New Delhi) July 27, 1988.

88. Shukla, n. 82, p. 106.

89. "Soviet Pull-out Complete," *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXV, no. 15, April 9-15, 1989, p. 20519.

**In February 1989, the Soviets withdrew completely from Afghanistan. With this, the shadow of colonialism and foreign occupation was temporarily brought to an end in the war-torn state.**

Department (CPWD). The Ministry of External Affairs also reported that decisive progress was achieved towards the supply of equipment, for example, medicines worth Rs. 20 lakh per annum and consultancy services for the construction of the Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health Expansion Project in Kabul, besides setting up of Common Facilities Centres (for small-scale industry) with India's assistance.

The President of Afghanistan, Mohammed Najibullah, visited India from May 4-6, 1988. India pledged assistance worth Rs. 10 crore for the relief and rehabilitation of the Afghan refugees.

This was followed by a mid-term review meeting of the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission on Economic, Technical, Trade and Cultural Cooperation, held in Kabul in June 1988.<sup>90</sup> Subsequently, a protocol on cooperation in the field of television between Doordashan (India), the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India and the State Committee for Radio, Television and Cinematography of the Republic of Afghanistan was signed on July 22, 1988. As relations between the two countries began to improve considerably, a seven-member troupe from India including Ms. Kaushalaya (Kuchipudi) and Manjushi Chatterjee (Kathak) visited Afghanistan and performed in various places in Afghanistan from August 11-20, 1988.<sup>91</sup> Abdul Wakil, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, visited India from September 1-4, 1988.

The Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, accompanied by his wife Raisa, visited India on November 18, 1988, and met various Indian leaders and discussed the prevailing international developments. The Indian government, in recognition of Soviet President Gorbachev's "bold and imaginative proposal to initiate a positive and practical process of nuclear disarmament: and his vision of a non-violent world free of nuclear weapons",

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90. *Annual Report 1988-89* (India: Ministry of External Affairs), p. viii.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 8 and p. 86.

awarded him the Indira Gandhi Peace Prize for peace, disarmament and development on November 19, 1988. This award came after the signing of the Geneva Agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan for the smooth withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. During this visit, India and the USSR signed various agreements on long-term cooperation in exploration and use of outer space for peaceful purposes, avoidance of double taxation, financial and technical cooperation. And as a sign of close relations between the two countries, a life-size bronze statue of the Russian poet and revolutionary, Alexander Pushkin, was unveiled at the Rabindra Bhavan in New Delhi on November 20 by the Russian Minister for Culture, V.G. Zakharov. At the end of President Mikhail Gorbachev's visit, a joint statement was issued between the two countries reiterating:

....their support for the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan and call for their strict and sincere implementation by all parties concerned. The two countries deplore the obstructionist policy of certain forces which are violating the Accords. They express concern over the continued bloodshed in Afghanistan and affirm that the process of national reconciliation should be encouraged.<sup>92</sup>

In February 1989, the Soviets withdrew completely from Afghanistan. With this, the shadow of colonialism and foreign occupation was temporarily brought to an end in the war-torn state. Subsequently, the then Afghan President, Mohammad Najibullah, declared a state of emergency and took over the affairs of the state to prevent subversive activities in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal.<sup>93</sup> In the midst of all these developments, the resistance groups formed an Afghan Interim Government in February following a *Shura* that had been convened in Rawalpindi. Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), on March 16, 1989, recognised the interim government formed by the Mujahideen fighting the Soviet backed Kabul government, giving it

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92. For details of Soviet President M. Gorbachev's visit to India, see *Asian Recorder*, vol. XXXIV, no. 52, December 16-22, 1988, pp. 20343-20348.

93. "Emergency Imposed," *Ibid.*, p. 20520.

the vacant Afghanistan seat. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Foreign Minister of the Afghan interim government took the seat at the meeting of the 46-member organisation to sustained applause and cries of "Allahu Akbar."<sup>94</sup>

Indian leaders were in touch with the Government of Afghanistan from the beginning of the Soviet intervention in their pursuit to solve the crisis in Afghanistan. That is why the Afghan leaders sought India's help in the mitigation of the political crisis in their country. On March 3, 1989, Shah Mohammad Dost, then Afghanistan's Ambassador to the UN, in his address to the media at the UN, said, "India is a leading country of the region and has a vital stake in what happens there. It has an important role in ensuring that the problems of the region are resolved." A day later, on May 4, 1989, Afghan President Dr. Najibullah visited India and discussed the Geneva Accord with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the two countries called for the proper implementation of the Geneva Accord.<sup>95</sup> During the visit, besides the political issues, various other social and economic issues were also discussed by the leaders of the two countries. On the economic front, it was reported that Afghanistan "agreed to enter into a long-term arrangement for the import of packet tea from India," and an agreement for "the supply of 2,000 tonnes of packet tea" was finalised. On September 5, 1989, an agreement "to establish a Joint Business Council" was signed on between the Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Afghan Chambers of Commerce and Industry "to provide for an institutional framework for augmenting India's trade with Afghanistan."<sup>96</sup>

Regular high level exchange visits between India and Afghanistan continued throughout the 1990s. Abdul Wakil, Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, visited India from June 11-15, 1990, for the meeting of the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission, which was followed by President Najibullah in August 1990. During this visit, an agreement on the prevention of trafficking

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94. "OIC Recognizes Mujahideen Government," *Bangladesh Times* (Dacca) March 17, 1989.

