Chapter II

Soviet Stakes in Afghanistan: Causes and Motivations of Intervention - A Historical Analysis
Russian interest in Afghanistan goes back to the
Tsarist times. The small landlocked and backward country
was then a buffer between the British and Tsarist empires
and it was keenly aware of its powerful northern neighbour.
By virtue of its size and common border, Russia has held an
important place in Afghan foreign policy; even though the
intensity of Moscow's relations with Kabul has varied.

Land and People

Afghanistan occupies an anomalous place historically
and geographically in the third world. Historically it was
one of the very few countries not to be subjected to colonial
rule and like Ethiopia, North Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iran,
Nepal, Thailand - retained pre-capitalist socio-economic
structures much longer than was the case in countries more
directly subjected to colonial expansion. At the same time
the struggles through which Afghanistan did succeed in resis-
ting European i.e. Russian and English pressures generated
a nationalist sentiment in the country, which bore many
similarities to the struggles in countries which were subjected
to direct colonial rule.

The other anomalous feature of Afghanistan is its geo-
graphic position which has enabled it to remain independent
and isolated from any of the conventional regional divisions
of Asia. Afghanistan is linked to, but is not an integral
part of all three major regions which it borders—Central Asia, South Asia and Middle East. It has long borders with the Soviet Union, Iran and Pakistan and a small 50 mile border with China. In area it is 250,000 square miles and is also a landlocked country; the nearest port is Karachi which is 700 miles from the mainland. The country itself is physically dominated by the Hindu-Kush, which runs diagonally from heights of 20,000 feet or more in the North-East to taper away in the deserts bordering Iran and Pakistan. Half of Afghanistan's mountains are snow bound in the winter.  

The cultivated areas of the country lie in the mountain valleys around the central range, and beside the rivers running from them. The main agricultural areas are in the northern plains along the Russian frontier, but animal-herding, nomads and agricultural settlements along the rivers can also be found in the West and the South. In all, about twenty-one percent of the country's land areas is used for agricultural purposes; i.e. 35 million of the 165 million acres are irrigated and another 10 million are dry farmed or allowed to lie fallow. 

The great majority of Afghanistan's population i.e., eighty percent are Muslims of the Hanafi branch of Sunni

2 Ibid.
Islam as in Pakistan and the remaining twenty percent are Shias. The most potent factor of division in Afghanistan has been the ethnic factor. The existence of twenty different groups in the country reflects the influence of the three main regions surrounding the country.\(^3\) The largest group are the tribally organized Pashtuns, of the Southern and Eastern Afghanistan. The Pashtuns have controlled the country since its origin in the eighteenth century. Another thirty percent are Tajiks - Persian speaking - who are not tribally organized, and who form the majority of the urban, specially trading communities.\(^4\) A further one million people who are the down-trodden, are the Hazaras, Persian speaking of Mongol descent. Other groups include the Baluchis, numbering 100,000 in the South-western areas, the Aimaq an 800,000 strong people who speak a mixture of Persian and Turkish; and a number of Turkic speakers - the Uzbeks, Turkomans, and Uizil Bash. There are even smaller trading communities of Jews and Sikhs in the major towns, and in the mountains east of Kabul live the Nuristanis; a fair haired people believed to be the descendants of the armies of Alexander the Great.\(^5\)

\(^3\) For an elaborate account of the ethnic divisions in Afghanistan see Louis Dupree, \textit{Afghanistan} (Princeton, 1973), pp.59-64.

\(^4\) Since 1964, the Persian language as spoken in Afghanistan, has officially been called, Dari, after the dialect used around Kabul. The differences between them are not such as to lead to mutual incomprehensibility.

\(^5\) Dupree, n.3, pp.62,65.
A Brief History of the Erstwhile Afghan State

Afghanistan's position in Central Asia has made it the object of several invasions and conquests. It was only in the eighteenth century that an identifiable Afghan state emerge. This state was founded by the Durrani confederation of the Pashtun tribes, under the leadership of Ahmed Khan, who in the 1740's defeated Persian invaders and proclaimed himself the Amir of the Afghans. He subjected the Northern and Western sectors of the country to rule from the Pashtun East and built up the power of the Durrani tribal leaders or Khans. This power was built up, by giving them land in their own - and in Tajik - areas in return for military support. In this manner he set the pattern of uninterrupted rule by the Durranis for 230 years. During this era, Afghanistan had to face invasions of the colonial powers, and also annexation of territories which it had historically controlled by its northern neighbour Russia even though the intensity of Moscow's relations with Kabul has varied.

The history of Russian-Afghan relations reveals a pattern of persistent Russian expansion in Central Asia and the persistent fear from the nineteenth century onward shared by both Afghanistan and Britain - that Russia might expand into neighbouring Afghanistan. The British fear was shaped by an apprehension that Russia, having occupied several important areas in Central Asia, would turn south to Afghanistan
thereby posing a threat to British interests in that area.
The Afghan fears were motivated by the strong desires of
the Afghan rulers to build a neutral, independent and econo-
mically viable state.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Afghanistan
became the object of British-Russian rivalries. 6 It is cont-
ended by some historians that British-Russian influence in
Afghanistan began as early as 1828, after Persia had become
a virtual Russian sphere of influence. 7 During this era,
British apprehensions of Russia's long range political and
economic gains in Central Asia were matched by the Russian
fears of an extension of British influence from Afghanistan
into Central Asia, where Russia had important commercial
interests. 8 Russia was also apprehensive that a revitalised
Sunni Muslim power in the then conquered Central Asian
Khanates could form centres of potential Pan-Islamic uprisings

6 British-Russian rivalries began to centre on Afghanistan
as early as 1839, when the British alarmed by Russia's
support of Persian claims on Herat, invaded Afghanistan
from India. British fears centred on an apprehension
that Russia might be tempted to invade India through
Afghanistan. Russia was primarily interested in the
Khanates of Central Asia, see Vartan Gregorian, The
Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform

7 For details see, Ronald R. Rader, The Russian Military
and Afghanistan: An Historical Perspective, p.308 cited
in Alfred L. Monks, The Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan

8 Between 1758 and 1853 the amount of Russia's exports to
Central Asia increased twelve and a half times, while
the value of imports increased sixteen times. Between
1840-60, the value of Russian trade with Central Asia
doubled, see Gregorian, n.6, p.102.
undermining Russia's economic gains. The Anglo-Russian treaties of 1855 and 1857, however, strengthened the British position in Afghanistan and reduced possible Russian encroachments against Afghanistan. These treaties did not restrain the Russians completely in Central Asia and gradually they made political and economic gains in Khiva and Khokand in 1864, and captured Tashkent in 1865 and annexed Samarkhand in 1869.9

A temporary cessation of British-Russian rivalry in Afghanistan and Central Asia occurred in 1873, when the two powers concluded an agreement by which Russia recognized the Northern and Northwestern frontiers of Afghanistan and agreed to consider that country to be outside the Russian sphere of influence.10 In the same year, however, Russia occupied Khiva and in 1875 Khokand. These events terminated the British and Russian plan for a buffer, between their spheres of influence. As per the plan which was shelved, Britain was to have guaranteed the independence of Kalat, Afghanistan and Yarkhand and Russia would have guaranteed autonomy for Khiva, Khokhand and Bukhara.

During the years 1874-80 militant groups came to power both in Russia and Britain. Consequently, the rivalry between

---

9 Dupree, n.3, p.404.
the two countries intensified in Central Asia and Afghanistan. 11 At this juncture, the British were primarily interested in protecting the Indian borders and preventing the Russian expansion. The Russian aim however, was not clear. Various groups advanced various positions. One section was of the view that, in the event of a British-Russian war in Europe, Russia should enter into an alliance with the Afghan Amir and thereafter advance to India. Another group proposed a policy of simultaneous support for rival claimants to the Afghan throne in order to foment internal unrest. A third group which was more militant than the other two, proposed the extension of the Transcaspian railroad upto the Afghan village of Herat in the Northwest to Kandahar in the South.

