Chapter Five

INDO-SOVIEET POLITICAL RELATIONSHIP: REGIONAL CONTEXT
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The Indo-Soviet Treaty had been perceived by both the treaty partners as a "stabilising factor of peace and stability in the region". Though both the sides felt the necessity of peace in the region; their respective ideas of peace differed which could be related to a gap in security perceptions of a global power and a regional power. India-China-Soviet Union triangular relationship and Indo-Soviet diplomacy on Soviet intervention in Afghanistan will be discussed in this context.

India-China-USSR Triangular Relationship

China had all along been an important factor in Indo-Soviet relations. With the intensification of Sino-Soviet rivalry, Moscow chose India as an important ally to counter the Chinese influence in Asia. Since this period coincided with India's war with China (starting with 1962 India-China War) common enmity towards China became a cementing factor in the friendship between India and the USSR which was substantiated in the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 9 August 1971.

However, peace and good neighbourly relations with the neighbouring countries had always been an important component of India's foreign policy. Normalisation of relations with China was thus given high priority in the interest of peace and stability in the region. There
was apprehension in some Indian circles that if the Treaty was construed as an Indo-Soviet alliance against the prevailing Sino-Soviet alliance, it might hinder India's effort to normalise relations with China which India had all along been pursuing for bringing peace and stability in the region. But India-China-USSR triangular relationship in the post-treaty period under study tends to disprove such apprehension. On the other hand, with a degree of sophistication and skill India maintained a balance between Indo-China and Indo-USSR relationship. India being an important factor in Soviet strategy of countering China, Moscow had been extremely sensitive to any hint of India's normalisation drive with China, and through diplomatic, military and economic overtures tried to woo India so that she could be dissuaded from such a policy towards China. India, however, skilfully pursued her policy of opening dialogue with China which although was not achieved very successfully due to China's own perceptions, nonetheless, was never obstructed due to India's friendly relations with the USSR. Soviet Union's own difficulties appeared to have increased India's bargaining position vis-a-vis the former. Balancing Indo-China with Indo-Soviet friendship became slightly difficult during the period of Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Even then, no significant change in India's relations with the USSR was noted during the brief period under review since both the countries sought entente with China.

Soon after the war of 1971, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took steps to increase India's foreign policy options by making consistent efforts to normalise relations with China, USA and

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1See the views expressed by A.K. Gopalan, Samar Guha and Shyam Nandan Mishra in Lok Sabha during the debate over the Indo-Soviet Treaty on 10 August 1971; India, Lok Sabha. *Debates*, vol.7, no.57, 10 August 1971, Cols.235, 326, 294 respectively.
Pakistan and decrease India's dependence on Moscow. With regard to China, India's declared policy "continued to be one of restraint and desire to normalise relations", although on the part of the Chinese there was a continuing "unfriendly and even hostile posture". China tried to create suspicion and mistrust between India and her neighbours by consistently propagating against Indo-Soviet combination criticising India's peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE) at Pokharan in May 1974, attainment of statehood by Sikkim and its "annexation" into India the same year and Indira Gandhi's announcement of Emergency in 1975. Because of China's consistent anti-Indian attitude no significant result was achieved in Sino-Indian normalisation but Moscow reacted sharply to every hint at India's effort to open a dialogue with China. Presenting before India the enormity of "China threat", she made strenuous effort to dissuade India from her China policy and even offered political, military and economic incentives which, no doubt, benefited India. The visit of the General Secretary of the CPSU, Leonoid Brezhnev to India in November 1973 represented one such crucial effort of Moscow to draw India in her anti-China alliance. Speaking before the Indian Parliament, the Soviet President drew India's attention to the existence in the Asian region of "major outstanding problems and disputes between states and the hotbeds of grave tension". Viewing that "Asia must become a continent of peace, friendship and cooperation" he proposed a "common approach acceptable to all concerned to the problems of peace and security in Asia". He, thus, invited India's participation in a system of collective security system built under the Soviet aegis which he had

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proposed a few year's earlier in 1969, and which had an anti-China slant. But, India, persisted with her policy of normalising relations with China with an assurance to Moscow that such a policy was not to be at the cost of India's tested friendship with the Soviet Union.

As in 1969, Mrs. Gandhi was restrained and polite in her response. She assured the Soviet President that India's friendly relationship with other countries was not to be at the cost of Indo-Soviet friendship. But she underlined the idea of greater independence of regional countries from great power influence and greater economic and political cooperation among themselves. From that point of view India seeking "friendly relations with all the countries adjacent to India" was not against the Indo-Soviet Treaty which while providing comprehensive framework of cooperation between India and the Soviet Union was never "aimed against a third country" -- she suggested.4

The joint communique released after the President's visit which made a specific reference to the "right of people to be master of their destinies" and the development of "mutually beneficial relations" among the states themselves, was more in line with Indian thinking which preferred regional cooperation rather than a collective arrangement by these states under the management of a greater power.5 India, thus did not appear to be convinced by Soviet presentation of "China threat" and there was no indication that India's normalisation drive towards China was going to be stopped under Soviet persuasion. Neither did India show any inclination to get herself drawn into Soviet Union's collective security proposal to contain

4See her speech at the banquet in honour of the Soviet President cited in ibid., pp.83, 85-87.
5From the joint communique cited in ibid., p.138.
China. India’s clarification of the issue was clearly spelt out by India’s Foreign Minister in Lok Sabha on 21 December 1973 when he observed,

The emergence of Asia as a result of relaxation of tension is a desirable objective. However, it is Government of India’s belief that an atmosphere of friendship and peace can prevail not by means of military blocs nor by any system of grouping of countries directed against any other country or group of countries, but through goodwill and cooperation. More extensive cooperation in the economic field in the first instance would help in strengthening mutuality of interests among countries of the region.\(^6\)

India’s idea of security for Asia clearly differed from that of the Soviet one. Instead of creating a military arrangement India laid greater emphasis on economic cooperation among the countries of the region itself.

It may be noted here that the Soviets never tried to put any pressure on India to accept its proposal for a collective security arrangement for which they had hoped to win India’s favour. Their regard of India’s sensitiveness on this issue earned India’s appreciation. Acknowledging the Soviet restraint Indira Gandhi remarked, "There are some people who try to confuse and misinterpret things. But the fact is that the Soviet Union has not during so many years of friendship ever put pressure on us or told us what to do and what not to do".\(^7\) In fact, despite differences over the idea of security in Asia as also on China, both sides appreciated the result of Brezhnev’s visit on the prevailing state of Indo-Soviet relationship. While India acknowledged that the relationship was based on the principle of peaceful co-existence

\(^6\)India, MEA, Report 1973-74, p.164.

\(^7\)Indira Gandhi’s remark at a public reception for Brezhnev held at Red Fort, cited in Drieberg, n.3, p.101.
"reinforcing the existing bond of friendship", the highest leadership in Kremlin highly assessed it as having raised the relationship "to a higher level".  

Moscow, however, kept unabated her efforts to create an anti-China image in India pointing out to her the threat China posed to India's security. To that end it extended diplomatic support to India on the issues straining India's relations with China which proved strategically beneficial to India in dealing with the latter. Two such issues in 1974 were India's peaceful nuclear explosion in May 1974 and integration of Sikkim into Indian territory. China described India's PNE as a "nuclear blackmail by India" which was judged unjustified by India. India's PNE confronted Moscow with a dilemma. So far as it demonstrated India's independence from Moscow, reminiscent of China's nuclear ambition of 1964, Moscow had reason to be anxious. But the symbolic value of India's PNE in offsetting China's nuclear posture made Moscow think that the benefit compensated the loss. Moscow, therefore, preferred to keep its position non-committal and the official declaration merely reported the event with an inclusion of India's official stand that the PNE was related to India's peaceful nuclear research. The Soviet stand was described in India's MEA Report as a "positive assessment".  

Similarly, Moscow's effort to offset Peking's attack on Sikkim's integration in India benefitted the latter. The strong note that China released on 29 April calling the Indian act as  

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9Ibid., of 1974-75, pp.20-21, 37.

