Chapter VI

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While the conflict-situation in Kampuchea was in critical stage, the events unfolding in Southwestern border of China posited additional challenge to China's basic foreign policy and security strategy. Reference here is to the conflict-situation evolving in Afghanistan since the Saur revolution (1978). It should be noted that China has geographical contiguity with Afghanistan, spread to 75 kilometres. Naturally, Beijing viewed the developments as a threat to its security and subsequent Soviet military intervention as a matter of "direct national concern." Since China was not in position to militarily challenge Moscow's venture in Afghanistan, it attempted to make maximum use of the UN forum to mobilize political pressure against Soviet continued occupation.

The conflict-situation in Afghanistan which took to crisis proportion in 1979-80 was not a bolt from the blue but rather the onslaught of a storm which had been long gathering since the time of Zahir Shah's ouster (1973). To place these developments in perspective, it would be appropriate here to briefly bring forth the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan, the game of power-politics the two Super Powers played and China's action and reaction to the emerging situation.
The Background

In modern time, Afghanistan, because of its geostrategic location, has invariably been a bone of contention in the international rivalry of major powers in this part of the world.

During the nineteenth century, the Tsarist Russian Empire and the British Empire tried to out manoeuvre each other. Eventually, the two powers, to avoid a direct confrontation, reached an understanding to accept Afghanistan as a buffer zone between the two empires.¹ This situation also served the interest of the Afghan rulers as well and they deliberately opted for a policy of neutralism.²

After the Second World War, the same factor made it a bone of contention between East-West conflict that had ensued. Again, as in the earlier case, the United States and the Soviet Union seemed to reach a tacit understanding to maintain Afghanistan's neutrality and its territory to be treated as a buffer zone. As such at the height of Cold War and bipolarization of international system, the United States and its regional


²Gregorian, ibid., pp.385-89.
allies had accepted Afghanistan's Soviet tilt as an unavoidable fact of life, considering its vulnerable, landlocked position. Moscow, on its part, kept up correct relations with successive Afghan conservative governments as long as they pursued a Soviet-tilted brand of neutralism. Whenever they had quarrel with Pakistan and sealed off their border, Afghanistan turned to Soviet Union for goods and transit privileges. Moscow also responded with generous aids and facilities, making it the first non-communist country to receive extensive economic and military assistance from Kremlin. Another factor of vital importance to be mentioned here, is that of the three non-communist states on the strategic southern borders of the Soviet Union, Afghanistan alone was not committed to the anti-communist alliances forged by the United States.

On the other hand, the importance Beijing accorded to Afghanistan is a very recent development. Compared to other major Powers, China was much slower in forming relationship with Kabul, despite the fact that the Afghanistan government was


5 Mustafa, ibid., pp.285-87.
one of the first nations to extend recognition to China (done so as early as 12 January 1950). The initial contact occurred only in 1954 when China, in an effort to widen its international connections, adopted five principles of peaceful co-existence to establish relations with countries of different socio-political orientation. The two countries finally established full diplomatic relations in January 1955 and thereafter, Afghanistan, along with other nations, vigorously advocated the seating of China in the United Nations. However, Beijing did not try to cultivate Afghanistan on a large scale, considering the constant tension the latter had with Pakistan whose, on the other hand, close relations with China constituted an important factor in Chinese strategic planning in South Asia. Whatever interest Beijing had in Afghanistan was derived primarily from its concern in broader regional politics.  