The war between Turkey and Russia in 1877-78, which resulted in sizeable Russian gains, heightened the British fears of Russia's long range objectives in the region and gave a filip to the 'forward policy of Britain in Afghanistan. 12 With the liberals assuming power in Britain during the 1880's, the main aim of the British government was to maintain a well defined frontier and to retain Afghanistan under its political

11 Gregorian, n.6, pp.108-10.
12 During the Russo-Turkish wars, the Russians tried to exploit the Afghan situation in order to obtain British concessions concerning the Ottoman empire. This involved the deployment of small Russian units along the Afghan border, in the summer of 1878, and the heightened British fears of a Russian march to India through Afghanistan. See Monks, n.7, p.4.
control. In pursuance of this well defined goal the liberal
government of Britain accepted Abdur Rahman Khan as the new
ruler of Afghanistan gave him total sovereignty in domestic
affairs and continued to retain their hold on Afghanistan's
foreign affairs. The British guarded this privilege zealously; primarily to offset the threat from Russia and to a
lesser extent the other countries neighbouring Afghanistan.

During the reign of Abdur Rahman, 1810-1901, the rivalry
between Britain and Russia in Afghanistan and the adjacent
areas, continued unabated. Abdur Rahman while accepting
British predominance, looked upon Russia with suspicion. 13
In fact Abdur Rahman was convinced that all his powerful
neighbours were like vultures waiting for an opportunity to
swallow their marked victim. 14 Two acts of the Russian
army, intensified the Afghan and British distrust of Russia.
One was the capture of Merv in 1884 - a region less than 200
miles from the Afghan village of Herat -; the other was the
Panjdeh crisis of 1886; 15 when the Russians occupied by
force the district of Panjdeh; an area south of Merv and

14 Afghanistan has long been the target of a stream of
invaders Genghis Khan, the Persians, Arabs, Turks, British and finally the Russians.
15 For details, seeDupree, n.3, pp.421-3.
north of the Afghan border. The British and the Afghans were worried over the Panjdeh crisis because it had brought the Russians almost close to their border. At this point the British warned the Russians to refrain from any move on Herat, which could lead to a war. The Russians heeded, the North-western Afghan boundary was demarcated and a boundary treaty was drawn up in 1877.\(^\text{16}\)

Until the death of Abdur Rahman in 1901, Afghanistan followed a policy of independence and defensive isolationism, balancing power between Russia and Britain. Though mistrustful of all foreigners, Abdur Rahman was more tolerant of British influence in Afghanistan than the Russian. He approved an agreement which simultaneously provided for the British recognition of Afghanistan's independence and its guarantee to protect Afghanistan from external aggression. In return Britain was given the right to construct military fortifications, Railway and Telegraph lines; and also station British military advisers in Afghanistan. These measures frustrated the attempts by the Russians to establish closer links with Afghanistan. However, after the reign of

\(^{16}\) The boundary ran from Zulfizar, a village 8 miles south-west of Panjdeh, northeast ward to the village of Khwaja Saleh on the river Amu Darya. In the 1890's the river was made the official boundary between the two countries. This brought a section of the Pashtun and Baluch tribes under British control. See, P. Tarutta, "The People of Afghanistan Build a New Life", Kommunist Voorzhenykh (Moscow), vol.8, April 1979, p.78.
Abdur Rahman, the Russians once again sought to establish closer diplomatic and economic relations with his successor, Amir Habibullah - 1901-19. The Russians succeeded primarily in commercial relations, and trade between the two countries reached a new high during 1901-09. Increased contact and trade with Afghanistan was indispensable for the Russians, since the very security of Central Asia necessitated an accurate information about Afghanistan. As the Russians became increasingly interested in Afghanistan, a series of border incidents occurred, which only rekindled Afghan and British fears of Russian intervention in Afghanistan's affairs. Apprehensive of the Russian motivations, the British reasserted their right to control Afghanistan's external affairs and a new Anglo-Afghan treaty was signed on 21 March 1905. This treaty once again granted the British control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs but denied it of any trade or commercial and other concessions. It also recognized limited Russian commercial ties with Afghanistan under British supervision. Though the British could not attain all their goals by this treaty, it enhanced the Afghan ruler's capacity to resist both the powers and to a certain degree enabled him to initiate independent action. Thus this treaty - to an extent - enhanced the monarch's prestige in Afghanistan.

17 Gregorian, n.6, p.196.
19 Monks, n.7, p.6.
19 Adamec, n.13, pp.61-64.
In August 1907 Russia and Britain entered into a treaty, which represented a compromise on their respective roles in Afghanistan. In accordance with this treaty Russia declared that Afghanistan lay outside its sphere of influence except for commercial trade and Britain stated that it had decided not to initiate any action which would alter the political status-quo in Afghanistan. The improvement of Anglo-Russian ties — as a consequence of the 1907 treaty — was viewed suspiciously by the Afghans. They contended that the end of traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry and improved ties between the two big powers would be at the cost of the Afghan interest.

The outbreak of the First World War led to the pronouncement of Afghanistan's neutrality. The Afghans also entered into a treaty with the Germans in January 1916. In fact this treaty marked the end of Afghanistan's isolationism in international politics and it led to the presence of the Germans in Afghanistan. The newly established ties between Afghanistan and Germany weakened the existent links of Afghanistan with Britain and Russia. The Afghan-German Treaty to a certain extent circumscribed Habibullah's independence and ultimately was the cause of his being killed in February 1919.

Mir Amanullah Khan who succeeded Habibullah, initiated action to reduce the over-riding influence of the British in his country. To attain this goal he initiated new ties

20 Gregorian, n.6, p.211.
with other countries especially the newly created Bolshevik regime in Russia. Afghanistan wanted to establish direct relations with the new regime in Russia and also sought an alliance with it to counter any renewed threat from Britain. Despite these attempts to build close ties friction between the two countries persisted. This was mainly because of Amanullah's attempts to exploit the weakness of the Russians during the civil war and the new Soviet government's attempts to prevent the growth of separatist Muslim states in Central Asia. Besides, the Afghan and Turkish nationalists strove to create a Pan-Islamic state. Friction between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan reached its peak in the spring of 1920, after the Afghan forces had moved into the Merv and Kushk area, and as the Soviet regime in response encouraged Jamshidi raids against Afghan settlements. These events together with certain other factors led to the gradual deterioration of relations between the two countries.

In the early 1920's this deterioration was caused by the policy of forced assimilation followed by the Soviets in Bukhara and Khiva. This policy was resisted by the Afghans vigorously, despite the consequent Soviet embargo on aid and assistance to it. In June 1922, a further deterioration was caused in Soviet-Afghan ties, with the armed Afghan raids into Turkestan. In December 1935 ties between the two states almost came to a breaking point, with the Afghans accusing the Soviets of invading their territory North east
of the Panjdeh district. The origin of this dispute - in Panjdeh dates back to the 1890's, when the Russo-Afghan border was defined. The actual cause of the dispute was a phenomenon by natural forces. The changing course of the river Amu Darya brought about a northward shift of the Afghan tribesmen which in turn resulted in these areas being administered by the Afghans. This was unacceptable to the Russians who laid claims to the territory south of the river. Thus confusion as regards ownership of the occupied territory arose; which ultimately led to Afghan apprehension of Soviet expansionism and the ultimate rejection of the Soviet claim by the Afghans. There existed a presumption at that time that the "Soviet claims were basically a pressure tactic to force the Amir to rid the area of Muslim Bashmachi rebels". 21

The Soviet Afghan Treaty of February 1921, and the Non-Aggression Treaty of 1926, did not restrain the Afghan ruler Amanullah from insisting on Afghan sovereignty in the disputed area. He reiterated his stand on Afghan sovereignty by declaring all foreigners in Afghanistan, including the Russians, as employees of his government and subject to its

21 The Bashmachi movement was an anti-Soviet religious movement led by a nationalist group, that demanded the independence of Khiva and Bukhara. After the Soviet government was set up in Bukhara in September 1920, the Bashmachs fled to Northern Afghanistan from Soviet Central Asia and continued to raid Soviet territory. Members of the Bashmachi group have been carrying out raids in the northern provinces of Baghlan and Kunduz in Afghanistan, in the current war there. Pravda (Moscow), 29 July 1980.
regulations. In the light of these actions by Amanullah, the Russians could not make much political headway during the 1920's in Afghanistan despite the directive given by V.I.Lenin to the first Soviet envoy to Kabul, and the success of their advisers in varied fields.