10Ibid., p.61.
an "illegal annexation" motivated by India's desire to become a "Super Power" with Soviet support was strongly criticised by India as China's attempt to "interfere in India's internal affair".\textsuperscript{11} Soviet commentators tried to offset China's propaganda with warning against her missile build-up in Tibet and refuting Chinese claims on Sino-Indian territorial dispute point by point on lines presented by India.\textsuperscript{12} India's happiness with the Soviet Union could be gleaned from India's Foreign Minister's statement in Rajya Sabha on 30 July 1974, "...it is a happy thought for me that at all difficult moments the Soviet Union had stood firmly with us. And, therefore, our continued friendship with the Soviet Union is a key matter in our future policy".\textsuperscript{13} On her part Moscow assumed that she would do everything in her power to make her friendship with this great "Asian Power" stronger.\textsuperscript{14} It was thus that Moscow did not find it difficult to support Indira Gandhi's announcement of Emergency in the country in the following year 1975. China attacked Indira Gandhi's decision as an indication of her dependence on "Soviet revisionist social imperialists."\textsuperscript{15} Soviet Union was more interested in India's stability necessary as an effective counterbalance to China than in Indian democracy. Therefore, the Soviet media quickly described the decision as an "unprecedented steps" taken

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p.28.

\textsuperscript{12}Cited from the article published in the Soviet Journal \textit{Problems of the East} in \textit{Far Eastern Economic Review} (Hong Kong), 17 June 1974, pp.31-33.

\textsuperscript{13}Swaran Singh's remark while speaking in the debate on international situation in MEA, \textit{Report 1974-75}, p.37.

\textsuperscript{14}See Gromyko's speech at the meeting held on the eve of 57 anniversary of October Revolution on 6 November 1974 in ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{China Quarterly} (London University, Contemporary China Institute of School of Oriental and African Studies), September 1975, p.592.
in the interest of speediest solution to India's socio-economic task. Kewal Singh's journey to Moscow closely on the heels of declaration of Emergency in India coincided with the publication of an article in the Soviet journal which criticised China's "provocating reaction" aiming at plunging India into chaos, diverting her from giving effect to progressive measures with a reminder to India that this was China's answer to her normalisation drive articulating the message that with such a country India could not have a friendship.

Against this background New Delhi's announcement on 15 April 1976 for restoring the channels of communication between India and China through exchange of Ambassadors after a lapse of 15 years was viewed with much concern in the USSR. New Delhi regarded the decision as a first step towards the normalisation of relations and development of constructive and meaningful bilateral ties with China but the Soviet leaders became concerned about the stability of Indo-Soviet relationship. The leaders in Moscow noted that despite persistent hostile attitude towards India, she desisted from any kind of propaganda campaign and followed a policy of seeking normalisation with China -- which was evident in her initiative in calling Chinese Table Tennis Federation to take part in World Table Tennis championship, and Indira Gandhi's acceptance of the Chinese request of her candidature for Asian Development which

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16R. Ulianovski, and V. Shurygin, "India : A Time of Important Decision", International Affairs (Moscow), no.11, November 1975, pp.52-62; henceforth reference to this journal will be of Moscow edition.


led ultimately to the decision of 15 April 1976. It was perhaps because of this that the Soviet Union suddenly got over her hesitation and offered India MiG-21 fighter bomber on terms better than that offered by the West and possibilities of economic cooperation in various areas, such as industries, steel, petroleum and chemicals were explored. Above all, there was Soviet President's unprecedented praise for India and the Treaty in his address at the 25th CPSU Congress in February 1976. When India proceeded with her decision of formally restoring Indo-China diplomatic relationship, the Soviet President personally made efforts to make India assure the Soviet side about the consistence of Indo-Soviet relations when the Prime Minister visited Moscow in June 1976, by inviting India's participation in "joint-efforts" at peace in Asia.

Indira Gandhi again gave a wide berth to Brezhnev's favourite theme of collective security arrangement in Asia which he proposed in order to contain China. She categorically asserted India's right of independently pursuing her policy with regard to her neighbours which the "international community should support rather than hinder". Especially Soviet Union which had accepted India's non-alignment in the Indo-Soviet Treaty, should "encourage" such efforts of the states to act "on its own", and "expand the areas of goodwill". Indian Prime Minister thus made plain her disagreement with the Soviets on normalisation with China. But

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19Ibid., of 1975-76, p.28.

20See Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs (External Publicity Division), *Foreign Affairs Record* (New Delhi), vol.23, no.6, June 1976, pp.180-81; (henceforth to be cited as *Foreign Affairs Record*).

21See Mrs. Gandhi's statement in ibid., pp.182-83.
as happened before this was not allowed to damage the growth of bilateral relationship. India's relation with the Soviet Union was reviewed to develop on the basis of the solid foundation laid by the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed between the two countries in 1971.


India-USSR-China triangular relationship assumed a new dimension when the Janata Party gained power in March 1977. One of the main themes of the Party's election campaign was that the predecessor Government led by Indira Gandhi compromised India's non-alignment by leaning too heavily towards the Soviet Union. In one of his pre-election campaign speeches, the party leader Mr. Morarji Desai even suggested that the Indo-Soviet Treaty would have to be abrogated if it came in the way of India's policy of pursuing friendship with other countries. To correct this "tilt" they suggested pursuit of "genuine non-alignment" which the new Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee elaborated in Lok Sabha on 29 June, 1977. He said,

India should not only remain Non-Aligned but appear to be so. If India did anything which gave rise to feeling that India leaned towards a particular bloc and surrendered its sovereign rights of judging issues on their merit it would be a deviation from the straight but difficult path of Non-Alignment.

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23 Indian Express (New Delhi), 21 January, 11 February, 25 March, 1971; all references to this newspaper in this chapter are of Delhi edition.

24 See Vajpayee's speech initiating debate on demands for grants of the Ministry of External Affairs in Foreign Affairs Record, n.20, p.90.
Initially the Kremlin leadership was critical about the foreign policy approach of the Janata leadership. In the pre-election period the Soviet media expressed scepticism about the Janata's "right wing" approach to economic and social issues, vilifying Desai and his party as "reactionaries", enemies of peace-loving anti-imperialist policy of Indira Gandhi Government which was pursuing friendship with the socialist countries. But when the Janata Party gained power there was a volte face and Moscow started showing her eagerness to appease the new leadership. The Soviet media abruptly halted their criticism of the Janata Party leaders with a contention that promotion of the two countries' traditional friendship accorded with the long-term interest of peace and security in Asia and elsewhere, and even attributed Mrs. Gandhi's defeat to "mistakes and excesses" during the state of emergency. Moscow's eagerness in shoring up her position with the new leadership was evidenced in the hastily arranged visit of the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to New Delhi immediately after the Janata Party formed the Government.

India's response to Gromyko's visit must have removed Moscow's doubts about the present government's attitude towards Indo-Soviet friendship. Speaking at the lunch given in honour of Gromyko on 26 April 1971 the Foreign Minister of India reiterated that the "bonds of friendship between the two countries are strong enough to survive the demand of divergent systems, the fate of an individual or the fortune of a political party". He also noted that the Treaty reflected the friendship which stood the test of time and remained a constant factor of

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26 V. Sofyin, "Foreign Policy Contours", ibid., no.16, April 1977, p.12.
peace in the changing kaleidoscope of the international situation. The apprehension that the Treaty would be abrogated under the new leadership was then removed.

The Joint Communique released after Gromyko's visit expressed the determination of both the sides on further strengthening the "equal and mutually beneficial relationship in the spirit of the Indo-Soviet Treaty". Vajpayee reiterated this policy in his statement in Parliament on June 29, 1977. That the Government was not committed to a policy of change in India's relationship with the Soviet bloc countries in the context of "genuine non-alignment" was made clear in his statement that the quality of relations between India and the socialist countries of Europe had in no way suffered with the change of Government. The logic of mutual benefit, on the contrary, called for close cooperation.

While Janata Government's perception about Indo-Soviet relationship might have comforted Moscow, it was not sure how this would evolve in the context of China. Vajpayee in his major pronouncement on foreign policy on June 29, 1977, declared the new government's goal of forging "beneficial bilateral relationship" based on the old Five Principles between India and China, although he recognised that the problems with China still remained unanswered. But he also reminded that there was no clash between Indo-Soviet friendship and India's search for friendship with others (China in that instance).

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27 See Vajpayee's speech on 26 April 1977 and the Joint Communiqué in Foreign Affairs Record, vol.23, no.4, April 1977, pp.70, 71-72.