7 For example Sino-Afghan Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Non-Aggression signed on 26 August 1960 in the atmosphere where Sino-Indian relations were deteriorating over the issue of China's ruthless suppression of the Tibetan revolt of 1959 and increasing border disputes. When the border dispute led to open war with India in 1962, China found itself in great international discomfort. To counter its tarnished image, China moved to strengthen its ties and attempted to settle boundary problems with the other neighbouring countries of Asia. In line with this policy, China deliberately signed a border agreement with Afghanistan in November 1963, renouncing its own claim over Wakhan corridor. In so doing, it hoped to gain additional means of isolating India and to win a propaganda advantage among the Third World nations, of the genuineness of its desire for peaceful resolution of problem.
When the Chinese pressurized in the 1960s to take a stand on the Sino-Soviet dispute, Afghanistan sided with the Soviet Union considering its dependence on Soviet for aid and transit facilities. However, in the context of Soviet's proposal for an anti-Chinese Collective Security System in Asia, China could elicit assurance from Afghanistan of its opposition to any military alliance. In 1970s, China's main concern was the Soviet penetration in the Middle East which, it perceived, would serve as Soviet's encirclement of China and springboard for Soviet advances in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Considering the geopolitical importance of Afghanistan as a link between South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East, China reinforced its efforts to maintain its presence in the country, though it well understood that it was in no position to challenge the Soviet Union on equal terms in this respect.

In such a situation, the Kabul government trotted a razor's edge to maintain balanced relations with all the major powers. However, once Mohammad Daoud Khan abolished the two century old monarchy system through a coup and established his shaky new

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republic in 1973, the carefully nurtured balanced relations were upset and Kabul was rapidly turned into, once again, a cold war political battle-ground.\textsuperscript{11}

Beijing viewed the coup as a Soviet-inspired action to implement its grand design of expansionism towards Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{12} China was all the more nervous because of its nuclear installation at Lop Nor in Xingiang. These apprehensions caused Beijing's initial hesitance to accord recognition to the new Afghanistan regime and ultimately, recognized it, at the request of the regime.\textsuperscript{13} When Daud, in his drive for diversifying Kabul's international relations, sent his brother Mohammad Naim Khan as a special envoy to Beijing in December 1974, the Chinese reciprocated it, despite its earlier reservation. Once the new regime gave indication of greater independence from the Soviet Union, China went ahead to conclude several agreements with the Kabul Government.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14}Ram Rahul Sheel, n.6, p.126.
Daoud's decision to break with the Parchamites, with whom Daoud formed the coalition government at Moscow's behest, coupled with its drift towards pro-Teheran and pro-West policy, provoked a significant change in Soviet policy towards the Afghan communist movement during the course of 1976. Moscow embarked on a serious effort to strengthen and unify the communist movement with an eye to a possible communist take over.15

Saur Revolution and After

When a leftist regime, composed of two factions of Khalq and Parcham, seized power by a coup which is known as the Saur revolution (1978), the Soviet Union did not seem to be directly involved in the "planning" of the coup.16 China too, like some of the other nations, suspected the Soviet hand in it and waited for eleven days before recognizing the new regime; that too, once again, "at request" of the new regime.17

15 See, Harrison, n.3, pp.165-66.

16 Although the Soviet Union since 1976 embarked on a serious effort to strengthen and unify the communist movement, it surely would not have planned to install a communist regime so quickly, keeping in view the feeble base of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan and that too with Amin at the helm of affairs. However, with the rapid turn of events in Kabul, the Soviets certainly must have blessed the coup at the opportune movement. See, Harrison, n.3, pp.166-70; see also, Fred Halliday, "The Revolution in Afghanistan", New Left Review (London), November/December 1978, pp.39-40; Louis Dupree, "Afghanistan under the Khalq", Problems of Communism, July/August 1979, pp.48-47.

17 Survey of World Broadcasting -- Far East (SWB/FE), 5807/32, 8 May 1978; see also ibid., 5808/11, 9 May 1978.
These developments acquired greater significance by viewing them in wider international context, where a new alignment in world politics was taking shape in late 1978 with the break through in Sino-Japanese and Sino-American relations, on the anti-hegemony forum. This had alarmed the Soviet Union and made it all the more sensitive to the involvement of these powers in Afghan politics. Further, the Soviet Union found it hard to let its position in Afghanistan eroded. These extraneous factors along with the geographical proximity and ideological affinity between the ruling cliques in Kabul and Moscow led to the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation in December 1978.18