In 1929 with the overthrow of Amir Amanullah, Bacha-i-Saqqau (Amir Habibullah) a rebel leader, came to power. The Soviet policy towards the new regime was ambivalent. Whereas they held the new ruler to be a puppet of the British and demanded withholding of support, they could not risk breaking off ties with an Afghan ruler. Thus the policy of the Soviets did not extend beyond a mere verbal attack of the rebel leader. With the opposition mounting, Bacha-i-Saqqau could not stem the tide of the rebellion against his rule and was deposed and executed in October 1929.

After the death of Amir Habibullah, Nadir Khan and his followers who constituted the main opposition to Habibullah took over the reigns of power in Afghanistan. Nadir Khan's main goal was to minimise Soviet influence in his country.

V.I.Lenin said "Our policy in the east is not aggressive, it is a policy of peace and friendship. In all your work you must systematically put forward this key point, and in Kabul, in particular, set for yourself the main goal of developing friendship with Afghanistan. Friendship implies mutual assistance and, on the strength of our desire to the extent it is possible to promote development and flourishing of the friendly Afghan state, we are prepared to render it all the assistance in our power in this field", see Jillian Pomeroy, "The New Peoples Republic of Afghanistan", New World Review (New York), vol.47, No.2, March-April 1979, p.13.
with this end in view, he renegotiated treaties entered into by previous Afghan rulers with the Soviets. 23

The principal aim of Nadir Khan in renegotiating these treaties was to curtail what he perceived as Soviet economic and political penetration into Afghanistan. Though he did not succeed in eliminating Soviet and also British influence in Afghanistan, he alienated neither. He maintained friendly ties with both. Pursuing a policy of neutrality, he did not permit his country to become the base of anti-Soviet, Pan-Islamic or Pan-Turkic activities, and in 1931, he entered into a non-aggression pact with the Soviets. The limited success which he did attain in limiting Soviet influence in Afghanistan, was by replacing the Soviet technicians employed in his country with local expertise. Nadir Khan's rule ended with his assassination in 1933 and he was replaced by his nineteen year old son Zahir Khan.

The new ruler on his assumption of power, embarked on a programme of economic modernization, which was entirely dependent on aid from the Soviet Union. Thus Zahir renewed the Soviet-Afghan mutual assistance pact originally signed in 1931 and he also entered into a fresh commercial agreement.

---

23 These included the 1926 Neutrality Treaty, renegotiated in the Non-Aggression Treaty of June 1931, a Postal accord April 1932, and an Agreement of September 1932, for the appointment of Commissions to study frontier disputes. The Neutrality pact was designed to allay Soviet fears that Afghanistan had in exchange for British assurances entered into any secret, anti-Soviet obligations. Gregorian, n.6, p.332.
with the Soviets in 1936. In 1937, Zahir entered into the Saadabad pact with Iran, Iraq and Turkey, and thus formed the first regional alliance. 24

Besides these steps, the most important decision taken by Zahir in 1936 was the one to purchase arms from the Soviet Union. This act of the Afghan monarch, gave a new dimension to Soviet-Afghan relations. In fact, Afghanistan's dependence on the Soviet Union for arms and ammunition which commenced during the Zahir era has been the major factor which has led Afghanistan into the Soviet orbit today.

The Soviet interest in Afghanistan's armed forces began shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution and led to a Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty signed in 1921. As early as in 1924, when Ahmed Khan organized the Royal Afghan Air Force, the Soviet technicians were brought into the country to train the Afghan army and airforce. In 1927, the Soviet Union and Afghanistan signed an agreement which envisaged the construction of a series of airfields. At that time Kabul began to purchase Soviet built aircraft which were manned by Soviet pilots and serviced by the Soviet ground crew; Afghan personnel in turn were sent to the Soviet Union for training as air

24 The Soviets regarded the pact as an extension of the collective security concept. See, Ibid., p.377 also for a different interpretation of the Soviet reaction, see Adamec, n.13, p.434.
crew.\(^25\) Because of Afghanistan's caution during the next two decades, Moscow's influence waned but the United States rejection of Kabul's request for military aid between 1953 and 1955 resulted in a $20 million arms agreement between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan in August 1956. Actually there had been reports of thinly disguised Soviet military assistance almost a year earlier. Afghanistan had also previously accepted an invitation to send a military mission to Czechoslovakia to inspect the latest types of military equipment.\(^26\) The Kremlin's motive for these overtures was ostensibly to prevent Afghanistan from joining the Baghdad Pact.

The initial Soviet-bloc contract in 1956 provided for the delivery of T-34 Tanks, MIG 17 Aircraft, I.L.-28 Bombers, Helicopters and small arms from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary and East Germany.\(^27\) As the military aid increased, Soviet military advisers were once again attached to the Afghan army and airforce. Within a decade the Soviet instructors had replaced Turkish officers - traditionally the advisers to the Afghan military - and several hundred were to be found serving with the Afghan units in the field.

---


\(^{26}\) *The Economist* (London), 12 November 1955.

\(^{27}\) Louis Dupree, "Afghanistan's Big Gamble" Part II, *American Universities Field Staff Reports, Asia Series* (Hanover, Hampshire) (Hereinafter referred to as *AUPSA Reports*), vol.4, No.4, 1960, pp.10-11.
Thus in this manner the Soviet influence became manifest in the Afghan airforce; all its aircraft and advisers were provided by the Soviet Union and a considerable proportion of the Afghan air crew were trained in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{28}

As the Afghan armed forces were re-organized and modernized with Soviet military assistance, they became for the first time, an effective instrument for maintaining the stability and authority of the government. Conversely, the armed forces were now increasingly in a position to influence and even threaten the monarchy. This development was paralleled by an increase in Soviet influence, by the mid 1960's. It has been contended that "the armed forces had by then become almost totally dependent upon the Soviets, not only for equipment but also for logistical support. The almost total dependence of the military on Soviet logistic support to include gasoline, ammunition and spare parts would appear to give the Soviets a large measure of control over the Afghan military operations".\textsuperscript{29}

It has also been contended by certain quarters that "the Soviets required no written or verbal pledges, because they realised such commitments were unnecessary; certain commitments are present when the arms are delivered. Any new technology, equipment, be it military or agricultural,

\textsuperscript{28} Nollau and Wiehe, n.25,.. p.119.
\textsuperscript{29} Area Handbook, n.25, pp.375-81.
brings along a dependence on the system which developed the machines. Military arms and equipment are followed by instructors and spare parts. Pilots and mechanics must be trained to fly and maintain aircraft; infantrymen must learn to break down and operate their small arms; and tankers must learn the intricacies of their new toys. In accepting Soviet arms, Afghanistan became totally dependent on the Soviet Union for replacement items, spares and military instruction. Within two decades of the Second World War, the Soviets trained approximately 7,000 Afghan officers, while only 600 received American training. No matter what their field of study in the Soviet Union, these Afghan officers were required to take courses in dialectical and historical materialism and in the history of the international communist movement.