28 Foreign Affairs Record, n.20, p.93.

29 See Vajpayee's speech on June 29, 1977, in ibid.
The visit of Indian Prime Minister Morarji Desai to Moscow in October 1977 provided another occasion to test Indo-USSR-China triangular relationship. Moscow viewed the visit with cautious optimism. In the welcome speech the Soviet President Brezhnev took care to warn India about the danger that China posed to the security of the Asian states. Referring to the "new conflict situation and hot beds of increased tension" in the region which should be "extinguished without delay", he reiterated the necessity for a collective security in Asia. He noted, "We are convinced that one of the surest ways to détente and security in Asia lies through joint efforts by Asian states taken in whatever forms they would deem acceptable to them".30 Hoping for India's approval to such a proposal, he added that peace-loving India which appreciated Moscow's efforts to bring peace in Europe through All European Conference at Helsinki would have no hesitation towards such efforts by Moscow to bring peace in Asia through collective efforts.31

The Indian Prime Minister assured the Soviet leaders about his government's policy of continuing friendship with the Soviet Union. Since the basis of Indo-Soviet relations was not "personalities or ideologies but equality, national interest and enlightened common purposes", the relationship need not be diminished by Mrs. Gandhi's departure from the office he noted. However, he added that this was not intended to obstruct India's policy of extending "friendship to all nations who were willing to befriend India". He further added that the partner nation with whom India shared the heritage of history should "join India to forge new sinews

31Ibid.
of cooperation to make South Asia a region of stability and dynamic process"; especially when the Indo-Soviet relationship based on "equality and mutual benefit" had stood the "test of time".\textsuperscript{32} Desai clearly indicated India's independence from Moscow in deciding her relations with other countries and disapproval of any anti-China collective arrangement sponsored by the USSR. The Joint communiqué, therefore, contained no reference to Soviet security proposal and instead referred to the "right of every people to choose her own political and social system" while listing the principle on which peace in Asia was to rest,\textsuperscript{33} in line with India's preference. There was again an indication of Soviet prudence in not pressurising India to accept her own proposal which received appreciation from India.\textsuperscript{34}

India, too, was conscious about Moscow's sensitivity about China and was always willing to assure Moscow that Indo-China friendship was not to be at the cost of India's proven friendship with Moscow. It was due to this that Indian Foreign Minister arranged his visit to Moscow in September 1978 prior to his visit to China scheduled to be in February 1979. Vajpayee's proposed visit coincided with a period of intensification of Moscow's rivalry with China. Moscow's difficulty was compounded by an indication of India's policy of seeking "step by step normalisation of relations with China on the basis of Five Principle of Panchsheel" as was stated in the MEA report of the year.\textsuperscript{35} Moscow, therefore, took all

\textsuperscript{32}Cited from Desai's speech at the banquet given in his honour by the Soviet leader on October 21, 1977 in ibid., pp.198-9, 200.

\textsuperscript{33}From the Joint Communiqué in ibid., p.205.


\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., MEA, \textit{Report 1977-78}, p.10.
efforts to dissuade India from her China policy through offers of economic and military incentives. Her sudden willingness to enter into the bidding of MiG 23 which it had dropped earlier and Arkipov's travel to India with a proposal for long-term protocol for expansion of trade could be seen to reflect this policy.

Vajpayee, therefore, was welcomed in Moscow with a reiteration from the Soviet side of the necessity of a collective security arrangement as a counter to China's expansionist design. The Indian Foreign Minister, however, was firm that Treaty was in no way directed against any other country and was not intended to be an "impediment to the development of similar constructive relations with other countries". India, he added, worked for promoting a "climate of confidence and goodwill with neighbours" and hoped that such endeavour "uninfluenced by tension elsewhere will overcome old suspicions and irritation and receive encouragement from all powers".\textsuperscript{36} The Joint Communique again made no reference to the Soviet proposal of collective security in Asia indicating existence of difference on this issue. The communique went a step further than that released after Desai's visit by adding to the "right of each people to choose their own political system" end and provision for solution of regional problems "bilaterally without outside interference on the basis of equality and sovereignty".\textsuperscript{37} This was a clear indication of India's preference for a regional solution to problems arising within the region without any interference by an outside power. A noted

\textsuperscript{36}Foreign Affairs Record, vol.24, no.9, September, 1978, pp.305-7.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p.309.
western scholar rightly observed that the Vajpayee's visit seemed to have marked a direct and forceful but futile Soviet attempt to steer India away from China.38

The Ministry of External Affairs's Report for the year put it neatly,

As a genuinely non-aligned country to oppose the concept of bloc in international relations, India did not believe that friendly relations with any one country should come in the way of its development such relations with any third country.... India believed that the co-operation with the Soviet Union on the basis of equality, mutual benefit non-interference in each other to choose their own political and social systems would strengthen the cause of peace and stability in Asia.39

The dual thread of Indo-China and Indo-Soviet friendship were, thus, skilfully inter-woven in Janata Government's policy of genuine non-alignment.

China's intrusion in Vietnam during Vajpayee's trip to China introduced a new element of uncertainty in the Indo-China's-USSR triangular relationship. In one sense, China's military intervention in a country, a close ally of the USSR concerned the latter. It also gave a jolt to India's normalisation pursuit with China. Although Vajpayee's visit was described as an "exploratory" one, the result achieved was more than what was expected and was described as "significant".40 But China's decision to militarily intrude in a country, teach it a lesson, and more importantly during the period of Vajpayee's stay in Beijing was disturbing to India.

40See for details on India's perception about the result of the visit in Foreign Minister's statement in India, Lok Sabha on 20 February 1979 in Lok Sabha, *Debates*, sixth series, vol.XXII, no.1-10, 20 February 1979, cols.243-51.
The Desai Government embarrassed by China's action "expressed profound shock and distress" and recalled Vajpayee to Delhi. The Foreign Minister spoke before the Indian Parliament in a restrained tone before the agitated parliamentarians; but he, too, unequivocally expressed his government's solidarity with the people of Vietnam and condemned the so-called "punitive military action" by China, demanding "withdrawal of the Chinese troops from there." New Delhi's disapproval of Chinese action in Vietnam was clear.

Moscow seized this anti-China mood of India in trying to utilise this as India's support to USSR on her Indo-China policy, as also to dissuade India from the course of normalisation of relations with India. Soviet Premier's visit to India in March 1979, immediately after the crisis was an indication of that. Prior to his visit articles were published in Soviet press demonstrating Soviet sympathy to the threat the Chinese posed to India's security by occupying 36,000 square metres of Indian territory and cautioning India to be more realistic about her friendship with China in view of China's duplicity shown in her policy of sending troops to Vietnam during Vajpayee's visit. Speaking before the Indian Parliament, Premier Kosygin in unusually harsh and critical words lambasted China for her criminal action in Vietnam, upholding that no peaceful country, least of all India, should remain indifferent to such a brazen contempt of human dignity and international law. Drawing attention to Chinese

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42See the statement by Atal Bihari Vajpayee on 21 February 1979 in India, Lok Sabha, in Lok Sabha, Debates, Sixth Series, vol.XXII, no.1-10, 21 February 1979, cols.370, 371; for MP's views on China's invasion see ibid., cols.290-4.

43Cited from Soviet writing in Horn, n.38, p.166.
invasion of India in 1962 he warned that China might repeat that in India in the form what they did in Vietnam for teaching a lesson.\textsuperscript{44}

The Indian Prime Minister's response was restrained. In line with the Soviet suggestion he, too, called for immediate withdrawal of Chinese troops from Vietnam in the interest of regional peace. But unlike the Soviet Premier he declined to call it "aggression", preferring instead to use the phrase China's "massive armed attack". That his Government had not abandoned totally India's policy of seeking friendship with China could be read in his statement that India still believed that in the interest of regional peace, the problems between the neighbours should be resolved through "dialogue" rather than by "use of equation of power" or with "outside interference".\textsuperscript{45} A noted Indian newspaper appreciated India's stand in resisting Soviet pressure to be drawn into a virulent anti-China campaign initiated by Kosygin and keeping her option wide open with regard to China.\textsuperscript{46}

However, the issue did not overshadow the basic thrust of Indo-Soviet relationship. The Joint Communiqué expressed both sides' conviction in continuing Indo-Soviet friendship "in

\textsuperscript{44}See Kosygin's speech in \textit{Foreign Affairs Record}, vol.25, no.3, March 1979, p.66.