Beijing viewed the treaty as another link in a chain of treaties forged by Moscow with countries bordering China (like India, Vietnam, Mongolia which have already signed similar treaties with Moscow). Beijing's press especially publicised the military aspects of the treaty, particularly Article 4, according to which the concerned countries have agreed to develop cooperation in military field on the basis of appropriate

18 For detail regarding circumstances leading to signing of the treaty, see, in Thomas W. Robinson, "Chinese-Soviet Relations in the Context of Asia and International Politics", International Journal (Toronto), vol. 34, no. 4, Autumn 1979, p. 642.
agreements between them and Article 8, which facilitated "the creation of an effective security system in Asia." Above all, China was alarmed by the increasing Soviet presence in the form of an ever-growing number of civilian and military advisers in response to mounting rebel activities in Afghanistan. These developments further reinforced China's premonition of Soviet "hegemonistic" design in the area. Meanwhile, Beijing's media started focusing on the Afghan rebel's activities which it views as a national liberation movement.

**Soviet Intervention and UN Response**

The later half of 1979 unfolded the events in Afghanistan which were of great significance to international politics. Taraki was ousted and Hafizullah Amin seized power in September 1979. However, Amin was overthrown and killed on 27 December 1979 when the Soviet forces intervened in Afghanistan and

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19 *Peking Review*, vol.21, no.50, 15 December 1978, p.29.

20 China perceived the rebel activities as reaction not so much against the Taraki government as against Soviet intervention imposed on the Afghan government and cloaked in legality by the friendship treaty. See, *Renmin Ribao* commentary of 11 and 29 June 1979 in Foreign Broadcast Information Service China (FBIS-CHI), 18 June 1979, p.F/1; see also ibid., 10 July 1979, p.C/1.


installed Parcham leader, Babrak Karmal, as Prime Minister. This event had world-wide repercussion due to the fact that it was the first direct military intervention by Soviet Union in a nonaligned Third World nation. Further, it was the first open, direct and persistent defiance of the UN Charter principles by a Super Power.23

In a statement issued by the government of China, which was transmitted to the UN Secretary-General on 31 December, it was stated that this act of Soviet Union is a "naked military aggression" which is a threat not only to Afghanistan but also "a great threat to peace and security in Asia and the whole world." Drawing attention to the strategic significance of Afghanistan and to the motivation behind the Soviet move, China called for vigilance and expressed its readiness to work with others "to frustrate Soviet acts of aggression and expansion."24

Beijing's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zhang Haifeng, in a protest to the Soviet ambassador in Beijing demanded immediate withholding of its aggression and intervention in Afghanistan and withdrawal of all its armed forces from that country. He further stressed that "Afghanistan is China's


neighbour and therefore the Soviet armed invasion of that country poses a threat to China's security. This cannot but arouse the grave concern of the Chinese people.\textsuperscript{25} These statements clearly demonstrate the revival of Beijing's dogmatic hostility towards the Soviet Union which it had ceased from early 1979 in an effort to improve their relations. In fact, China abruptly cancelled the second round of Sino-Soviet talks (which had been scheduled for early 1980) as a protest against the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{26}

At the international level, the UN Security Council met, unlike the earlier Soviet military adventures in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, nearly two weeks after the Soviet military intervention.\textsuperscript{27} Since the Western group was not so much for

\textsuperscript{25}Beijing Review, vol.23, no.1, 7 January 1980, p.3.

\textsuperscript{26}It is ironic that the Afghanistan crisis occurred just as the Chinese leaders were on the point of mitigating some of the dogmatic hostility towards the Soviet Union which had characterized the Chinese foreign policy for the past two decades. They found the sterile posture of anti-Soviet restrict the manoeuvring capacity and realised the desirability of peaceful co-existence with Soviet Union, especially for the implementation of its four modernization programme. The first bilateral talk to solve the outstanding problems to improve relations was held in October 1979. For details on this issue see, G.Segal, "China and the Great Power Triangle", China Quarterly, no.83, September 1980, pp.502-4.