The outbreak of the Second World War had increased the strategic importance of Afghanistan. This fact was recognized by almost all the major powers and each one desired to befriend Afghanistan and secure its collaboration in the war effort. As the war persisted minor irritants developed between the two countries. This was further intensified when the Afghans strengthened their ties with the Germans. Infact the Afghans continued to have regular ties with Germany, even when its defeat at the hands of the allied forces was imminent.

There was a great deal of sympathy for Nazi Germany in Afghanistan during the war. However, this was against the interests of both the Soviet Union and Britain.

The post Second World War era falls into three major periods in Afghanistan's foreign relations. 31

a) The period 1946-53 can be characterized as a period of traditional balancing of the influence of the great powers. During this era, the US had replaced Great Britain as counter balance to the Soviet Union.

b) The period 1953-63, which witnessed a shift in Afghanistan's foreign policy, was necessitated by the deterioration of Afghanistan's ties with Pakistan. The breakdown of these ties with Pakistan, forced the Afghans to improve their relations with the Soviet Union.

c) The period after 1963, which witnessed a trend toward the normalization of relations with all neighbours including Pakistan. During this era, the US, the Soviet Union and Pakistan received the utmost attention from the Government of Afghanistan.

During the first period 1946-53, the world was divided into two blocs, communist and non-communist. The Afghan rulers, perceiving a threat from their northern neighbour, the Soviet Union, adopted a policy of 'caution' towards it. It was in fact a policy of containment of the Soviet Union. The only other country with a similar goal during this period was the US. The US, in order to counter the Soviet Union, entered into a number of mutual defense pacts with the states bordering the Soviet Union, and also offered them considerable assistance.

31 Dupree, n.3, pp.362-3.
to improve their economy and armed forces. This was particularly so in the case of Pakistan. But in direct contravention of its policy in South Asia, the US withheld all arms supply to Afghanistan. A military alliance between the two was also not possible because of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1931. Thus the US had to remain content with existing economic and technical contacts with Afghanistan.

The second period 1953-63, brought about a major shift in Afghanistan's foreign policy. This change was necessitated by the worsening ties of Afghanistan with Pakistan. It was the border problem between the two states which was the primary cause of this deterioration. The origin of this problem lay in the incorporation of the Pashtu speaking North-West frontier areas of the erstwhile British empire into the newly created state of Pakistan, which has all along been unacceptable to any Afghan government. The signing of the Mutual Defence Pact by Pakistan and Turkey in July 1955 and it becoming broad based - as the Baghdad Pact - with the US participating by early 1957, further complicated the issue.

33 While the US extended loans to Afghanistan, in the early 1950's the relatively small size of the loans, their high interest rates, and their short term maturities, did little to further the American cause in Afghanistan, ibid., p.123.
34 The Soviet-Afghan Treaty of 1931, prohibited the two countries from entering into alliances with any other state and which would be harmful to the interest of either country.
Afghanistan viewed this act of the US as one that would weaken its position vis-a-vis Pakistan, particularly on the border issue. The outbreak of riots in these areas, and the subsequent closure of the Afghan-Pakistan border left no option for Afghanistan but seek closer ties with her northern neighbour. Thus it was the existential conditions and the practical problems of a landlocked state, that forced the ruler Mohammed Daoud to forge closer links with the Soviet Union. Besides seeking an extension of the 1931 Soviet-Afghan Treaty, he also entered into a five year trade agreement with the Soviet Union.\(^{35}\) With the strengthening of economic ties, the Soviets also accorded their support to Afghanistan on political issues.\(^{36}\) As the ties between the two countries grew from strength to strength, the Soviet Union increased its aid programme and diversified it. Thus aid was given for road construction,\(^{37}\) industrial

---

35 Nollau and Wiehe, n.25 b, p.94.

36 Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev on his first visit to Kabul on 18 December 1953 declared "The friendship between our two countries is deep rooted. The great V.I. Lenin was one of the founders of this friendship and he himself received the first Ambassador from Afghanistan. Since that date the friendship between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan has continued to grow and increase in strength. It has never been clouded by conflicts or disputes and we are firmly convinced that it never will be." Ibid.

37 In the late 1950's and early 1960's, the Soviets constructed two major land routes used by the Soviet forces in December 1979. a) Salang pass road from the river point of Sher Khan(Gizil Gala) on the Amu Darya to Kabul built between 1956 and 1964. This route was made possible by the Salang Pass tunnel-8760 feet long which at an altitude of 11,700 feet is the highest road tunnel in the world. b) The other major road was the 460 mile route from Tor Ghundi on the Soviet border to Kandahar via Herat. Built between 1959 and 1965, this road by passed several major settlements, and was constructed with a number of bridges, capable of carrying extra-heavy loads, see Area Handbook, n.1, p.32. Also see Nollau and Wiehe, n.25 b, p.103.
and agricultural development, oil exploration and most important of all approval was accorded for the first delivery of the Soviet and East European Arms to Afghanistan. During this period, the Soviet Union supplied over 300 light and medium field guns, T-54/55 Tanks, 400 Armoured Personnel carriers, 400 additional guns, Howitzers, Mortars, Multiple rocket launchers, I.L. 28 Anti Aircraft guns, Helicopters, -62 Model Tanks, Saggar ATGW's, SA-3 and SA-7 Surface to Air Missiles, Atoll Anti Aircraft Missiles, MIG-21 Combat aircraft 307 and MI-8 Helicopters and BMP, MICV Infantry combat Vehicles.

Afghanistan's willingness to accept large scale aid from the Soviet Union, caused concern in the US. The Afghan government, however, reiterated its adherence to a neutralist policy. Prime Minister Daoud expressed the Afghan outlook in the following words.

Our whole life, our whole existence, revolves around one single focal point - freedom - should we ever get the feeling that our freedom is in the slightest danger, from whatever quarter, then we should prefer to live on dry bread, or even starve rather than accept help that would restrict our freedom. (40)

38 In August 1956, the Soviets entered into an agreement to supply arms to Afghanistan. See, Anthony Arnold, Afghanistan : The Soviet Invasion in Perspective (Stanford, 1981), p.38.


40 Nollau and Wiehe, n.25, p.136.
To a certain degree the US concern was justified, since the Soviet military assistance to Afghanistan during this period was extensive; and by 1973, it had amounted to about $1.5 billion surpassing aid from both the US and China.\(^41\)

In the year 1963, Daoud was forced to resign as Prime Minister, and a period of political instability followed.\(^42\) During this period, several political organizations sprang up — including the Marxist Democratic Party of the People (D.P.P.). Under the leadership of Nur Mohammed Taraki, the D.P.P. and the other parties called for an overthrow of the Afghan monarchy, and the concentration of political power in the hands of the people.

In July 1973, Daoud deposed the king in a military coup and became the President of the Republic of Afghanistan. The D.P.P. supported Daoud. The Soviets recognized the new regime forthwith and Daoud maintained the neutralist policy with a strong pro-Soviet orientation. However, Daoud's efforts to improve ties with Iran and Pakistan displeased Moscow. The Soviet Union, despite Daoud's ambivalence, in its desire to strengthen ties with Afghanistan, gave it a credit of $437 million.

\(^{41}\) Monks, n.7, p.14.

\(^{42}\) Zahir Khan continued his rule during this period and presided over the affairs of the Afghan state until July 1973, Daoud who was appointed Minister of Defence in 1950 and Prime Minister and Minister of Interior in 1953, was replaced by Mohammed Yousef as Prime Minister in 1963. Between 1963 and 73, — when he over-threw Zahir and replaced him as the President — Daoud was outside the government.
during 1975. In 1976, the two countries signed a trade agreement which stipulated a sixty-five percent increase in commercial transactions by 1980. Therefore, by September 1977, the Soviet presence in Afghanistan was greater than that of any other foreign power. During Daoud's tenure as the President, clashes between the Muslim tribesmen and the Kabul government were frequent. Ultimately, Daoud was overthrown in April 1978, by the Armed forces council led by Taraki and his Afghan Marxist Party.