\textsuperscript{45}See the summary of Morarji Desai's statement on 9 March 1979 in ibid., p.68. The Joint Communiqué in ibid., p.72; Morarji Desai's statement in Parliament on 26 March 1979 on the Soviet leader's visit to India in India, Lok Sabha, \textit{Debates}, vol.24, sixth series, 26 March 1979, cols.323-5.

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{The Statesman} (Calcutta), 20 March 1979.
the spirit of the Treaty" -- although the phrase "on the basis of the Treaty" as used during the predecessor's regime was avoided. 47

Recognition of Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea: The Key Issue in India-China-Soviet Relationship

The degree of impartiality that the Janata Government had maintained as between India's friendship with the USSR and China was marred to some extent by Indira Gandhi Government's recognition of the Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea on 7 July 1980. By according recognition to a country which was overtly pro-Soviet India moved closer to the Soviet's position as against China. India's recognition of Heng Samrin regime was favoured by Moscow and Vietnam. The Soviet President, speaking before the Indian Parliament publicly praised India's decision by a remark "Recognition of reality has always been an important element of a wise foreign policy". 48 Heng Samrin in similar vein dubbed the decision as "Correct and clear-sighted" contributing to the "peace and stability in Southeast". 49

What motivated Indira Gandhi towards such a decision which she knew was likely to raise a criticism of her being bound to Moscow? Obviously the official interpretation did not

47 The Joint Communiqué, cited in Foreign Affairs Record, n.44, p.71.


49 British Broadcasting Corporation, Summary of World Broadcast, Part 3, Far East, FF/6466/A/3/2, para 3, 9 July 1980, henceforth to be cited as SWB.
fully speak about India's motivation. It was true, as was pointed out by the Indian Foreign Minister, that in deciding on recognition "Indira Gandhi was guided by the legal criteria that the Heng Samrin regime, notwithstanding being supported by the Vietnamese troops, was the Government which was in effective control of the majority of the people and territory of Kampuchea." But behind these legalistic interpretation, Indira Gandhi was also guided by a political motivation of countering Chinese influence in Indo-China -- a motivation which ran on parallel lines with that of the Soviets (who also formulated their Asian strategy with reference to the perceived threat from China). This was not spelt out in India's official statement but an indication of India's anxiety of keeping the Indo-China region free from big power influence was found in the MEA Report which said that recognition was necessary to promote stability in the region which was being enmeshed in the attempt by external powers to incite conflict and create and atmosphere of destabilisation. While speaking in Rajya Sabha on India's recognition of Kampuchea, Mr. Kamlapati Tripathi expressed the same idea when he observed that India's decision was directed by the objective of avoiding involvement

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50See Foreign Minister's statement on India's decision on recognition of Kampuchea in Foreign Affairs Record, vol.26, no.7, July 1980, pp.149-50.

51On this see the article by W. Garver, "Chinese Indian Rivalry in Indo-China", Strategic Digest (New Delhi, Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses (IDSA), vol.80, no.7, 1988, pp.446-55.

52India, MEA, Report 1980-81, p.ix.
into the region of outside powers for influence and rivalries.\textsuperscript{53} In fact India's relation with China was related to the respective nation's rivalries over their power status in the region.\textsuperscript{54}

Recognition of Heng Samrin regime, therefore, quite naturally had the immediate impact of cooling off the process of normalisation in Indo-China relationship that had been initiated earlier, the cancellation of the impending visit to India of China's Foreign Secretary Huang Hua being one indication. But what concerned Moscow was that even with recognition, Indira Gandhi's government did not show any inclination to close the option with regard to China. In international forum Indira Gandhi had shown her disinclination to take directly the Soviet line. For example, in the United Nations India opposed the UN Credential Committee's decision to allow the Pol Pot regime in the seat allotted to Kampuchea and also refused to join International Conference in Kampuchea on the premise that the conference, based on a representation rejected by several of the countries directly concerned, could not offer a meaningful dialogue. But, when the General Assembly adopted the resolution calling for the withdrawal of Foreign troops from Kampuchea and adherence to the results of the International Conference on Kampuchea, India abstained.\textsuperscript{55} Despite recognition of the Heng Samrin regime the Soviet Union, therefore, failed to persuade India into taking a position from

\textsuperscript{53}See, Statement by the Minister of Railways Kamalpati Tripathi on behalf of Minister of External Affairs, in Rajya Sabha, \textit{Debates}, vol.CXIV, no.21, 7 July 1980, cols.166-8.


abstention to a vote in favour of the Soviet bloc and against China on Kampuchean question. Moscow's discomfort at these developments could be read in the articles that were published during this time. One such article contained a warning to India regarding the "military threat" that the China-Pakistan alliance posed to India through the Karakoram Highway and through Pakistan’s increasing strategic alliance with the USA. India was advised to be "cautious and avoid hasty steps" (alluding to Sino-Indian normalisation) that could be detrimental to Indian national interest, with concluding remarks that Indo-Soviet normalisation could not be subject of bargaining in the matter of normalisation of Indo-China relation. Moscow continued her efforts to remind India about the consistency of Indo-Soviet friendship as against the prevailing Indian policy of Indo-China friendship when the postponed visit of the Chinese Foreign Minister ultimately took place in June 1981. The visit underlined India's differences with China on crucial issues -- important among them being India's non-acceptance of the Chinese package deal having proposal for Chinese concession in the east in return for India's recognition of the status quo in the west. Despite such differences the visit was regarded in New Delhi as a "positive development" towards better understanding of each other's position. Moscow, however, capitalised on the lack of substantive agreement on border issues contending that Beijing had wanted a "virtual perpetuation of the status quo both in the eastern and western sectors". Beijing's other disturbing manoeuvres relating to India's internal


57 India, MEA, Report 1981-82, p.11; also see Narasimha Rao's statement on Indo-China relation on 12 December 1981 reported in Times of India (New Delhi), 13 December 1981; all references to this newspaper in this chapter are of Delhi edition.
situation were also denounced with a simultaneous stepping up of Moscow's reminder to India of the "indispensable element" in Asia of the "Soviet Indian constancy". But Indira Gandhi's government proceeded towards normalising her relations with China despite efforts to dissuade India from that pursuit.

Here again as had happened in the past difference overs China did not disturb the healthy growth of Indo-Soviet relationship. During India's Foreign Minister's visit to Moscow in 1982, President Brezhnev spoke warmly about India's adherence to non-alignment and work for peace and cooperation. In the joint communique both sides reiterated the belief that Indo-Soviet relations were an important factor of peace in the region as well as in the world.

Gorbachev-Rajiv Gandhi Era: Sino-Soviet Rapprochement: A Change in Indo-Soviet Relations?

The onset of Sino-Soviet rapprochement led to speculation regarding the future framework of Indo-Soviet relations. With Sino-Soviet rapprochement, it was India who became apprehensive on that count. But taking note of the fact that the Sino-Soviet normalisation had a long way to go before it attained a crystallised framework, Indian fear remained on the level of speculation.

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59 From Prime Minister's statement in Rajya Sabha on his visit to USSR in India, Rajya Sabha, *Debates*, vol.C24, no.6, October 1982, col.294.