\textsuperscript{27}The various plausible reasons for delaying the Security Council meeting for nearly two weeks, see, K.P. Saksena, n.23, pp.104-5.
gaining propaganda advantage out of the Soviet intervention, unlike the Cold War period, but for a compromised settlement to thwart further aggression, they took a backseat in the formal UN proceedings. They left for the nonaligned countries and others to take initiative on the question. During the debate Beijing's representative, Chen Chu, said:

The undisguised Soviet armed aggression and intervention against Afghanistan has not only grossly encroached upon the sovereignty and independence of Afghanistan but also openly trampled upon the UN Charter and the norms guiding international relations, thus posing an extremely serious threat to peace and security in Asia and the whole world. (28)

He further stated that the Soviet had extended the use of its notorious "theory of limited sovereignty" from its "community of nations" to a nonaligned and Islamic country of the Third World. (29) He further pointed out that the "naked military aggression" enabled "the people to see more clearly that the self-styled 'natural ally' of the Third World was in fact the most vicious enemy of the Third World and all peoples." (30)

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30 Ibid.
He suggested that "the Security Council should not only condemn the Soviet military aggression and intervention against Afghanistan in the strongest terms but should firmly demand the immediate withdrawal of all Soviet armed forces from Afghanistan." After two days of heated debate, members of the Security Council were called upon to vote a six-Power sponsored draft resolution. This draft resolution avoided condemnation with the hope of reaching a settlement. It merely "deplored the recent armed intervention in Afghanistan" which it described as inconsistent with the fundamental principles of the UN Charter, and it called "for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan." The Chinese representative described it as "inadequate" but it voted for the resolution as "the wording of the text is clearly directed against Soviet armed intervention in Afghanistan." However, it failed to secure adoption because of the negative vote of the Soviet Union.

Following this, the Security Council on 9 January approved a procedural resolution to move the Afghanistan question to the

31 Ibid.

32 UN Doc. S/13729, the draft resolution sponsored by Bangladesh, Jamaica, Nigeria, Philippines, Tunisia and Zambia.

General Assembly. Accordingly, an emergency session of the General Assembly was convened on 10 January. Speaking during the debate, the Chinese representative, Chen Chu, said that the Soviet "military aggression against Afghanistan ... is not an isolated event, but an important component of the Soviet Union's global strategy of pushing southward to the Indian Ocean, controlling the sea lanes, seizing strategic points, outflanking Europe, threatening Asia and then dominating the world."

By linking the Kampuchean crisis of 1978 with that of the events in Afghanistan, he emphatically stated:

If there is any difference between the two, it lies in the fact that this time the Soviet Union has come out into the open from behind the scenes, changed from the use of proxies to the direct, sending of its own troops and will be ready to invade and occupy any state it pleases on the same pretext and by the same logic. (35)

Based on such perception, he declared, "Soviet social-imperialism is the most dangerous source of a new world war." and further urged the international community to take "practical actions to frustrate the aggression and expansion of Soviet hegemonism."

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34 UN Doc. A/ES-6/PV.1, 10 January 1980, pp. 53-54. This allegation had been repeatedly levelled up to 1982, see ibid., A/35/PV.65, 18 November 1980, p. 57; ibid., A/37/PV.78, 27 November 1982, p. 67.

35 Ibid., p. 56.

36 Ibid., pp. 53-54.

37 Ibid., pp. 57, 61.
On the other hand, he aptly implied that the final decisive factor lies in the people of Afghanistan in these words, "We are convinced that, with the support of the people of the whole world, the Afghan people will severely punish the Soviet aggressor and finally drive them out of their territory." 38 Beijing regarded their struggle not only in defence of their own country but also to "safeguard peace and security in South Asia, the Gulf region and the world as a whole." 39 After several days of debate, Pakistan, on behalf of 24 sponsors, presented a draft resolution, similar in content to the one vetoed by the Soviet Union in the Security Council. 40 It was adopted by an overwhelming majority. The voting was 104 in favour to 18 against with 18 abstentions. China was, as expected, among those who supported the resolution. However, it had hardly any effect on the development in Afghanistan.