Background of the Leftist Movements in Afghanistan

To trace the Marxist-Leninist roots in Afghanistan, one must look back briefly to the violence prone young Afghan movement of the early 1930's and the Seventh National Assembly of the late 1940's. Although the young Afghans as a group did not adopt Marxism-Leninism as a creed, in 1947 a few of the groups former members formed a successor organization, the ωικh-i-Zalmayan (Awakened Youth), which included a number of pro-Soviet elements. The Awakened Youth was formed in protest against the abuses of power by the leading Mohammedzai family members who ran the country, and it went on to play a prominent role in the politics of the Seventh National Assembly. The key figures around whom the opposition coalesced were Mir Ghulam Mohammed Ghubar and

A. Rahman Mahmudi. 44

Mahmudi was active in launching the organ of the Watan party which was led by him and Ghubar. 45 Babrak Karmal was another collaborator. Mahmudi was elected to the Seventh National Assembly, and was active in founding the newspaper Nida-i-Khalq (Voice of the Masses). Both in name and in its political orientation — leftist but conceding the political need for the temporary accommodation with the monarchy—, this paper was the fore-runner of the more outspoken communist outlet Khalq.

The experiment in liberal democracy in the early 1960's led to the formation of several political parties including the left parties of Afghanistan. The Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), was launched at the Shahmina home of Nur Mohammed Taraki in Kabul on 1 January 1965, and he was elected unanimously as its Secretary General. The leftists also published their own newspaper. The first important leftist paper was Khalq (Masses or the People). Taraki was the publisher and Bareq Shafiyye its editor. Six issues of the paper were published from 11 April to 16 May 1960. In these issues Khalq announced its policy of alleviating the boundless agonies of the oppressed people of Afghanistan and linked itself with international socialism. The paper

45 Dupree, n. 3, p. 495.
contended that international socialism began with the great October Socialist Revolution, and held it to be a struggle between international socialism and capitalism.

Opposition to and outcries against the Khalq, came from several quarters, particularly the religious leaders in the upper house of the National Assembly. Twenty members demanded an investigation having accused it of being anti-Islamic, anti-monarchy and anti-constitution. This allegation was refuted by Khalq and it stated that its policy was not to violate the principles of Islam, that it upheld the fundamental rights embodied in the constitution, and recognized the necessity of the monarchy at that juncture of Afghanistan's development. Despite these refutations Khalq's stand on land reform and its preference for public over private ownership of certain types of property was viewed as un-Islamic by the government and it banned the paper under the press law on 23 May 1966. Khalq's publisher Tarakai applied for permission to publish a new paper, but the government turned down his request. This action - of the government - was regarded as ill advised even by the non-leftist elements in Afghanistan.

In July 1967, the PDPA split into two, over policy and personality issues - Khalq and Parcham. - whereas Taraki leader of the Khalqs believed in class struggle, his adversary Karmal - a pragmatist - wanted to form a united democratic front, a class alliance or coalition. The Khalqis
also advocated a much stronger stand on the Pashtunistan issue, than the supporter's of Karmal's faction Parcham.

After the break from Khalq, Karmal and his associates began publishing from March 1968, an independent paper Parcham (The Banner), with Sulaiman Layek as the publisher and editor. The last editor of Parcham before its closure was Mir Akbar Khyber. During April 1968 another splinter faction of the Khalq began to publish Shula-i-Jawed (Eternal Flame), whose editor was Rahman Mahmudi. This paper appealed more to the educated urban minority groups. The organization behind Shula-i-Jawed was led by Mohammed Osman Londai; and it was often referred to as being pro-Peking as Karmal's Parcham was referred to as pro-Moscow. Further, while the Parchamites were considered to be pro-government, the Khalqis were reckoned to be more independent.

A further split in the Khalq party led to the formation of Tem-i-Meli by Taher Badekshi. This party called for a Maoist type mobilization and the localization of power in the countryside, in effect a combination of ethnocentrism and Maoism.

The period 1969-73 witnessed a rapid deterioration in the parliamentary system. In fact the parliament served as a pawn in the hands of the Royal family and its supporters. The fate of the executive and judiciary was also similar. The king's last prime minister Moosa Shafiq - 6 December 1972 to 17 July 1973 - attempted certain reforms but it was
inadequate and inordinately delayed. 46

During the entire period 1969-73, the major leftist parties, especially Khalq and Parcham gained in strength. The Khalqis concentrated mainly on the military and civil service and the Parchamites among the urban middle class, the intellectuals, professionals and students.

The year 1968 witnessed several labour strikes and student unrest. Both the Khalqis and the Parchamites were not mere bystanders to the violence. As a reaction to this violence, there was a mass shift to the right in the 1969 parliamentary elections. 47 In this election, Parcham and several other opposition newspapers were banned and there were allegations of the government having interfered to secure the defeat of the leftists. 48 The elections of 1969 led to the defeat of Nur Mohammed Nur, and the victory of Karmal and Hafizullah Amin. The left lost ground but the cause was probably less a matter of governmental interference than the weakening effect of the Khalq/Parcham split on the one hand, and popular resentment against leftist disturbances on the other. The leftist popularity was eroded further when in April 1970, Parcham printed an Ode to Lenin

48 Dupree, n.46, pp.7, 9.
on the occasion of his birthday praising him in terms normally reserved for the Prophet Mohammed. The result was an anti-communist demonstration by the religious gentry and a pro-communist demonstration by the student community.

As the decade of the 1960's neared the end, the conflict in Vietnam gained precedence on the international scene and the primacy of Afghanistan as an overt area for playing out the East-West struggle waned. With the diminution of Afghanistan's international importance the annual Soviet investment in that country also decreased. "It dropped from $44.7 million in 1967-68 to $30.5 million in 1968-69 and to the lowest aid figure $28.4 million in 1969-70. Similarly, during this period US grants and loans also fell sharply from $12.7 million to $4.8 million."49

The close of the 1960's also brought about a reduction in popularity of those forces in Afghanistan that publicly supported the Soviet Union. Parcham's readership was reduced and the strength of the leftists in the Wolesi Jirgah (National Assembly) was almost negligible. The time was indeed not fortuitous for a communist victory. Despite this and the dwindling Soviet interest in Afghanistan, the country's civilian students and military officers continued their training in the Soviet Union. It was here that a nucleus of Afghanistan's military men and students came

49 Newell, n.32, p.144.
under the scrutiny and influence of the Soviet intelligence services. Thus one tends to presume that the long term Soviet political plans in Afghanistan had hardly undergone any drastic change between 1963-73. Perhaps the reliance on a democratic political instrument - the PDPA, Khalq Parcham combine - had proven as ineffectual an approach for the Soviet Union as the reliance on purely economic penetration. It was time for a new approach, perhaps one from behind the scenes, commanding greater influence for the Soviet Union in Afghanistan's domestic policies.

The short democratic experiment ended on 17 July 1973, with the blood-less coup led by the former Prime Minister Daoud and the country once again reverted to one man rule.