95. Satish Kumar, ed., *Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy, 1989* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990), p. 31.

96. A brief analysis of the Afghan President Dr. Najibullah's visit to India is discussed in *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.



in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, cooperation between agricultural institutes, and cultural exchanges were signed between the two countries.<sup>97</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Indo-Afghan Joint Commission was held for two days on June 12 and 13, 1990. A "comprehensive protocol envisaging cooperation in areas ranging from agriculture to commodity assistance and telecommunications" was also reported to have been signed during the meeting.<sup>98</sup> With the reconstruction of Afghanistan as the aim, various new projects like the "construction of a 300-bed gynaecological and obstetrics hospital, additional industrial sheds, cooperation in agriculture, cartography, metreology and tourism" were identified by India for project assistance and supply of equipment to Afghanistan. India also agreed to depute 35 experts to Afghanistan and train 50 nominees.<sup>99</sup>

Lt. Gen. Kamal Matinuddin, then Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad says, "Afghanistan had always looked to India for support, but India's interest in Afghanistan was purely to pincer Pakistan. Now India is on thin ice. Rajiv is forced to support Najibullah, or risk the displeasure of Moscow. But now, he must face the prospect of an Afghanistan which is much closer to Pakistan than to India."<sup>100</sup> Mr. Javed Larinjani, Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran and present adviser to the Iranian President, said his country would ensure that "India is never victorious against Pakistan." He claimed that a "hegemonistic India will inevitably threaten Iran's security." This would lead to a "natural joint alignment" of Iran and Pakistan.<sup>101</sup>

## CONCLUSION

India since its inception has followed a non-aligned foreign policy. However, owing to the unfavourable geo-political environment in the region, it tilted its foreign policy towards the Soviet Union and has relied on the Soviets

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97. Ibid., p. iv.

98. Ibid., p. 10.

99. Ibid., p. 75.

100. Rehman Rashid, "Kabul-New Bugbear in Indo-Pakistan Ties," *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), June 15, 1988.

101. Quoted in "Iran to Ensure Pakistan Victory Against India," *The Times of India*, January 28, 1990.

**India's foreign policy was put to a serious test at the time of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.**

for its economic and military development for most of its existence. At the same time, due to Pakistan's antagonistic policy towards India, especially on the Kashmir issue, India also came into contact with the Muslim countries like Afghanistan and Iran. Subsequently, throughout the Cold War period, both India and Afghanistan depended on the Soviet Union.

India's foreign policy was put to a serious test at the time of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. It is unfortunate that though India was one of the South Asian countries closest to the Soviet Union, the Soviet did not take India into consideration at the time of the military intervention in Afghanistan. At the same time, India was ignored by the Carter Administration and he "did not consult India before responding to the Soviet action by offering substantial military aid to Pakistan and sending his Defence Secretary, Harold Brown, to Peking to solicit Chinese help in the rearming of Pakistan."<sup>102</sup> The above fact clearly indicates that when the superpowers' "interests were at stake, they cared little for the sensitivities of medium powers not committed to their respective alignments."<sup>103</sup>

J.N. Dixit has noted that even in relations with its neighbouring country, Afghanistan, the policy stance adopted by the Indian leaders, specially Mrs. Indira Gandhi "suffered from a basic flaw which one discerns with the benefit of hindsight."<sup>104</sup> Afghanistan is one of the closest Muslim countries to India. The convergence of interest between the two countries enabled Indian policy-makers to maintain relations with successive regimes of Afghanistan uninterruptedly. However, one finds that India's relations with Afghanistan have been shaped less by its own proactive policy and more by the state of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations prior to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

India's policy towards Afghanistan, as it was during the Soviet intervention, does not witness any significant change. By virtue of its economy, military and geographical location, India has acquired considerable

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102. Sen Gupta, n. 1, p. 110.

103. Ibid.

104. Dixit, n. 22, p. 138.

international influence and prestige amongst the countries of the region. Successive Indian leaders have continued to uphold the principles of non-alignment, support for decolonisation and disarmament. Therefore, most of the countries of the world expected India to condemn the Soviet military action. However, while India did not condemn the Soviets openly, successive Indian leaders conveyed their disapproval of the Soviet policy. This attitude of India not only led countries to criticise India for following double standards in its foreign policy objectives, but also disappointed the Afghans.

Brajesh Mishra tried to convince the world community by deliberating at the UN General Assembly on March 11, 1980, that "Soviet troops will be withdrawn when requested to do so by the Afghan government."<sup>105</sup> But, on the contrary, the then Indian Ambassador, J.N. Dixit categorically stated that Russian Ambassador Tabeev had told him in March 1982 that the Soviets had come to Afghanistan "to stay." Dixit further added that Ambassador Tabeev expressed the view that the Soviets "will maintain necessary force levels to keep [Afghanistan] under control; [which the Soviets hope to] achieve by August/September, 1982"<sup>106</sup> This clearly reveals that India's Afghan policy suffered from serious flaws during the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

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105. Quoted in Kux, n. 25, p. 367.

106. J.N.Dixit, *An Afghan Dairy: Zahir Shah to Taliban* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2000), p. 67.