China has taken the crisis as vindication of Beijing's past analysis of Soviet's motivation of tilting the global balance in its favour. As compared to Washington's response to Hanoi's intervention in Kampuchea, Beijing found the United States reaction to this issue quite encouraging. The United

38 Ibid., p.61.
40 UN General Assembly Resolution ES-6/2, 14 January 1980.
States abandoned any pretence of balance in relationship with Moscow and Beijing and the United States—Soviet "detente" was disrupted as an impact of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. China was quite relieved as it never favoured "detente" between Moscow and Washington. Encouraged by these developments, Beijing advocated that the only means of resisting Soviet "imperialism" was to build the broadest possible international united front, one that would include China and the Third World; Western Europe; Japan and the United States. It specifically sought strategic understanding with Japan and the United States against the Soviet Union. The subsequent diplomatic activities and public pronouncements created distinct impression of

41 China never favoured the detente because it feared that under the guise of detente, the both Super Powers might gang up against it or that the Soviet might be able to isolate and attack it without fear of a strong Western reaction.

42 The inclusion of the United States in the united front is a major departure from the Mao's theory of three worlds. However, Beijing justified on the ground that the prevailing situation is not due to contradiction between the two Super Powers and the rest of the world but "between Soviet expansion -- one the one hand and the opposition to it from China, Japan, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and other East Asian countries together with the United States on the other", see, FBIS-CHI 8 April 1981, p.A/2.
coalescence of its objectives of countering Soviet advances and influence with that of the United States.\textsuperscript{43}

But in actual practice, it was not in favour of joining highly coordinated defense strategy nor had any intention of assuming a direct military role in Afghanistan. It preferred to carry on its own programme of assistance.\textsuperscript{44} It was ready only for minimal and informal collaboration and covert supply of small arms. Disagreeing with some of the Western Power's hope of neutralization of Afghanistan through political settlement, China perceived that to press for a political settlement, before necessary conditions were met, would end in compromises and concessions and recognizing \textit{fait accompli} of the Soviet invasion.\textsuperscript{45} In fact, the agreement between Moscow and the Babrak Karmal regime on the "temporary stay" of Soviet troops in Afghanistan on 14 March 1980 was regarded by Beijing as a

\textsuperscript{43} Till the Afghanistan crisis, the United States adopted cautious attitude and its endeavour to maintain detente with the Soviet Union continued. The visit of the US Defense Secretary, George Brown, to Beijing in January 1980 and of the May 1980 were the first clear pointers to the close strategic cooperation that the two countries were evolving against the Soviet Union. See, for details, Jonathan D. Pollack, \textit{The Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Chinese Security Debate} (Monica CA, 1982), pp.48-49.

\textsuperscript{44} For details see, Jonathan D. Pollack, \textit{The Lessons of Coalition Politics; Sino-American Security Relations} (Monica CA, 1984), pp.54-55.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Beijing Review}, vol.23, no.11, 17 March 1980, p.3.
synonym for perpetual occupation which killed all hope of a Soviet military withdrawal through a political settlement. Later, the Soviet announcement of "partial withdrawal" of troops from Afghanistan on 22 June had been received by China as a propaganda trick and a political ploy to avoid international condemnation and pacify domestic dissatisfaction.