Daoud's return to power heralded the formation of the Republic of Afghanistan. Throughout this period, the Afghan leftists were divided on the issue of cooperation with the Daoud regime. Whereas the Parchamites supported the united front concept, the die hard Khalqis placed emphasis on class struggle as the key to progressive change. The division between the two sections was exacerbated with the Khalq accusing the Parchamites of collaborating with the Republican guard in drawing up a list of activists of the Khalq central committee and the Parchamites in turn spreading the rumour that both Taraki and Amin were agents of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

As the leftist infighting continued Daoud dropped the
the leftists in his cabinet one by one. Karmal watched helplessly as his dreams of becoming a leader of Afghanistan began to fade. By mid 1975, Daoud had seriously wounded Parcham and down graded Khalq and moved ahead with his reform programmes, at least on paper. Daoud gradually reverted to the tactics of an old style tribal khan and he began to become increasingly dependent upon old friends, sycophants and even collateral members of the royal family. His cabinet reappointed in 1977 contained most of these people rather than the promised new blood and the leftists. This was a major turning point in Afghan history as the two leftist factions re-united ten years after its formation to oppose Daoud and his regime; but even they did not expect that events would move quickly and dramatically. Indeed the stage was being set for the April 1978 coup.

The Accidental Coup

A series of accidents led to the 27 April 1978 coup and additional outcomes determined the final outcome. The first accident occurred on 17 April when Khyber, the well

50 Louis Dupree, n.46, p.17.


known Parcham ideologue, was murdered by unknown persons. Massive demonstrations at the funeral for Khyber on 19 April 1978 surprised most of the Afghans and foreign observers. An estimated ten to fifteen thousand mourners took to the streets, many of them marching past the American embassy shouted anti-US, anti-CIA and anti-imperialist slogans.

Alarmed, the government arrested the leftists leadership but not before Amin who was in charge of recruiting Khalq cadre among the military contacted certain members within the armed forces. A make shift plan resulted and the coup was launched as the Daoud cabinet met on the morning of 27 April, 1978 to consider the fate of jailed Khalq and Parcham leaders. The coup succeeded in less than twenty four hours. President Daoud and about thirty men, women and children of his family were killed. In all about a thousand people lost their lives in the coup and thus ended the long rule of the Mohammedzai family in Afghanistan.

The April 1978 coup had several unusual aspects. The first was the PDPA claim that it drilled its military members beforehand in their duties with great care holding about ten rehearsals. It was able to run such drills without compromise because it camouflaged them so that had Daoud been intimated he would not have suspected any of the measures against his regime. Whatever the cover, it was

---

clearly adequate and the drills were an essential element of success for the small group of Afghan officers who had to act decisively and in concert to overcome the disadvantage of their numbers.

One of the major blunders committed by Daoud's regime was the loose house arrest of Amin, a man with wide contacts in the army. In fact during the period of the loose house arrest on 26 April 1978, Amin received visitors and sent his sons out to get information and contact the Khalqí recruits in the army. He passed out detailed instructions to the cadre in the army regarding the proposed coup without any hindrance or suspicion from his guards. Taraki had delegated to Amin the task of recruiting military officers into the Khalq as early as 1973. To have left Amin at large especially when a leftist upheaval was imminent was no doubt the biggest blunder of Daoud. The explanation for this error was the allegation that the third in command of Daoud's intelligence unit was a Khalqí. Perhaps, the Soviet Union also had its own agents who helped to sabotage Daoud's arrest orders and coordinate the PDPA activities after the arrests began cutting into the PDPA ranks. The persistent reports of unusual activity at the Soviet embassy during the period of the coup though not a proof of such involvement, do tend to discount the Soviet Ambassador Puzanov's

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
ingenuous statement that "no one was more surprised than I by the coup". As in 1973, there can be no doubt that the Soviet Union was at least aware of the conspirators coup plans since many of those involved in the 1978 coup were the same Afghans who in 1973 had aided Daoud to return to power.

To the world the coup was a shocking experience. Preliminary analysis in the West projected a picture of a beleagured "Afghan Left" that staked every thing in a final attempt to overthrow Daoud. In the chaos that followed both the rebels and the loyalists made multiple errors and "the side with the fewer foul ups won". There were remarkably few foul ups on the part of the PDPA. It appeared to have penetrated into not less than twenty military units and airports. Some of their officers were in key command positions; these included Majors Aslam Watanjar, Shah Jan Mazdoor, Assadullah Payam of the 4 armoured division and Lieut. Abdul Qadar, the Chief of the Air Force. There were several others of secondary rank who were successful in killing or incapacitating pro-Daoud commanders and taking charge themselves. The Republican guard, the 15 Armoured division and the 7 Armoured division remained loyal and fought on behalf of the President. However, it was of no avail, Daoud and his family

56 The Daily Telegraph (London), 4 May 1978.
58 The Political Department of the DRA, n.53, pp.17-19.
were slain on 28 April 1978 and the long rule of the Mohammedzai's in Afghanistan came to an end. With Daoud's death and take over of the government by the PDPA, the long term Soviet ambition of establishing a pliable regime in Kabul was almost accomplished.

Immediately after the coup, both the Soviets and the Afghans denied the fact of Afghanistan's commitment to the Soviet bloc. This effort continued till 1979, but its intensity was more pronounced during the first few days after the coup. Though it was rather difficult to measure the extent of the Soviet influence in Afghanistan, it was clear that it did not amount to total control during the first few months of the coup. If it was otherwise, the conflict between the two sections in the PDPA-Khalq and Parcham - would not have led to the new split of the party. As long as the Khalq and the Parcham had been quasi-legal opposition to the Afghan government, the Soviets had the leverage to force them to mend their fences. Once the reunited PDPA succeeded in wresting political power from Daoud in April 1978, it gained a measure of independence from the Soviet Union, specially in

59 Within three months of the April 1978 coup the Parcham leader Karmal along with a few others were ousted from the Cabinet and sent out of the country on diplomatic assignments. Thus by July 1978, the tenuous Khalq-Parcham alliance of the PDPA was broken. For details see, Richard S. Newell and Nancy P. Newell, The Struggle for Afghanistan (London, 1981), pp.73-74.

60 There is speculation that the Soviet Union helped bring the two groups together. It is held that reconciliation took place in May 1977.
the conduct of its internal affairs. As both the Khalq and the Parcham factions were pro-Soviet, Moscow at first made no particular distinction among the two. It hoped for a compromise between them in the absence of which Moscow was prepared to support whichever group/faction triumphed.

The hostilities that developed between Parcham and Khalq from 1967-77 were far too fundamental to be reconciled within a year of their cooperation in government. The antagonism was all pervasive and as all coalitions which topple regimes, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) coalition also developed the strains of a break up. Behind the scene struggle for power intensified in few months after the DRA's formation. The dominant faction of the Khalq, on the consolidation of power, decided to purge the government of its Parcham elements, and divest Karmal and his followers from positions of power. The Parchamite leader also did not remain idle. He tried and failed to secure the support of such important nationalist figures as Qader, a Colonel who was a key figure in both the 1973 and 1978 coups in Kabul, and who had been named Minister of National Defence and promoted to the rank of Major General by Taraki. As most of the military units stationed in Kabul favoured both Taraki and Amin, the Parchamites were unable to defend their positions. Once this fact became clear, the Khalq dominated Revolutionary Council under Taraki moved against them. Most of the Parchamite leaders including Karmal were exiled to
ambassadorships, a method adopted by Daoud to immobilize elements opposed to his regime.

With the Parcham elite weakened, the government in late August 1979, moved against the powerful nationalist muslim factions both inside and outside the government. Most of the leaders of these groups were arrested. Those arrested included Maj.Gen. Qader, the Army Chief Lieut.Gen. Shapur Ahamedzai, who were charged with 'plotting' to overthrow the government. The Cabinet Ministers, Minister of Education Mohammed Rafi, Minister for Planning Sultan Ali Keshtamand and the Minister of Frontier Affairs Nizamuddin Tahzib were placed under house arrest. Karmal was depicted as the instigator and ring leader of the plotters, but most of those involved appeared to be nationalist muslims who were in favour of a nonaligned Afghanistan. The Revolutionary Council however, expelled Karmal, Nur Mohammed Nur, Keshtamand, Rafi, and Anahita Ratebzd from the PDPA and in October 1979, recalled all the Parcham ambassadors to Kabul. None of them complied with the orders and continued to stay on in Eastern Europe.