60 For details on the several phases of Sino-Soviet rapprochement see Donald S. Zagoria, "Moscow-Beijing Détente", *Strategic Digest*, vol.13, no.6, June 1983, pp.641-52.
Sino-Soviet dialogue which started by the end of 1979 with China agreeing to participate in normalisation talk with the Russians was postponed due to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. But the Soviet Union felt the necessity to resume the issue from a fear of evolving "encirclement" posed by China's effort to bring USA, Japan and the Third World countries of ASEAN into a loosely constructed anti-Soviet coalition to counter Soviet action in Afghanistan and Kampuchea. The Soviet President Brezhnev, in his celebrated speech at the 26th CPSU Congress spelt out the "confidence-building measures" for the Far East which was an expression of Soviet desire to normalise relations with China. After an initial hesitation, the Chinese responded to Soviet overtures in the year 1982 primarily because of Chinese dissatisfaction with Reagan Administration's falling on "Two China" policy with regard to Taiwan, and in November 1982 the Chinese Foreign Minister while attending Brezhnev's funeral expressed optimism about Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Mrs. Gandhi visited Moscow in September 1982 just before this initiation of Sino-Soviet dialogue. Since Moscow was herself talking to the Chinese this time, they were more circumspect than before in warning India against normalisation of her relations with China; neither was there any indication of India's sensitivity on this issue. The Joint Declaration noted that both the leaders expressed "profound

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satisfaction" at the result of the visit which further strengthened mutual trust between the two countries. 63

The "new political thinking" by Mikhail Gorbachev who became the General Secretary of the CPSU in March 1985 added a qualitatively different dimension to Soviet Union's China policy. Friendship with China was included in Gorbachev's proposal for a comprehensive peace arrangement in the Asia-Pacific region placed on 28 July 1986 at Vladivostok. Continuing his call for joint efforts to solve the problems of Asia at the 27th CPSU Congress 64 at Vladivostok, he mooted the idea of a three lines approach to erect place in Asia Pacific region involving all states of the region including China, Japan and USA as well. In his view, in contrast to the western proposed Pacific Community consisting of US-Japan-Seoul axis which aimed at security arrangement through military alliance among themselves, his idea of comprehensive peace proposal was aimed at diffusion of tension and regional conflicts in the area through peaceful cooperation and dialogue among all the states largely on the model of Helsinki Conference which aimed at bringing peace in Europe. This, in his view imparted greater dynamism to bilateral relations and eliminated build-up in the area including the nuclear one. Confidence-building measures in Far East along with Sino-Soviet rapprochement were important part of this peace proposal of Gorbachev. Pointing to the two countries sharing of world's longest border as well as their complementarities in economic interests, he affirmed


Soviet Union's preparedness to hold negotiations any time with China on additional measures to establish good relations. To that effect, he made important Soviet concessions to the Chinese proposals, like withdrawing a substantial portion of Soviet troops from Mongolia, lowering of the level of land forces on the official border on the Amur River and recalling the Soviet troops from Afghanistan as conditions for starting dialogue for Sino-Soviet rapprochement.  

India was regarded important by Gorbachev in launching his peace drive. The Soviet President took the occasion of Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Moscow in 1985 to impress upon him the necessity of such an arrangement. He broached the idea of an "overall comprehensive approach" by joining in the "efforts of the Asian states" in that direction. Based on the Helsinki model this joint search for constructive solutions of problems in Asia could take the form of "bilateral talks or multilateral consultations on an Asia-wide forum", he said. He sought Rajiv Gandhi's support to the Soviet initiative of peace in Asia by addressing India as a 'Great Power' that enjoyed "high standing and respect" both in the Asian countries and throughout the world. 

Rajiv Gandhi's response was lukewarm. He agreed with the Soviet President that "world peace and regional tranquillity were closely intertwined". But his idea of regional peace

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differed from that of the Soviets. He expected South Asian regional cooperation to make a contribution to better mutually beneficial relations among the countries of the region and bilateral talks between neighbours. He also brought to Soviet notice in that connection India's initiation of discussion with her neighbours to improve the total environment of regional peace and cooperation.67

Indian Government did not clearly spell out her position on this. Judging from the statements from official and unofficial circles one can make some presumptions. During his visit to India in November 1986, Gorbachev in continuation of his gesture to Indian Prime Minister in May 1985, sought India's support to his peace proposals for Asia. He expressed the hope that being a "major Asian power" and an "acknowledged leader of Non-Aligned movement", India would take the side of the USSR in ensuring peace in the Asian region which was in mutual interest of both the countries. However, sensing India's reservation about Sino-Soviet rapprochement which was included in his peace proposal, he assured India that "nothing can be a substitute for the advantage of good relation with one's neighbour" (meaning that Sino-Soviet rapprochement was not to be at the cost of Indo-Soviet friendship).68 Rajiv Gandhi's reply made no reference to Soviet peace proposal. Since the Soviet President did not present the proposal as "worked out and determined concept", India did not evolve any specific response to it. But Indian Prime Minister had made it clear that the idea was for all "the Asian countries to build" and the concept should grow out of "Asian situation and perception". He

67See Rajiv Gandhi's answer in ibid., p.138.

pointed out there was no such basic difference between Gorbachev's vision of peace in Asia and the one that was developed by Jawaharlal Nehru in the pre-independence era which Gorbachev also had indicated at Vladivostok.⁶⁹

Rajiv Gandhi's reluctance to effusively embrace Soviet idea about Asian-Pacific security could not, however, be regarded as an expression of his pragmatism or his disapproval of Sino-Soviet rapprochement inherent in the peace proposals; neither Gorbachev's refusal to make critical remarks about China during his stay in India be construed as evidence of Soviet pusillanimity as the anti-Soviet elements in India interpreted it. Actually, as an Indian journalist pointed out, it was imperative for both India and the Soviet Union to simultaneously seek entente with China -- and the visit of the Soviet President provided the occasion for both the countries to pursue that effort. In plain terms the level of understanding reached between Moscow and New Delhi had made it possible for the two countries to seek entente with third countries without raising suspicion regarding each other's bonafides. Such a new thinking which permeated the thoughts of both the leaders constituted, no doubt, a departure from the old stereotyped approach in the past which sought to pin one country against another under such appellations as "balance of power" or "sphere of influence".⁷⁰

Some evidence, however, is available which indicated India's anxiety about Gorbachev's new approach towards China. The Report of the Ministry of Defence, for example, observed

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⁶⁹See Prime Minister's statement in India, Rajya Sabha, Debates, vol.CXL, no.21, 2 December 1986, col.224.

⁷⁰Dilip Padgaonker, "At Home and Abroad : Greening [sic] of Gandhi and Gorbachev", Times of India, 2 December 1986.
that any improvement in Sino-Soviet relation would encourage China to adopt intransigent and rigid postures regarding the Sino-Soviet border dispute and might encourage China to redeploy her forces from Sino-Soviet border to Tibet.\textsuperscript{71} In a seminar held in Moscow in 1986 attended by both Soviet and Indian scholars, some Indian analysts, in line with Moscow's previous attitude with regard to Sino-Indian normalisation, warned Moscow against such a policy reflecting on China's unreliability as a partner and the consistency of India-Soviet friendship.\textsuperscript{72} In Indian Parliament several members noted that Gorbachev had been positive in assuring India of Soviet assistance in terms of the Treaty. But did the President give any specific assurances about the Soviet role in India's future conflict with Pakistan or China -- was their query. They also drew attention to Moscow still printing maps showing wrong delineation of India's border in north and including some of the territories in Aksai Chin which India claimed as her own. Did the Prime Minister seek any clarification on this point -- was also another anxious query.\textsuperscript{73} These reflected the existence of some sort of doubt about the credibility of Soviet President's assurance in terms of the Treaty. The reason for this, among others, might be Gorbachev's silence over the Chinese intrusion into the Sun Durang valley of Arunachal Pradesh which was perceived by India not in consonance with the understanding between India and China to maintain peace and tranquility along the borders; and also Gorbachev's evasiveness when confronted in a press conference with specific question as to


\textsuperscript{72}From Seminar proceedings held in Moscow in October 1986 under the auspices of Moscow's Institute for Oriental Studies (IOS), cited in J.S. Duncan, The Soviet Union and India (London, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1989), p.54.

\textsuperscript{73}The statement by M.S. Gurupadaswamy in Rajya Sabha, Debates, no.69, col.209.
what the Soviet Union would do in the event of renewed fighting between India and either of her enemies.  

When asked about the kind of Soviet assurance, the Prime Minister avoided any specific answer and only cited the remark Gorbachev had made on the Treaty in that context in the Parliament which read:

> Its (the Treaty's) supreme meaning lies in reciprocal commitment to act should a complicated situation arise for one or both. Such situation did arise. Both the Soviet Union and India have remained faithful to these commitments and acted in accordance with the spirit and the letter of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.  

These were, however, speculations and could not be taken as substantive evidence indicating India's alarm at the prospect of Sino-Soviet rapprochement. Evidence on the contrary remained that there were knowledgeable opinions which viewed such an attitude as an unjustified apprehension. Some read in Gorbachev's remark on the Treaty an evidence of Moscow's continuing commitment in favour of India's security which was being threatened. A noted Indian scholar on Indo-Soviet relations expressed the opinion that Moscow's overture to China could not harm her relations with India since in his opinion the bilateral relations subsumed the concept that the bilateral relations between the two countries need not affect the relations with a third state.  