Another occasion to subject Soviet Union to accountability of its action in Afghanistan at the world forum was provided by the thirty-fifth session of the UN General Assembly in September 1980. Speaking during the debate on the topic, the Chinese representative, Huang Hua, said that the Soviet's justification of the invasion (desire to have no hostile Power in its neighbourhood) was "even more peremptory and aggressive in nature than the notorious doctrine of "limited sovereignty." He perceived the Soviet move in Afghanistan and its support to Vietnamese invasion in Kampuchea as aimed to turn them into "springboards for further expansion... to hasten the completion of its global strategic deployment for world domination." He further called for effective coordinated overall measures to check Soviet "expansion."
China outrightly rejected Kabul's new proposal announced on 24 August 1981 to bring about solution to the Afghanistan issue as mere delaying tactics to divert public opinion and relieve pressure from international community. Beijing also found the political settlement called for by this proposal still based on the fait accompli created by foreign invasion and it forthrightly refused to accept it as basis of any political settlement.\(^5^1\) It persistently advocated that "basis of any political solution can only be the total withdrawal of foreign troops" unconditionally.\(^5^2\)

In the draft resolution sponsored by 42 Third World and Islamic states, they reiterated their stand stated in previous resolution of 14 January 1980 and further asked the appointment of a UN special representative to promote a political solution to the Afghanistan issue. This resolution was adopted by a vote of 111 to 22 with 12 abstentions.\(^5^3\) Similar resolutions were passed annually at the UN General Assembly in subsequent years,\(^5^4\) and China always supported them.


\(^5^3\) General Assembly Resolution 35/37, 20 November 1980.

Quest for Political Settlement

It should be noted that from the beginning attempts had been made not only to put pressure on Soviet Union but set in motion the political process which would enable Soviet Union to reach a political settlement and to withdraw from Afghanistan.

In accordance with the General Assembly resolution, Javier Perez de Cuellar was appointed as UN special representative for Afghanistan on 11 February 1981. Later, on his appointment to the post of UN Secretary-General in January 1982, Diego Cordovez was appointed as his personal envoy on Afghanistan. Under their charge, the United Nations pursued its efforts to negotiate a political settlement of the Afghanistan situation. However, Pakistan and Iran, the two frontline states, refused to have direct dealings with the Babrak Karmal government which they refused to recognize. This position was strongly endorsed by China. Nevertheless, the first round of indirect talk between Pakistan and the Babrak Karmal regime, under the auspices of the United Nations, was held in Geneva in June 1982. These have been continuing with regularity and often reported progress and near-agreement.

China, however, favoured political settlement only on the basis of the principles laid down in UN resolutions, namely, the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan, which will enable the people to exercise freely their own social and political system, without external interference and will permit the restoration of Afghan's independence and nonaligned character. 56 Another criteria China emphasised since 1984 is that any political settlement of the question "must take fully into consideration and reflect the views of the Afghan people engaged in the fighting." 57 Once the question reaches settlement on these principles, China expressed its readiness to "join in an international guarantee against any form of interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, the occupation of its territory, or the use of it to violate the independence and sovereignty of other countries in the region." It accused the Soviet Union of exerting strong diplomatic, political and military pressure on Pakistan to compel it to abandon its position of opposition to Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. 58


57 Ibid.

China attributed these pressures and policies of Soviet Union as stumbling bloc to any "progress in the indirect talks in Geneva for a political solution and obstructing the relaxation of the tension in Afghanistan." 59

China doubted the Soviet sincerity of its desire for a political solution on the ground that the Soviet Union stepped up its efforts in expanding air bases and in building strategic highways, bridges, barracks, oil depots and other military installations "on an enormous scale that far more exceeded the needs of the so-called temporary garrisoning of Soviet troops in Afghanistan." It was of the opinion that these activities indicate the Soviet's attempt to perpetuate their occupation of Afghanistan. 60

China along with other Powers continued to extend economic and military support to Afghan guerrillas, not with the objective of driving out Soviets from Afghanistan which is bound to be a risky and dangerous affair, but to keep the Soviet Union pinned down in Afghanistan to make it a Soviet's Vietnam. Precisely with this motive, Beijing along with others disapproved of Pakistan's flexible posture to reach a negotiated


settlement with the Afghan government under the UN auspices. 61

However, since 1982, China subdued its allegation of Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a part of its global hegemonistic design. Rather, the statements regarding the threat to its own security from the Soviet presence in Afghanistan have been revived which had remained muted after the initial outburst. 62 Further, it listed the issue as one of the obstacles in the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations. 63

Along with this change in its strategic postures, there was increasing reports of Beijing having stepped up its military activities in the area bordering with Afghanistan. In fact, in a note of protest of Afghanistan to China which was transmitted to the UN Secretary-General

61 See, Salig S. Harrison, "A Break Through in Afghanistan?", Foreign Policy, no.51, Summer 1983, pp.3-26; see also Harrison, "Cut in Regional Deal", Foreign Policy, no.62, Spring 1986, p.137.