With the removal of the Parchamites, the Khalq leadership initiated steps which alienated the Afghan masses.

---

61 In July 1979, Karmal was posted to Prague, Nur Mohammed Nur to Washington, Abdul Hakil to London, and Mohammed Baryalay to Islamabad. The only woman in the Cabinet Anahita Ratebzd was sent to Belgrade.

62 It was presumed that the Russians were providing shelter to these exiled Parcham leaders; only to use them as an alternative to the Khalqi regime. Later events have justified this presumption.
from the government. Taraki's decision to raise a new Afghan National Banner - a blood red close copy of the Soviet flag - and his elimination of the Islamic green from the national standard was one of the most unwise of his several provocative moves against Afghan tradition. The passing of the several decrees by the new government further alienated the masses.

Initially the opposition was minimal, but as the days passed and the agricultural off season arrived, unrest exploded in the rural areas. In Kabul, periodic explosions rocked the city and plethora of Shab-Namas reminded the regime of the opposition to it.63

The first major uprising occurred among the culturally distinct Nuristani ethnic group; north of Jalalabad in Eastern Afghanistan.64 By March 1979, the Nuristani rebels controlled most of the upper Kumar valley and had actually proclaimed an Azad (Free) Nuristan. This was the first significant warning against any neglect of the demand for autonomy by the various ethno-linguistic groups. No government in Afghanistan can afford to ignore the claims of the Nuristanis.

63 Shab-Namah is recognized by all the Afghans as a play on words. The great eleventh century Persian Poet Firdausi wrote a Shah Namah - or the History of the kings. The present Shab Namah is understood as referring to the history or activities of the present rulers - the Khalq regime.

64 The Nuristanis - a distinct ethnic group in Afghanistan - speak dialects of Indo-Aryans. Their dialects, Persian and Pashtu are not mutually understandable. The Nuristanis are also proud of their distinctive mount in culture and were converted to Islam under duress, by Amir Abdur Rahman in the last decade of the nineteenth century.
Hazaras, Badakshahis and Baluchis. 65

The revolt that started in Nuristan very soon spread to more than half of Afghanistan's twenty-nine provinces. Major disturbances occurred in Paktia, Nangarhar, Kapisa, Uruzgan, Parwan, Badghis, Balkh, Ghazni, Farah and Herat. At Farah, the rebels controlled a major airbase - Shindand - for a short period. In Herat the rebels killed an undetermined number of Soviet technicians, their wives and children, before army units loyal to the Khalq dominated government restored order. 66

As the resistance to the DRA mounted, Taraki appointed Amin as Prime Minister to counter it. Amin's new authority was thought to herald both, firmer measures against the insurgents and closer ties with Moscow. On 5 December 1978, the Afghans entered into a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviets at Moscow. 67 A visit by the high ranking Soviet military delegation under the leadership of


67 The provisions of the Treaty, including Article 4, stipulated the signatories to consult each other and by agreement take appropriate measures to ensure the security, independence and territorial integrity of the two countries; for Text of Treaty see Soviet Review (Moscow), vol. 15, No. 58, December 1978, pp. 31-34.
of Alekseyevich Yepishev - a man who played a leading role in the 1968 Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia - during April 1979, reflected the seriousness of the problems faced by the Afghan army in quelling the resistance by the Muslim insurgents. The subsequent visit of the commanding general of the Soviet ground forces Gen. Ivan Pavlovsky in August 1979, and his prolonged stay in Afghanistan was a clear indication of the long term plan of a Soviet military move into Afghanistan. The killing of Taraki and the takeover of power by Amin in September 1979 - a man who was not trusted by the Soviets - speeded up the Soviet thinking on these lines. The preparations for a massive invasion began in late October 1979, and by November there were reports of Soviet Central Asian troops being moved into the country in small units to take over guard duties from the Afghan forces. By late November 1979, Soviet troops were put on a state of limited readiness and the reservists were called in to fill out the understrength combat divisions in the Central Asian military districts. A Soviet military headquarters - under the command of Marshal Sergey L. Sakalov was set up at Termez near the Afghan border and the Warsaw Pact countries placed their forces in an advanced state of readiness.

About mid December 1979 the Soviets airlifted about two battalions of troops with heavy armour and artillery into Bagram Air Base, which they had taken over earlier. The actual date of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan is reckoned to be 27 December 1979. The Soviets justify their action as a mere response to an invitation by the Afghan government. The existence of such an invitation has in fact become the debating point of both the pro and anti-Soviet elements both within and outside Afghanistan.

**Causes and Motivations of the Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan**

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan has given rise to several hypotheses and formulations as to the factors or motivations leading to it. The Soviets claim that they entered Afghanistan in response to a request for military aid to counter the armed intervention by imperialist forces which began immediately after the April Revolution and which persists. Justifying their intervention, the Soviets cite Article 4 of the Soviet-Afghan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation of December 1978, which inter alia provides for military cooperation.

It is interesting to compare the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan with the Soviet aid to North Vietnam a decade ago. In both these cases, the Soviets justify their aid to

---

threatened governments by imperialist aggression as a duty of proletarian internationalism. However, it is important to note that while in 1972, Soviet Surface to Air Missiles were shooting down B-52 bombers over Hanoi, in 1980 Soviet forces crossed an international boundary of a nonaligned state and are engulfed in an internecine civil war situation in Afghanistan even today.

In undertaking military intervention in Afghanistan, the Soviets hoped to create the image of overwhelming clout and victory. They hoped that a demonstration of "the changing co-relation of forces might encourage several more regimes of socialist orientation to join the Soviet bloc and create new allied military forces capable of undertaking the defence of the gains of socialism on a broader scale". The Soviets now claim that their military power is the necessary condition for the liberation of all such states. The changing corelation of forces has become almost a synonym for Soviet military superiority, and in the Soviet view this shift in the world balance of forces is all important. Unlike the earlier era in the Soviet Union claims to defend local revolutions against external enemies - imperialist aggression and internal opposition. Further, in addition to external and internal defense, the Soviet Union and its Socialist allies

71 The external function of the armies of Socialist countries is to render possible military support and help to other peoples struggling for their political independence.

72 The decisive success in the struggle for freedom and independence which the national liberation movement in Asia and Africa attained were pre-determined by the growth of the might of the Soviet Union. See N.I. Lebedev and N.M. Nkolskii, The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union (Moscow, 1976), p.101.
are to provide direct assistance in party building and in ideological development toward the transition from military rule to government by a vanguard party.\textsuperscript{73}

The rebellion in Afghanistan which was about to topple and replace the revolutionary regime of Socialist orientation established in April 1978, presented the Soviet leadership with an immensely important decision affecting Soviet credibility - the success or failure of its past and current policies. Unlike Africa or Indo-China, Afghanistan was clearly the sole responsibility of the Soviet Union as 'Proletarian Internationalism' charged it with the success of the April Revolution. If it was defeated by the rebels favoured by the anti-Soviet forces operating within Afghanistan the example could be contagious. Ultimately, the changing correlation of forces could be reversed bringing down the whole edifice of Soviet policy. In these circumstances the Soviets appear to have been pushed into defending the gains of socialism by the only means available, an invasion by Soviet troops. It was undertaken primarily to uphold credibility and save a position in which great deal was invested. By sending an invasion force to depose and replace the existing government and by taking over the internal administration, the Soviets had crossed a major policy threshold. The direct use of Soviet combat troops outside the Warsaw Pact countries broke a precedent of Soviet restraint upheld since the Second World

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
War. This naturally raised fears of a new policy of Soviet conquest. The Afghanistan precedent indicates that the Soviet Union will henceforth decide when and where a 'Socialist Orientation' is to be made irreversible by intervention.