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24 From Gorbachev's dialogue with the press reported in FBIS, 2 December 1986, pp.D5-7 and D-16.  

25 See Rajya Sabha, Debates, n.69, col.225.  

26 See Padgaonker's article, n.70.  

one eminent Indian journalist that if the foundation of Indo-Soviet relationship could be laid in the period of Sino-Soviet rivalry there was no reason why the relationship should not flourish in the period of renewed amity between these two powers. In fact, host of assurances to that effect came from the Soviet side, including that of Gorbachev to India's External Affairs Ministry officials just prior to his visit to India. Indian leaders appeared convinced of Soviet intentions and Rajiv Gandhi had reportedly said that Soviet talks with China would not pose any problem for India. Apparently India perceived no erosion in her importance in Soviet foreign policy perception and Rajiv Gandhi held that Gorbachev's visit had shown the importance the Soviet Union attached to friendship with India.

The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan: The Indian Response

Next to China it was Pakistan which played a vital role in shaping the regional framework of Indo-Soviet relationship. Soviet backing to India against US-Pakistan-China axis during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971 helped India to rise to a position of primacy in the region. Paradoxically this also led to a resurgence of independence in the conduct of India's foreign policy, which was evident in Indira Gandhi's resolve to normalise relations with

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Pakistan bilaterally on the basis of Simla Agreement (reached in 1972) without being burdened with the Soviet mediation. President Brezhnev appreciated India's efforts when he viewed the Simla Agreement as a "crucial turn to good-neighbourly relations and mutually beneficial cooperation". The US decision in 1975 to resume arms supplies to Pakistan through lifting of the arms embargo introduced again an element of suspicion in the relations between the two subcontinental powers. Close on the heels of the US decision the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko visited India and discussed with Indian Defence Minister various aspects of the situation connected with Indian security including the military build-up of Pakistan by the U.S. Indo-Soviet consensus was visible in India's remark on the visit highlighting the importance attached by both the countries "to the preservation of peace and stability in Asia". The Afghanistan situation provided a further perspective to the triangular Soviet-Pakistan-India relationship.

Although the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan was a third country affair for India, she became an indirect victim of the event so far as her relationship with Pakistan was concerned. In fact, the whole gamut of the national goals of these two countries stood jeopardised by this Soviet action. It was true that next to the agony of Afghanistan it was Pakistan on whom had fallen the most pernicious consequences of the Soviet invasion and the

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83 Ibid., Report 1974-75, p.4.
84 On this see a detailed analysis by J.S. Mehta, "The Prospect in Afghanistan : Can India be Indifferent?" in Satish Kumar, ed., Yearbook on India's Foreign Policy, 1984-85 (New Delhi, 1987), pp.135-46.
internal conflict in Afghanistan. With three or perhaps four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan which was proportionately larger than the Palestinians in Lebanon, Pakistan’s future economic viability stood in jeopardy. Added to this was the wider strategic dangers that Pakistan perceived from the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, ranging from the possibility of purposeful hot pursuits by Soviet army in NWFP of Pakistan, possible destabilisation of Baluchistan by the Soviet Union and the serious possibility of joint Soviet-Indian collusion for a pincer squeeze on Pakistan.  

Like Afghanistan and Pakistan India’s security was not directly threatened by the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan; but the shadow of Afghanistan had fallen on India since her geo-political situation was such that tensions at global level inevitably infringed on defence and security environment of India, noted the Defence Ministry.

Two themes dominated India’s perception of the Afghan event having implication on India’s security as outlined in the MEA report. Firstly, India viewed the development in Afghanistan "in the larger background of deterioration of global and regional environment" when there was a steady growth of increased projection of the military strength of powerful states beyond their borders creating threats of military intervention. Since no client state could hide permanently behind the shield of armed security provided by others, ultimately this reliance on external security umbrella had grave repercussion on their internal political, social and economic viability, jeopardising even their independence. Guided by this perception India was against the "presence of foreign troops or bases in any country" and was 'deeply

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85 For Pakistani perception of threat see the author’s *Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan, Causes, Consequences and India’s Responses* (new Delhi, 1987), pp.43-52.

concerned and vitally interested in the security, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and traditional non-alignment of friendly Afghanistan". India expected Afghanistan to solve her problems without outside interference and hoped that Soviet force would withdraw from Afghanistan, said the report. Secondly, on the assumption that all states should "refrain from actions which could intensify great power rivalries in South Asian region", the report noted with concern the re-entry of the United States into the region and her resumption of arms aid to Pakistan, which it viewed had the risk of "converting the subcontinent into a theatre of Great Power confrontation threatening India's security", as also a negative implication of decelerating the process of normalisation which the Governments of India and Pakistan had fostered in the spirit of the Simla Agreement. The central theme in New Delhi's perception of the Soviet action in Afghanistan was that by relinking USA and Pakistan it had not only disturbed the military balance in the subcontinent, but had also obstructed India's policy of normalising relations with Pakistan. Indo-Pakistani problems, of course, had deeper roots and manifestation than a resultant function from Afghanistan problem, but enmeshing Indo-Pakistani cold war into a bigger cold war between USA and the USSR it further complicated the problem.  

The first official reaction by the then caretaker government led by Charan Singh followed the first line of perception described above. In a highly critical response he expressed India's opposition to intervention in a non-aligned country having friendly relations with India. The intervention, he said had the adverse implication of turning the area into an area of Super

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**From India, MEA, Report 1977-80, pp.i-iv.**
Power competition. He urged the Soviet Union for a "speedy withdrawal of troops" from Afghanistan. 88

When Indira Gandhi came to power in January 1980, she brought moderation over Charan Singh's response by following the second line of Government's perception outlined above. Being strongly against foreign interference in a country's internal affairs she was hardly pleased with the Soviet action. But she was unable to see the Soviet action out of context of foreign-power meddling (meaning US/Chinese backing to Afghan Mujahideen) operating from Pakistani territory. In the first interview to the press after the event on 9 January 1980 she said, "I am strongly against any interference. But in Afghanistan the Soviet intervention is not one-sided. Other interferences are gong on..." 89 Following precisely this line of argument, Brajesh Mishra (India's envoy at the United Nations) while speaking on this issue at the United Nations General Assembly, expressed opposition against the presence of foreign troops in another country; but he did not miss the opportunity to bring to UN's notice the effort of certain powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan by training and arming the subversive elements. He appeared to share Soviet justification in sending the troops when he expressed hope in Soviet assertion that the Soviet troops would not remain a day longer than necessary. With this justification he abstained from voting in a resolution which called for the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. 90 Abstention in the face of an

88 See Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, India's Views on Afghan Situation (New Delhi, 1980), henceforth to be cited as India's Views...

89 Interview cited in ibid., p.41.

overwhelming support of 104 countries calling for an immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, indeed, was an indication of India's sympathy to Soviet sensibilities which caused a "great deal of shock and surprise" to almost all non-aligned countries.\textsuperscript{91} Mishra's justification ran almost parallel to that of the Soviet President who denied that there had been any "intervention" by the Soviet Union. It was the Americans together with the Chinese who were directing the intervention against Afghanistan from Pakistani territory. The Soviet Union by sending troops safeguarded the "revolutionary forces in Afghanistan from gross intervention outside..."\textsuperscript{92} Brajesh Mishra's failure to take a hard line on Afghanistan was interpreted by some observers as a change in India's stand. It was said that the pledge Mrs. Gandhi took prior to election to reinforce India's close relation with the USSR led her to this response, which the Janata Government, if it was in power, would not have done.\textsuperscript{93}