63 When the Sino-Soviet talks of normalization were resumed in 1982, Chinese officials said that the core of the dispute lies in the so-called "three obstacles", one of which was Soviet's troops presence in the Afghanistan. See for details, Gerald Segal, "Sino-Soviet Relations: The Road to Detente," The World Today, vol.40, no.5, May 1984, pp.205-12.
accused Beijing not only of providing necessary ammunition and giving training in terrorist tactics to guerrillas but also letting them to operate from its territory.\textsuperscript{64} Further, it had alleged that "there exists direct cooperation in the expansion of military aggression against Afghanistan" between China, the United States and Pakistan. This, it noted, had caused "difficulty in ... seeking ways for a peaceful solution of the situation between Afghanistan and its neighbours."\textsuperscript{65}

Soviet protest seems to have its effect as Beijing's support and supply of arms to mujaheddin of late has been not that open and challenging.\textsuperscript{66} A keen observer on Afghanistan has noted that Beijing has, if not stopped, at least reduced substantially its assistance to Afghanistan by 1985, as a part of its general policy of flexibility with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{67}

Further, down grading of the issue is discernable with the dropping of it as one of the primary concerns of Beijing in

\textsuperscript{64}UN Doc. S/16944, 7 February 1985.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66}There is also remote possibility of a direct confrontation at the Sino-Afghanistan border due to rough terrain, lack of communication link and relatively insignificant strategic concern to China apart from the threat to Lop Nor nuclear installation. See for details, Segal, n.8, pp.1162-64.

\textsuperscript{67}This information has been given to me by Selig S. Harrison during a discussion on the topic at Washington, D.C.
its dealing with the Soviet Union, leaving the Kampuchean question as the main obstacle. But these changes in Chinese position had hardly any effect on the Afghanistan question as China never had great influence on the question. Further, its political and moral pressures through the UN forum have continued unabated. It persistently insisted that "the key to a political settlement... lies in the prompt and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan."69

Summary Observations

From the above analyses, it is evident that China's concern in the Afghanistan question emanated not only from its main strategic thrust of preventing Soviet Union from gaining additional foothold in its periphery but also perceived the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a "direct threat" to its own security.

Lacking both in economic and military strength to confront the Soviet Union, China has resorted to mobilize international opposition to Soviet intervention by projecting the question as yet another step towards Soviet "hegemonistic design." It called for concerted international effort to


69 Cited in Deccan Herald (Bangalore), 31 July 1986.
contain Soviet "expansionism". As in the case of Kampuchean question, China has obtained political advantages for being in the majority side during debates and votings on the issue at the United Nations. However, its verbal belligency has not been matched by its material support to Afghan guerrillas. Its support, in terms of arms and other material aids, was minimal and even that seems to have been halted by 1985.

A tactical change in its stance is discernable since 1982 when China de-emphasized the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan as a part of its global "hegemonistic design." Rather, Beijing has reverted to its expression of concern on its own national security, which had remained muted after its initial outburst.

This had served dual purpose of distancing itself from close identification with the US strategy and also provided justification for its active interest in Afghanistan. The Afghanistan issue as a direct national concern had been further highlighted by listing it as one of the three obstacles in normalization of Sino-Soviet relations. However, when China felt the need for readjustment with the Soviet Union, it dropped Afghanistan issue as a major obstacle in their relations, leaving the Kampuchean issue as the main hurdle.
In the changed international environment, therefore, China is likely to honour any agreement reached between the two contending parties through the proxy talks under the UN auspices.