Geopolitical and strategic analysts hold the view that the invasion was prompted in part by strategic considerations. Its consequences certainly include military threats to neighbouring countries, and the possibility of further Soviet adventure. One widely held view sees the intervention as part of a military pincer movement designed to encircle the Persian gulf with the other part of the pincers in Ethiopia and South Yemen. Afghanistan, it was held, could be useful in the accomplishment of this goal.

One of the major causes which impelled the Soviets to intervene in Afghanistan was the Iranian revolution. The Iranian revolution was viewed by the Soviets as a major threat to their interests in the region, especially with its potential of augmenting seeds of dissent among the fifty million Muslims within the Soviet Union.74

An anti-Soviet Islamic Afghanistan, complemented and aided by Islamic governments in Pakistan and Iran, it was

---

74 Craig Whitney of New York Times reported that the Soviet Central Asians support the Soviet War in Afghanistan seeing themselves as modernized and different from their backward and reactionary Afghan fellow Muslims see New York Times. 11 April 1980.
held, would lead to the creation of an anti-Soviet Islamic bloc on the border of the Central Asian Soviet Republics. On the other hand, a Soviet Afghanistan demonstrating Soviet resolution and power and the inability of the Islamic forces to contain the Soviet military juggernaut could lead to numerous future opportunities to steer Iran, Pakistan or both, in a Soviet direction. The Soviet aid to the Baluchis in Pakistan and Iran could be used as a lever to pressurise those countries or divide them. In this light it was contended that Iran and Pakistan might be impelled to accept the type of aid and friendship provided Afghanistan 20 years prior to the April Revolution. It was this scenario, together with the fears of a threat from an Islamic Afghanistan, and the favourable possibilities of a Soviet Afghanistan that finally impelled the Soviet intervention. In addition to these causes, there are certain other factors, which motivated the Soviets to move into Afghanistan.

(a) The Russian paranoid fear of invasion and their constant striving for defence. Afghanistan had a long history of leftist movements that began as early as the 1920's, when the Marxist/Leninist government of Amin was in the danger of falling.

75 The Soviet Communist party general secretary Leonid Brezhnev in a press conference stated that failure to move Soviet troops into Afghanistan would have created a serious threat to Soviet security interests on the Soviet southern flank. Pravda, 13 January 1980.

76 Baluchis live in Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Baluchi guerrillas supported from Afghanistan have held out against the Pakistani army forays for several years.
the Russian fear of the loss of a historic buffer
zone intensified.\textsuperscript{77}

(b) The basic Marxist ideology which stressed the
continual war between communism and capitalism.\textsuperscript{78}

(c) The fragility of the Marxist regime both due to its
internal weakness and opposition to it. Amin's rule
was turning to be a personalised rule. It probably
would not have collapsed but the discontent would
have spread. The Soviets did not particularly like
Amin but they were apprehensive of what might follow,
hence the decision to take things in their own hand.\textsuperscript{79}

(d) One theory that received far ranging attention in the
West was that the Soviets intervened militarily in
Afghanistan because of their apprehension that
Islamic fundamentalism would spread throughout Asia
and infest the Soviet Union's fifty million Muslims.\textsuperscript{80}

(e) Moscow perceived the US policy in South West Asia
to be essentially bankrupt and the US responses
limited by an inability to project American power
beyond a temporary naval presence. The 100,000 men
Rapid Deployment Force is operationally years away,
and the lesson learned in projecting the US forces
even 90 miles from American shores in Cuba - in the
exercise ordered by President Carter after the
discovery of the Soviet brigade - could not have been

\textsuperscript{77} J. Jerome Haggerty, "Afghanistan : The Great Game",
Military Review (Kansas), vol.60, No.8, August 1980, p.38.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Interview with an Afghan Marxist, "The Resort to Arms
was the Final Mistake", Middle East Research and
Information Project (MERIP Reports, Washington), July-
August 1980, p.23.

\textsuperscript{80} Haggerty, n.77, p.39.
lost on Moscow. The exercise, hopelessly delayed by bad weather and bogged down in bureaucratic and logistic problems, demonstrated the inadequacy of any US response in a critical situation.

(f) The Soviet Union took advantage of the American pre-occupation with Iran. The spectacle of the US condemned and held hostage in a country, where only in January 1978, President Carter had proclaimed the Shah of Iran, Mohammed Reza Pehalavi, as an island of stability in an unstable area of the world, permitted a unique opportunity for Moscow to move and project its own power in a region where hitherto the US had been dominant.

(g) Through the invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet Union took advantage of a golden opportunity to move towards the final step of fulfilling its ambition to secure a warm water port on the Indian Ocean, now only 300 miles from Soviet army positions through troubled Baluchistan. The temporary collapse of detente seemed a price worth paying, for the achievement of such a major and concrete objective.

(h) The decision to intervene is purported to be a consequence of the emergence of hard line elements who might have achieved dominance within the highest decision making bodies of the Soviet Union. These hard liners held that their country had to draw a line beyond which it would never retreat. After the set backs of recent years, and in view of the threat

perceived from growing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Sino-Japanese and American forces, the hardliners could not abandon Afghanistan, the Kremlin needed to prove its super power status to the world and perhaps to itself. The ascendency of the hardliners was a consequence of the undermining of the moderate position due to certain occurrences on the international scene.

Hardliners cited the following factors, as examples of the failure of moderate policies.

(a) The decision of NATO states to increase their military spending substantially over the decade.

(b) The willingness of the US and its allies to consider economic and military aid to China.

(c) The failure of the Brezhnev regime to respond more vigorously to China's invasion of Vietnam in 1979, and thereby encouraging further Chinese probes into Asia.82

(d) The West's firm rejection of Brezhnev's unilateral military reductions, made in East Germany on 6 October 1979.83

---

82 Pravda, 1 March 1979.

83 Leonid Brezhnev offered to withdraw 20,000 troops and 1,000 tanks from East Germany. The Soviets began to withdraw the six guard tank division (10,000 troops and more than 300 tanks) stationed near the West German border at Wittenburg on 5 December 1979. On 7 April 1980, an artillery unit was removed. In mid May 1980, the Soviets declared that they intended to remove all troops and tanks involved in the proposal, see Pravda, 16 May 1980. The rejection of these proposals by the West, was used by the hardliners to substantiate their posture of toughness vis-a-vis the West and their perceptions of US imperialism. For an indication of how seriously Moscow perceived this rejection, see the Communique of the Warsaw Pact Meetings. Krasnaya Zvezda, 18 May 1980.
(e) The reaction of the US Congress to the Soviet combat brigade stationed in Cuba.

(f) The establishment of an American Rapid Deployment Force, which was viewed by the Soviets as an attempt to extend the US military and political presence in the world. 84

(g) NATO's decision to deploy American medium range ballistic and cruise missiles in Europe, despite the Soviet efforts to kill the plan. 85

(h) The US Senate's decision to table the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks II (SALT II), a key component of Brezhnev's policy of detente.

Thus the predominance of the hardliners led by Mikhail Suslov the official high priest of the ideological pyramid, who dominated all aspects of Soviet society, especially since the summer of 1979 - indirectly, but strongly, influenced policy making by using ideology as a weapon against political enemies. Thus it is likely that Suslov had a major say in all major decisions of the party; it is not implausible that the intervention in Afghanistan was engineered by him and other hardliners in the communist party hierarchy.

84 Ibid.

85 Moscow apparently learned that these weapons might be deployed in Western Europe in early May 1979. The Soviets argue that while their medium range missiles cannot hit American targets US rockets can hit the western regions of the Soviet Union. Krasnaya Zvezda, 6 May 1979.