From a study of the statements of Indian leaders it can be inferred that it was the US reaction to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and her decision to resume arms supplies to Pakistan that caused concern to the decision-makers in New Delhi more than the intervention itself. Interpreting the development in the familiar mould of east-west rivalry, the USA perceived the event as a manifestation of Soviet design to reach the warm water ports and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Robert C. Horn, Afghanistan and the Soviet-Indian Influence Relationship", \textit{Asian Survey} (Berkeley, California), vol.23, no.3, pp.245-6.
\item \textsuperscript{92} Interview with Leonid Brezhnev by \textit{Pravda} correspondent on 13 January 1980 cited in \textit{Truth About Afghanistan : Documents and Eyewitness Reports} (Moscow, 1980), pp.9, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Mehta, n.84, pp.144-5.
\end{itemize}
thereby throttle the oil flow to the West -- destabilising the US economic and political base. The US administration sought to meet this threat militarily by improving and reactivising USA's Rapid Deployment Force base structure and access facilities in the gulf and north-west Africa and politically by restoring her credibility with the allies, in which Pakistan was perceived to be a "frontline state" discharging the double role of protecting US interest in the region as well as preventing further expansion of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan into the oil region. Since Pakistan became more important than India on this score, USA took up a policy of arms aid to that country and India's sensitivities on this issue became less important in US policy. This caused concern in India. The MEA report noted with regret the "reactive moves" which had already been started by China, USA and others to assist Pakistan in augmenting her military capability, which not only threatened the security of India but had the potential of decelerating the process of normalisation of relations between India and Pakistan. The statement which Narasimha Rao made in Indian Parliament on 23 January was more vocal in criticising the US decision to resume supply of arms to Pakistan than the Soviet intervention about which he expressed in general terms India's opposition to the

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94 President Carter in his State of Union message to the Joint Session of Congress on 23 January 1980 declared, "Soviet effort to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interest of the United States of America and will be repelled by the use of force including military forces"; For details of the speech, see New York Times, 24 January 1980.

95 For US perception of Pakistan's importance see Shahran Chubin's interview with prominent military personnel in USA cited in Timothy George, Robert Litwak and Shahran Chubin, India and the Great Powers (Hampshire, IISS, 1988), pp.179, 189, 200-02.

96 India, MEA, Report 1979-80, p.iii.
existence of foreign troops in another country.\footnote{See Narasimha Rao's statement in \textit{Foreign Affairs Record}, vol.26, no.1, January 1980, p.191.} This was also the line of argument presented by the Indian Prime Minister while she made the first statement on the issue in Parliament on 30 January 1980. She said:

\ldots we do not approve of foreign presence of intervening anywhere in the world. However, we do not believe in a 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.

On the allegation that she was following a "pro-Soviet approach" she added,

It is necessary to reaffirm our commitment to non-alignment and to emphasise the independence of our judgement on each issue which are not going to be affected by pressure from any quarters\ldots We are not pro any country, except for pro-India and intend to remain so.\footnote{From Prime Minister's statement in Lok Sabha on 30 January 1980 in India, Lok Sabha, \textit{Debates}, seventh series, vol.1, no.8, 30 January 1980, cols.156-7.}

This could be construed by the Soviet Union as an expression of India's support to Soviet activities in Afghanistan. But such a stand failed to commit the Soviet Union to any specific time-table for withdrawal. India's dissatisfaction with the Soviet unwillingness to commit to a specific time-frame for withdrawal could be gleaned from the result of the visit of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to New Delhi in February 1980. The visit was publicly in favour of Soviet position. India, however, played down the visit. The Indian press reported the matter only on the day of the visit. The MEA mentioned briefly on this adding the comment that India had conveyed her "concern" to the visiting Soviet President about the
events in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{99} The Joint Communiqué’s silence on the issue of Afghanistan was another indication. Indian Foreign Minister publicly expressed India’s disillusionment at Soviet action before Parliament after he returned from Moscow in June 1980. The Soviet leaders made it perfectly clear to the visiting Indian Minister that any talk about the withdrawal of force without furnishing of complete and reliable guarantee of an end to interference in Afghanistan by outside forces (through training of insurgents based on Pakistan) would merely hinder the achievement of a solution. The Soviet leaders, thus, left India in no doubt that the Soviet Union would agree to withdrawal of troops only when a political settlement had been achieved. The Indian Foreign Minister stated,

\begin{quote}
We are opposed to the presence of foreign troops in any country. The Soviet Union had announced that the Soviet assistance to Afghanistan was limited in time, purposes and scale and did not present a threat to security and stability in the region. However, reports coming out of Afghanistan during the past few months...do not seem to suggest...that the Soviet assistance to Afghanistan could indeed remain limited in time as was originally intended....It is naturally a matter of concern to India. It is time for us to ask ourselves the question whether the troops meant for assisting in Afghanistan have not become or are not likely to become a pretext for those who wish to create further instability in that country. Our fear is that beyond a reasonable time-frame this could well come to pass.
\end{quote}

He concluded the urgent need for a political solution of the crisis.\textsuperscript{100} India realised that Soviet Union whose security was directly threatened by US-China-Pakistani meddling in the affairs of Afghanistan was not going to withdraw unless there was a guarantee regarding the end of such outside interference. Indian diplomacy had little to offer in this respect. Later, in reply


to a query about India's inability to bring pressure on Moscow for early troop withdrawal, Indira Gandhi said that though India had asked for this she knew what was important was not what India asked or wanted but what the interests of the Soviet Union were. "I have been always against pressurising the Soviet Union into a proposal which they would not accept", she said. In such a situation Indira Gandhi Government avoided confrontation with the Soviet Union. Through "quiet diplomacy" preferred to work behind the scene to bring about withdrawal of Soviet troops by pressurising the Soviets in private. While some viewed this stand as accommodation with the Soviet Union, New Delhi described it as a "balanced policy".

By the time the Soviet President Leonoid Brezhnev journeyed to India in December 1980, India's official stand based on the above perception had been clearly outlined in the External Affairs Ministry's report. The three guiding principles spelt out were: there should be no interference or intervention in the affairs of one country by another country by the use of armed forces; there should be no destabilisation of South Asian region by excessive induction of arms or interference or subversion from outside; the primary need was to prevent escalation of tension and to work ceaselessly for finding a solution through political and diplomatic measures. The western press speculated that the Soviet President would try to enlist India's support in staving off the sharp Third World criticism against the Soviet action in the United Nations, and through carrots of more trade and aid offer would induce India to change her stand in the United Nations from abstention to a positive vote in favour of the

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101 From Prime Minister's interview with the press on 8 December 1980 cited in India's Views..., n.88, p.50.

Soviet action. But contrary to this speculation Afghanistan perhaps remained the only regional issue where the Soviet Union and India differed with each other strictly adhering to their respective positions. Of course, India as a part of her diplomacy avoided taking a strong critical stand on Soviet action in Afghanistan.

The Soviet President asserted most trenchantly the Soviet position that she would not withdraw her force from Afghanistan so long her neighbours (especially Pakistan) did not come to good-neighbourly agreement with Afghanistan through ceasing the sending of armed gangs into Afghanistan. This testified to the fact that the Soviet President had nothing to offer for a political solution of Afghanistan which India desired. The Soviet President also linked any prospective settlement of the Afghanistan crisis with a Five-Point Peace Proposal for the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean area into which he called for the participation of USA and other western powers, China, Japan and all other states who had interest in it. In justification of this proposal the Soviet President pointed out that for the purpose of Soviet security, the Soviet Union was interested in keeping peace in this region; since this area which had become a dangerous seat of international tension due to disproportionate build-up of military network by the US to meet the mythical Soviet "threat" to oil rich region, lay close


104 From Soviet President's address to the Members of Parliament in Foreign Affairs Record, n.48, p.294.

105 For the peace proposal see ibid., pp.293-4; Ian Clark in his unpublished paper presented to the IISS conference on "Security in South Asian Region" held in London from 21-23 July 1981, suggested the link between Soviet proposal of peace in the Persian Gulf with their policy on Afghanistan cited in George, et al., n.95, p.128, fn.101.
to Soviet border. Recalling peace-loving India's "dedication to the cause of peace", he maintained that India's participation in this Soviet peace proposal was specially important in the condition of the then exacerbated international tension caused by the USA and her allies. One can suggest that the Soviet President made the solution of the Afghanistan crisis conditional upon the achievement of peace and security in the Persian Gulf-Indian Ocean area where Soviet interests were threatened by the enormous military build-up by the USA and her allies.

India had doubt about the effectiveness of Soviet President's suggestion of a link between peace in the Persian Gulf and the settlement of Afghan crisis. In a sense it was the resurrection of his own proposal made in 1969 to which India had reacted coolly. This time also Indira Gandhi in her characteristic polite way avoided any categorical stand by describing it as "constructive and worthy of careful consideration". It appeared that she did not believe the President's assertion that the USA's military intervention was the "root cause" in creating tension in the region when she remarked,

We have not looked upon the situation affecting this or that country or only a group of countries. These tensions are related to regional and global situation. The Great Powers have special responsibilities in bringing about general and positive improvement in relation on a global scale. The people of Asia and Africa can ill afford embroilment in this international power-game which seems to be beginning of a new Cold War.107

106 See Brezhnev's speech cited in Foreign Affairs Record, n.48, p.295.

The Indian Prime Minister placed responsibility for the situation in the region on both the Super Powers. The Prime Minister also hinted at India's difference with the Soviet Union on Afghanistan by saying,

On Afghanistan the views of the Soviet Union were reiterated by President Brezhnev. On our part we made our perception clear and conveyed serious concern. We expressed our opposition to all forms of outside interference in the internal affairs of other countries whether through the induction of the regular troops or through infiltration and our view that all such interference should stop in order to make possible a political solution.108

The Joint Communique's silence on the issue substantiated this gap in perception. Instead of referring to the Soviet peace proposals in the Persian Gulf, it referred to the principle of co-existence among the countries of the region as basis of preservation of peace in the Asian region which India favoured -- indicating difference between the two countries in approaching the problem of peace in the region.109

There was a mixed reaction in Indian press about Indira Gandhi Government's response to Soviet proposal on Afghanistan. There were some who appreciated Indira Gandhi for not showing encouragement to Soviet President's proposals on Afghanistan. Though dressed as a peace doctrine, in essence, Brezhnev's peace proposal was in their view only Soviet propaganda point customarily aimed against the United States and Japan whose military build-up had concerned the Soviet Union. From that point of view Soviet peace proposal for the

108Emphasis by the author, ibid., cols.315-16.

109For the Joint Communique see India, Rajya Sabha, Debates, vol.CXVI, no.18, 11 December 1980, col.255; for details on India's diplomacy on Afghanistan see the author's book, n.85, chapter IV.
region without offer of any accord on Afghanistan could not be accepted by the countries of the region, including India, when the Soviet presence in Afghanistan itself had been causing concern to them. Brezhnev’s peace plan could be credible if the Soviet Union, too, adhered to this principle and had not stationed her troops in Afghanistan, they commented.\textsuperscript{110} There were others who, however, maintained that Mrs. Gandhi did not clearly enunciate India’s position on Afghanistan. Avoidance of reference to Afghanistan in the Joint Communiqué, in their eyes, meant that India did not want to apportion blame on the Soviet Union for the event in Afghanistan, although she wanted withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. This was a sort of “tight rope walking”, which India should avoid to maintain purity in her foreign policy, they argued.\textsuperscript{111}

Brezhnev-Indira summit, on the whole, substantiated the inability of both India and Soviet Union to influence each other in favour of their respective policies on Afghanistan. More than the Soviet Union, India could assert her independence, which disproved the lingering suspicion that Brezhnev with his attractive aid and trade offer could motivate Indira Gandhi to share Soviet perception on the crisis. Of course, she avoided a path of confrontation or public denunciation of Soviet action but she made clear India’s perception about the crisis to the Soviet President. What was significant in this context was that both the leaders showed an inclination not to let the differences over Afghanistan impair the existing stability in Indo-Soviet friendship. Mrs. Gandhi had clearly in mind this conviction when she remarked, "Indo-

\textsuperscript{110}The Hindu, 12 December, 1980; the editor’s column in The Statesman (Delhi), 13 December 1980.

\textsuperscript{111}"Soviet View Endorsed", Indian Express (editorial), 12 December 1980.
Soviet relationship was not based on total concurrence but on trust and mutuality of interest. Despite occasional differences the friendship continued". The Soviet President talked positively on the fruitful cooperation between the two countries "on the basis of the Treaty" and even went to the extent of remarking that "we are content with what has been achieved". His offer of a generous credit of 250 million roubles was appreciated by Indira Gandhi as a "friendly gesture" which would further strengthen "India's industrial sinews". Both preferred to keep their opposition restrained. Perhaps it was due to this that despite differences on an issue of grave importance to the security of both the states, bilateral relationship between the two countries progressed unhampered. Afghanistan, thus, remained an example where despite differences of opinion and policies, breach in the relationship between the two countries was avoided; on the contrary, the relationship remained stable.

In the subsequent period India continued this position on Afghanistan. Avoiding any confrontationist attitude, through a quiet diplomacy India tried to persuade the Kremlin leadership towards a specific time table for withdrawing Soviet troops from Afghanistan. India's pronounced policy on Afghanistan from then onwards became opposition to both "interference and intervention," a call for political settlement in that country through negotiation among the parties concerned on the basis of withdrawal of foreign troops, stopping


\[113\] See Brezhnev's remark in Indian Parliament on 8 and 10 December 1980 in Foreign Affairs Record, n.48, pp.293 and 286 respectively.

of all forms of outside interference and preservation of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-aligned status of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{115} No doubt, India stressed the importance of an end to interference in the affairs of Afghanistan which obstructed the withdrawal of Soviet troops. But for India more urgent was the necessity for withdrawal of Soviet troops, since this was leading to Pakistan's closer security alliance with USA which not only was encouraging an unhealthy arms race among the two subcontinental powers but was causing a set back to her efforts to normalise relations with Pakistan on the basis of Simla Agreement.

India firmly believed, as the MEA report stated, that political reconciliation with Pakistan could contribute to peace and stability in the region.\textsuperscript{116} It was, therefore, in the interest of sub-continental stability that India wanted an early withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Indian Foreign Minister's statement in Parliament on 31 March, 1982 was a categorical statement of India's policy on Afghanistan. He said,

\begin{quote}
We sincerely believe that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was in the good of all concerned, we sincerely believe that conditions have to be created for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. We also believe that a political solution is necessary and again we believe that for a political solution dialogue is necessary, I cannot think of a political solution without a dialogue.\textsuperscript{117}
\end{quote}

That the Soviet Union was not following such a policy was apparent in Rao's expression of his disillusionment at her line which ran in identical language used in June 1980. The

\textsuperscript{115}India, MEA, \textit{Report 1981-81}, p.vi.

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., p.7; and also MEA, \textit{Report 1983-84}, p.iv.

position remained the same even after Indian diplomatic effort to bring an early solution to the problem through sending the Foreign Minister to Moscow in June 1982. Remarking on Rao’s visit the Prime Minister disappointedly informed the members of Parliament that Soviet Union till then did not commit to any time-table for withdrawal, although they reiterated along with India that international relations should be based on renunciation of threat or use of force.\textsuperscript{118} Indian leaders predictably were not satisfied by the Soviet rigid stand on Afghanistan. Naturally, the problem eased when Mikhail Gorbachev with his policy of reduced Soviet commitment in the Third World took a more flexible attitude on the question of withdrawal of troops. His declaration at the 27th CPSU Congress of his government’s policy to "withdraw" was given a tangible shape in his announcement at Vladivostok that six regiments would be withdrawn by the end of 1986. He made it conditional upon the progress achieved during Pak-Afghan talks through UN mediation but this unilateral Soviet step did not go unappreciated in India. The only issue that remained before India was the speed at which the withdrawal would take place -- as the Prime Minister noted in a statement made in Indian Parliament during Gorbachev’s visit.\textsuperscript{119}

On the Afghanistan incident, therefore, India had shown preference to work independently without being influenced by the Soviet Union. Although India avoided a confrontation with the Soviet Union on this issue, it surely showed her willingness to distance

\textsuperscript{118}See Prime Minister’s statement on Rao’s visit to USSR in India, Rajya Sabha, \textit{Debates}, vol.CLXIV, no.6, October 1982, cols.294, 299.

\textsuperscript{119}For Rajiv Gandhi’s statement on 2 December 1986, see in Rajya Sabha, \textit{Debates}, n.69, cols.225-6.
from Moscow. A Western author rightly noted a "near revolution" in India's foreign policy on this issue. India kept her criticism of Moscow muted so long as Moscow proved to be an effective counter-weight to Pakistan's enormous military build-up through assistance from the USA, but to the extent Soviet pressure obstructed India's policy of normalising relation with Pakistan and tended to bring back Cold War in Asian theatre, India sought to distance thereof from Moscow. Therefore, the degree of Moscow's influence on India on the Afghanistan issue was limited to India's perception of her own national interest.

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